# THE ASIAN AGE

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Actress Janhvi Kapoor says her wish is to do an action-oriented role

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## WINDOWS

Tottenham Hotspur's Dele Alli (centre) scores his team's opening goal during the UEFA Europa League match with Wolfsberg at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London on Wednesday. — *AFP*

### Cabinet secy to meet with worst Covid-hit states

**New Delhi:** Worried over the rising cases of Covid-19, the Union Cabinet secretary has scheduled a review meeting with seven states — Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Chhattisgarh — that are witnessing an upsurge in daily detections. Overall 16,738 new daily cases of Covid-19 were recorded in the last 24 hours from all over India out of which 89.57 per cent of the new cases were from these seven states.

### 'Don't take court's view combatively'

**New Delhi:** The Delhi high court on Thursday said its view that the draft Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) should be translated in all 22 languages in the Eight Schedule of the Constitution should not be taken so "combatively" by the Central government. — *PTI*

### SC: Parental-side kin can inherit property

**New Delhi:** The Supreme Court has said heirs of the father of a woman can inherit property under the Hindu Succession Act and they cannot be held as "strangers". The SC said the term "family" has to be understood in a wider sense.


**Full report on Page 2**


## COUNTERPOINT

Not bail papers, he is distributing party tickets to potential candidates!

## WEATHER

**Max:** 32°C
**Min:** 18°C
**RH:** 43%
**Rain:** NIL

**Forecast:** Sunny

## ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Uttarayana
**Tithi:** Magha Shuddha Chaturdasi till 3.44 pm
**Star:** Ashlesha till 12.30 pm
**Varjyam:** 11.52 pm to 1.23 am
**Durmuhurtam:** 9 am to 9.46 am; 12.52 pm to 1.39 pm
**Rahukalam:** 10.30 am to noon
**SUNSET TODAY** 6.19 PM
**SUNRISE TOMORROW** 6.49 AM
**MOONRISE TOMORROW** 5.20 PM
**MOONSET TODAY** 6.16 AM

PNB SCAM CASE

# Nirav Modi to be extradited to India: UK court

*Will liaise with UK for early extradition: MEA*

**ADITI KHANNA**
LONDON, FEB. 25

In a comprehensive extradition win for the Indian authorities, a UK judge ruled on Thursday that fugitive diamantaire Nirav Modi not only has a case to answer in the Indian courts but that there is no evidence to suggest he would not receive a fair trial in India.

Hours after the order, India's ministry of external affairs (MEA) said the government will liaise with the UK authorities for early extradition of Nirav Modi.

Nirav Modi, wanted in India on charges of fraud and money laundering in the estimated $2-billion Punjab National Bank (PNB) scam case, lost his legal battle against extradition on all grounds as district judge Samuel Goozee also concluded that there are no human rights concerns that his medical needs would not be addressed as per several Indian government assurances.

The 49-year-old appeared via video link at Westminster Magistrates' Court from Wandsworth Prison in south-west London, dressed in a formal suit and sporting a thick beard, and showed no emotion as excerpts of the judgment were read out in court.

"I am satisfied that there is evidence upon which NDM (Nirav Deepak Modi) could be convicted in relation (to) the conspiracy to defraud the PNB. A prima facie case is established," the judge noted.

He similarly concludes a prima facie case to have been established on all counts of charges brought by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Enforcement Directorate (ED), including money laundering, intimidation of witnesses and disappearance of evidence.

"I am not required to exclude all Mr Modi's various alternative theoretical possibilities and narratives; nor exclude his personal interpretation of the evidence, in order to find a prima facie case has been established," the judge noted, referring to the extradition case of former Kingfisher Airlines boss Vijay Mallya as precedent.

He accepted that while Nirav's mental health had deteriorated due to the lengthy incarceration


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**UNDER THE UK** Extradition Act 2003, the judge will now send his findings to the secretary of state for home affairs, Priti Patel. She is authorised to order an extradition and has two months to make a decision.

**THE UK** judge was extremely critical of the poorly presented documentation by the Indian authorities and said, 'I hope the GOI takes these observations on board in relation to future requests.'

## India hammer England in day-night Test

Axar Patel celebrates with teammates the dismissal of England captain Joe Root on Day 2 of the third Test at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Thursday. Left-arm spinner Patel's 5/32 helped India hammer England for 10 wickets. India registered their second Test victory inside two days, overhauling a meagre target of 49 against England in the day-night third game to take an unassailable 2-1 lead in the four-match series. ■ **Report on Page 8**

# Govt tightens grip over social media, OTT with new IT rules

**MADHUSUDAN SAHOO with agency inputs**
NEW DELHI, FEB. 25

Weeks after a spat with Twitter and the fracas over the series Tandav, the government on Thursday announced the tightening of rules governing social media and streaming companies, requiring them to take down contentious content immediately, appoint grievance redressal officers and assist investigations by revealing the originator of a message or tweet.

The new Code of Ethics and self-regulation mechanism for video streaming services mean that anyone who misuses social media and over-the-top (OTT) platforms will be under the strict vigil of the government and is liable to face punishment.

As part of new rules to regulate online content, the government will ask the platform to reveal the originator of a message/tweet, and WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and other social media firms as well as streaming services such as Netflix, YouTube and Amazon Prime Video will be required to quickly take down any contentious content flagged by the government or legal order.

They also have to appoint executives to coordinate with law enforcement and remove, within 24 hours, content depicting nudity or morphed pictures of women.

They also have to now appoint a resident grievance officer who shall register complaints in 24 hours and file monthly compliance reports. User grievances have to be resolved within 15 days.

Social media platforms, on being asked by court or government, will be required to disclose the first originator of the mischievous information that undermines the sovereignty of India, security of the state, or public order.

The intermediary, however, will not be required to disclose the contents of any message.


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### IB monitoring 5,000 social media accounts

**New Delhi:** Intelligence Bureau's cyber division is closely monitoring more than 5,000 social media accounts on sites like Twitter and Facebook which are linked with the ongoing farmers agitation. Sources said if these social media platforms continue to refuse the government's request to block them then IB will send details to the National Investigation Agency for possible criminal action of these accounts.

■ Huge relief in Kashmir as DGMOs agree over hotline

# India, Pak in pact to stick to LoC truce

**PAWAN BALI and SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI**
NEW DELHI, FEB. 25

The Indian and Pakistan armies on Thursday announced that they would strictly observe a ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) and all other sectors from February 24 midnight in a major de-escalatory move.

The announcement comes after 2020 had seen a 18-year record high of 5,133 truce violations at the LoC and the international border with Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir. In contrast, there were 3,479 such violations in 2019 and 2,140 in 2018. The tensions at the LoC had risen after the terror attack on CRPF convoy in Pulwama in February 2019, and the revoking of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019. There have been nearly 600 violations in first two months of 2021.

India's director-general of military operations (DGMO), Lt. Gen. Paramjit Singh Sangha, and his Pakistani counterpart, Maj. Gen. Nauman Zakaria, held discussions over the hotline, and the two sides reviewed the situation along the LoC and all other sectors in a "free, frank and cordial atmosphere". A joint statement issued by both armies read: "In the interest of achieving mutually beneficial and sustainable peace along the borders, the two DGMOs agreed to address each other's core issues and concerns which have the propensity to disturb peace and lead to violence." It said both sides agreed to the strict observance of all agreements, understandings and cease firing along the Line of Control and all other sectors with effect from midnight February 24-25, 2021. It added: "Both sides reiterated that the existing mechanisms of hotline contact and border flag meetings will be utilised to resolve any unforeseen situation or misunderstanding."

The agreement comes as India is focused on a military standoff with China in Ladakh since May last year. India and Pakistan had signed a ceasefire agreement in 2003, but it has been frequently violated.

Hours after India and Pakistan made the announcement about a "strict observance" of the LoC ceasefire, Pakistan's national security adviser Moeed Yusuf made it clear that there had been "no back-channel" talks between him and India's NSA Ajit Doval, but nevertheless added that the "welcome development on the LoC is a result of discussions through the established channel of DGMOs" and that "obviously these are by their very nature not in the public eye and done privately and professionally through the direct channel". The Pakistani NSA insisted that that "there is nothing more than meets the eye here".

The Indian government also said on Thursday evening that it "desires normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan" and


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## Modi targets 'North-South' Rahul swipe, 'lies' by Cong

**Puducherry, Feb. 25:** Attacking Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for his recent "North-South" remarks, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday alleged that the party's policy was to "divide, lie and rule".

Not mincing words, he said the Congress culture of feudal politics, dynasty politics, patronage politics was ending, and people all over the country were rejecting the party.

He also expressed shock over Mr Gandhi's contention that there was no dedicated fisheries ministry. "... They are gold, silver and bronze medal winners in telling lies," Mr Modi said while addressing a public meeting in poll-bound Puducherry, as he said the Union territory's people were celebrating the "freedom from misgovernance of the Congress".

Mr Modi hit out at former Puducherry CM V. Narayanasamy for heading a "high command government" that served only the interests of a few Congress leaders in New Delhi.

Pitching Puducherry as a region with potential in various sectors, he said the NDA wanted


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# 13.7% growth in financial yr 2022 projected by Moody's

*UK-based rating agency expects 7% contraction this fiscal*

**New Delhi, Feb. 25:** Moody's on Thursday upped India's growth projection for the next financial year beginning April 1, to 13.7 per cent, from 10.8 per cent estimated earlier, on the back of normalisation of activity and growing confidence in the market with the rollout of Covid-19 vaccine.

For current fiscal, the US-based rating agency expects the economy to contract 7 per cent, lower than its previous estimate of 10.6% contraction.

Moody's Investors Service associate managing director (Sovereign Risk) Gene Fang said "our current expectation is that in the current fiscal ending March 2021, the economy would contract 7 per cent... We expect a rebound of 13.7 per cent growth in the next fiscal on normalisation of activity and base effects".

The very large rebound incorporates the view that recovery in activity will continue, with the rollout of vaccines and growing confidence in the market that activities are coming back to normal, Fang said in an online conference on India Credit Outlook 2021 organised by Moody's and its India affiliate ICRA.

ICRA principal economist Aditi Nayar said it expects 0.3 per cent growth in the third quarter (October-December) of current fiscal.

ICRA expects Indian economy to contract 7 per cent in current fiscal and growth to rebound to 10.5 per cent in the next fiscal beginning April 1.

"Recession in India has ended," she said, adding there could be upside to growth in FY'22 if government's capital expenditure increases, budget announcements are implemented and vaccination drives are carried out. — *PTI*

## Mamata rides e-scooter to protest hike in fuel prices

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee rides pillion on an electric scooter to reach Nabanna (state secretariat) in Kolkata on Thursday during a protest against the hike in fuel prices. — *ASIAN AGE*

## Explosives found near Ambani's residence 'Antilia'

**SHAHAB ANSARI**
MUMBAI, FEB. 25

An abandoned vehicle with 20 gelatin sticks was found just metres away from business tycoon Mukesh Ambani's house in Mumbai on Thursday.

The SUV was noticed at around 3 pm after which some people from the vicinity alerted the local police, who rushed to the spot and cordoned off the entire area, sending the state government and the police into a tizzy.

A Bomb Detection and Disposal Squad (BDDS) team reached the spot immediately. It was not an assembled explosive


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## Husband is man, wife is woman: Govt opposes same-sex marriage

**New Delhi, Feb. 25:** Marriage in India is not just a union of two individuals but an institution between biological man and woman, the Centre told the Delhi high court on Thursday while opposing same-sex marriage.

It also said that judicial interference will cause "complete havoc with the delicate balance of personal laws". Any interpretation other than treating a husband as a biological man and a wife as a biological woman will make all statutory provisions unworkable, it said.

Referring to a Supreme Court judgment, the Central government said that it only decriminalised a particular behaviour and did not legitimise it.

"The acceptance of the institution of marriage between two individuals of the same gender is neither recognised nor accepted in any uncodified personal laws or any codified statutory laws," the Centre said. — *PTI*

■ Move to benefit many Indians working in America on H-1B visa

# *Biden revokes Trump-era Green Card ban*

**Washington, Feb. 25:** President Joe Biden has revoked a policy issued by his predecessor during the pandemic that blocked many Green Card applicants from entering the US, a move that will benefit many Indians working in America on the H-1B visa.

A Green Card, known officially as a Permanent Resident Card, is a document issued to immigrants to the US as evidence that the bearer has been granted the privilege of residing permanently.

Indian IT professionals, most of whom are highly skilled and come to the US mainly on the H-1B work visas, are the worst sufferers of the current immigration system which imposes a seven per cent per country quota on allotment of the coveted Green Card or permanent legal residency.

The H-1B visa, the most sought after among Indian IT professionals, is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. The technology firms depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. — *PTI*


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**REOPENING THE** country to people seeking Green Cards, or legal permanent residence, Prez Biden in his proclamation on Wednesday said that the policy of former Prez Donald Trump does not advance the interests of the US.

SHORT TAKES

## Man murders wife, sleeps next to body

**New Delhi:** A 30-year-old woman was strangulated by her husband following a quarrel in Burari area, the police said on Thursday. The accused husband was drunk when the quarrel took place between them, the police said, adding that he slept next to his wife after the incident. According to the police, it has arrested the accused who has been identified as Raj Kumar (32), a resident of Sant Nagar in Burari. On Wednesday, the police received information regarding the murder of the woman at Sant Nagar. It reached the spot where one Hashika was found dead in her room on the fifth floor of a building, a senior police officer said. "The mother of the deceased stated that her son-in-law was absconding from the house. During investigation, Kumar was apprehended from Nangloi area," DCP (North) Anto Alphonse said.

## Govt tightens grip over social media, OTT with new IT rules

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Unveiling the Information Technology (Guidelines for Intermediary and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, IT and communications minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said they are designed to curb misuse of social media platforms and make social media and OTT companies accountable for "misuse and abuse".

The new rules take effect immediately, though significant social-media providers (based on number of users) will get three months before they need to start complying.

The new guidelines follow the government's spat with Twitter over allegedly inflammatory tweets and hashtags supporting farmer protests, with the microblogging service initially refusing to comply with orders to take down about 1,500 such posts and accounts. Twitter complied after it was threatened with the penal action. Separately, an Amazon Prime Video original series, Tandav, was ordered by authorities to be re-edited following protests over its depiction of Hindu gods and goddesses.

Freedom-of-speech activists and technology trade groups have criticised the draft version of the new rules, which replace a previous code from 2011, saying they would result in increased censorship and reduced user privacy.

Mr Prasad said concerns have been raised over the rampant abuse of social media platforms and the spread of fake news. "Social media companies are welcome to do business in India and empower Indians. We welcome criticism and dissent but it is important that users of social media are given a proper forum for the resolution of their grievances in a time-bound manner," he said. India is a large market for digital and social media companies and is witnessing strong growth on the back of booming smartphone sales and the availability of dirt-cheap data.

# Same sex marriages: Another plea in HC for its recognition

*Marriage an institution between biological man & woman: Centre*

**AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs**
NEW DELHI, FEB. 25

Four more people belonging to the gay and lesbian community urged the Delhi high court, on Thursday, to declare that marriages between any two persons irrespective of their sex be solemnised under the Special Marriage Act (SMA).

The Delhi government, in response to a similar petition filed earlier, has said that there is no provision in the SMA under which two women can be married and it would be willing to abide by the court's direction.

The latest petition is in addition to three pleas already before the high court seeking recognition of same sex marriages under the SMA, Hindu Marriage Act (HMA), and Foreign Marriage Act (FMA).

A bench of Justices Rajiv Sahai Endlaw and Amit Bansal sought the response of the Centre on the joint plea by three men and a woman, who have urged the court to also declare that the SMA applies, regardless of sex, to any two persons who wish to marry by reading down any gender or sexuality-based restrictions contained in the act.

> The Delhi government, in response to a similar petition filed earlier, has said that there is no provision in the SMA under which two women can be married and it would be willing to abide by the court's direction

> The latest petition is in addition to three pleas already before the high court seeking recognition of same sex marriages under the SMA, Hindu Marriage Act (HMA), and Foreign Marriage Act (FMA).

In their plea, filed through advocates Meghna Mishra and Tahira from Karanjawala and Co. law firm, the petitioners have also sought that the provisions in the SMA, which require a 'male' and a 'female' for solemnisation of a marriage, be declared as unconstitutional unless they are read as "neutral to gender identity and sexual orientation."

During the hearing, the Central government assured the bench that it would file a reply to the earlier petitions during the course of the day and the court listed all the four petitions, including the latest one, on April 20.

The Delhi High Court adjourned the batch of petitions it is hearing for legalisation of same-sex marriages under the Hindu Marriage Act, the Special Marriage Act, and the Foreign Marriage Act to 20 April.

Meanwhile, the Delhi government has filed its response to one of the petitions moved by two women seeking to get married under the SMA and challenging provisions of the statute to the extent it does not provide for same sex marriages.

It has said that there was no provision in the SMA under which the two women can be married and their marriage be registered.

While opposing same-sex marriage, Centre told court,"Marriage in India is not just a union of two individuals but an institution between biological man and woman."

It also said that judicial interference will cause "complete havoc with the delicate balance of personal laws".

Any interpretation other than treating a husband as a biological man and a wife as a biological woman will make all statutory provisions unworkable, it said.

Referring to a Supreme Court judgment, the central government said that it only decriminalised a particular behaviour and did not legitimise it.

The plea by equal rights activists Abhijit Iyer Mitra, Gopi Shankar M., Giti Thadani, and G. Oorvasi was filed through advocates Raghav Awasthi with Mukesh Sharma.

This is despite the fact that the said act does not distinguish between heterosexual and homosexual marriage if one were to go by how it has been worded. It very clearly states that marriage can indeed be solemnised between 'any two Hindus.

# Govt to switch fleet of cars for EVs in 6 months: Sisodia

**New Delhi, Feb. 25:** All departments of the Delhi government will now use only electric vehicles, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia announced on Thursday.

The transition to EVs will be done within the next six months, he said.

The government, which has over 2,000 cars in its fleet, hopes its decision will inspire other cities in the country and the world to tackle the issues of pollution and climate change with the urgency they deserve, he said.

The announcement came a day after the Aam Aadmi Party-led government launched a campaign, "Switch Delhi", to encourage private vehicle owners to take a pledge to shift to electric vehicles and install a charging point within their premises in the next three years.

"It"s history! Driven by the vision of CM @ArvindKejriwal to make

Manish Sisodia

Delhi the "Electric Vehicle capital", Delhi govt today became the 1st in the world, not just India, to mandate its entire hired car fleet to switch to electric within a deadline- 6 mths. @SwitchDelhi begins at home," Mr Sisodia tweeted.

"Over 2,000 cars will be impacted by this decision and will transition to EVs in next 6 months. We hope this decision inspires cities and govts around India and the world to tackle the pollution and climate change problem with the seriousness and urgency it deserves," he said.

The Delhi government had in August last year launched an Electric Vehicle Policy to tackle the problem of air pollution. Under the policy, it promised to waive registration fee, road tax, and provide an incentive of up to Rs 1.5 lakh for new cars in the national capital.

Under Delhi"s EV policy, 12 four-wheeler models are available and eligible for purchase and scrapping incentives.

Sisodia hoped that using Delhi as an example, cities of the world would ensure that using electric vehicles is an important agenda in the fight to curb pollution.

"It is necessary to focus on the challenges related to a sustainable environment. Delhi Government has prioritised the issue of curbing environmental distress along with its other major agenda items," he said. — *PTI*

## Kejriwal's security cover reduced, sources claim

**BHASKAR HARI SHARMA**
NEW DELHI, FEB 25

A day before Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's roadshow in Gujarat's Surat, insiders of AAP government alleged on Thursday that his security cover has been scaled down, a charge denied by the Union home ministry.

Joint Commissioner(Security) of Delhi Police ID Shukla said Mr Kejriwal has a Z+ security cover and his "complete Z+ security" is being maintained.

"The development at the behest of the BJP leadership has come two days after the Aam Aadmi Party's impressive performance in the Gujarat civic body polls," said a news agency quoting a source.

However, the Delhi Police claimed that no security of the Delhi CM has been hindered. "Delhi CM, Arvind Kejriwal has been provided Z plus security by Delhi Police which comprises of pilot escort, close protection team, house guard, spotters, searching and frisking staff in form of 47 plain-clothes security personnel and 16 uniform police Personnel from CRPF," said Chinmoy Biswal, the PRO of Delhi Police.

"The security cover provided to him remain unchanged and there has been no reduction in number of security personnel provided to him. The four police personnel Constable Gagandeep, Constable Ankur, Constable Jitu Mani Das and Constable Jitendra, were replaced by other four security personals due to administrative reasons," said the PRO. "On their place constable Naresh, Constable Vinod, Constable Ankush and Constable Shivraj had joined. This is normal procedure as per yellow book which , is followed in the security .

Thus Z plus security is maintained," Biswal added. Meanwhile, Aam Aadmi Party spokesperson Saurabh Bhardwaj demanded the Centre to clarify the reasons behind the "petty decision" to reduce Mr Kejriwal's security cover.

## 220 Covid cases recorded in city, total at 6,38,593

**New Delhi, Feb. 25:** Delhi recorded 220 new Covid cases on Thursday, the highest number of single-day incidences in February, while no fresh death was registered, as per data shared by officials.This is the fourth time the single-day fatality count has been nil this month.

On Wednesday, 200 Covid cases and two new deaths were registered, pushing the toll to 10,905.

On all preceding days, spanning February 1-23, the count of daily cases had been recorded below 200.Delhi had recorded 199 fresh Covid cases on January 28.

From January 15-26, the daily figures ranged from 148 on January 25 to 299 on January 16, according to official data. On Thursday, Delhi recorded 220 fresh coronavirus cases, while the positivity rate stood at 0.34 per cent, authorities said, adding that the infection tally in the city rose to 6,38,593, according to the latest health bulletin issued by the city government. — *PTI*

## Heirs of father of woman can inherit property, says top court

**New Delhi, Feb. 25:** The Supreme Court has said heirs of the father of a woman can inherit property under the Hindu Succession Act and they cannot be held as "strangers".

A bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan and R Subhash Reddy referred to Section 15(1)(d) of the Hindu Succession Act and said the heirs of the parental side of a Hindu woman are covered under persons entitled to succession of property.

"A perusal of Section 15(1)(d) indicates that heirs of the father are covered in the heirs who could succeed. When heirs of the father of a female are included as person who can possibly succeed, it cannot be held that they are strangers and not the members of the family qua the female," the bench said.

Section 15(1)(d) of the Hindu Succession Act relates to general rules of succession in the case of female Hindus and says that property can be inherited upon the heirs of the father.

The SC said the term "family" has to be understood in a wider sense so as to include within its fold not only close relations or legal heirs but "even those persons who may have some sort of antecedent title". — *PTI*

# Pakistani NSA: 'No back-channel' talks between me and Ajit Doval

**SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI**
NEW DELHI, FEB. 25

Hours after India and Pakistan agreed to a "strict observance" of the ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC), Pakistani national security advisor (NSA) Moeed Yusuf made it clear that there had been "no back channel" talks between him and India's NSA Ajit Doval but nevertheless added that the "welcome development on the LoC is a result of discussions through the established channel of DGMOs" and that "obviously these are by their very nature not in the public eye and done privately and professionally through the direct channel."

> **INDIA ON** also said it "desires normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan" and has 'always maintained that we (India) are committed to addressing issues, if any, in a peaceful bilateral manner.

The Pakistani NSA insisted that "there is nothing more than meets the eye here."

Meanwhile, India, on Thursday evening, also said it "desires normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan" and has "always maintained that we (India) are committed to addressing issues, if any, in a peaceful bilateral manner."

When asked whether this was the start of the resumption of the Indo-Pak peace process, New Delhi merely said that "on key issues, our position remains unchanged."

India had, earlier this month, squarely put the onus on Pakistan to "create an environment free of terror, hostility, and violence" in its response to a media query on the statement made by Pakistan's powerful Army chief Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa who had said that "it is time" for his country to "extend the hand of peace in all directions." The Pakistan Army chief had even called on both the countries to resolve the Kashmir issue in a "peaceful and dignified manner," in comments that were seen as a possible outreach to India.

# *Toolkit case: Court grants protection to Shantanu*

**New Delhi, Feb. 25:** A court here on Thursday granted protection from arrest till March 9 to Shantanu Muluk, who is accused along with Disha Ravi in connection with allegedly being involved in sharing a "toolkit" on social media related to the farmers" protest.

Muluk along with Ravi and another co accused Nikita Jacob, was booked for alleged sedition and other charges.

Additional Sessions Judge Dharmender Rana

> **INDIA ON** also said it "desires normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan" and has 'always maintained that we (India) are committed to addressing issues, if any, in a peaceful bilateral manner.

granted the relief after Delhi police said it needed time to conduct further interrogation before filing a detailed reply to Muluk"s anticipatory bail plea.

The judge directed the police not to take any coercive action against Muluk till March 9, when court will further hear the matter.

Muluk had got transit bail from Bombay High Court on February 16 for a period of 10 days, with a direction to approach the court concerned.

In his application, Muluk has said that he merely created the toolkit with information on the agitation, which was then edited by others without his knowledge.

According to the police, the "Toolkit" was a sinister design to defame India and cause violence.

Ravi was arrested by a Cyber Cell team of the Delhi Police from Bengaluru and brought to Delhi.

Muluk and Jacob are currently on transit bail, while Ravi was granted bail after nine day custody.

If convicted for sedition, the accused may get a maximum jail term for life. — *PTI*

## Delhi's pvt schools in favour of online exams for upto class 8

**New Delhi, Feb. 25:** Various private schools in city plan to promote students upto class 8 or assess them on the basis of projects and assignments through the year in view of continuing closure of schools due to the Covid .

The Delhi government had on Wednesday issued guidelines to its schools for assessment of students up to class 8, ruling out offline examinations and instead, asking them to grade the students on the basis of projects and assignments.

The government, however, has left the decision to private schools to prepare their own schedule and decide on the assessment modalities themselves.

"Giving students this benefit of their regularity in attendance that they had during the lockdown where the teaching mode was online is definitely very beneficial," said Priyanka Barara, Principal, MRG School, Rohini. — *PTI*

# *India, Pak in pact to stick to LoC truce*

■ Continued from Page 1

has "always maintained that we (India) are committed to addressing issues, if any, in a peaceful bilateral manner". Asked whether this was the start of the resumption of the India-Pakistan peace process, New Delhi merely said that "on key issues, our position remains unchanged".

MEA spokesman Anurag Srivastava said: "India desires normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan. We have always maintained we are committed to addressing issues, if any, in a peaceful, bilateral manner. On key issues, our position remains unchanged. I don't need to reiterate it."

In Islamabad, Pakistan's military spokesman Maj. Gen. Babar Iftikhar said that both DGMOs have agreed that the existing 2003 understanding should be implemented in letter and spirit, a news report by Pakistani newspaper Dawn says. Both officials agreed on making it sustainable and have expressed the intention to act on it, he said.

In Kashmir, the agreement was widely welcomed both by political parties and by ordinary people, particularly those living close to the border. It will come as a huge relief to villagers settled near LoC who have suffered both loss of lives and damage to property. Some 22 civilians were killed during ceasefire violations by Pakistan in 2020 and 71 injured. In 2019, 18 civilians were killed and 127 injured in truce violations by Pakistan.

However, the Indian Army has made it clear there will be no compromise on the anti-infiltration grid along the LoC and troops will not be moved back. India has the right to respond in case of any major terrorist attack on India by Pakistan-supported terrorists. The Indian security forces had killed 221 terrorists in 2020 in J&K and nine in 2021. Indian sources insisted that the ceasefire with Pakistan had nothing to do with standoff with China.

The Chief of Army Staff, Gen. M.M. Naravane, had said Wednesday that there was no overt signs of any collusion between China and Pakistan against India during current LAC standoff. He said that there were no large-scale mobilisations by Pakistan or any kind of activity which would be suggestive of any kind of help being given by one to the other.

India had earlier this month squarely put the onus on Pakistan to "create an environment free of terror, hostility and violence", in its response to a media query on the statement by Pakistan's powerful Army chief Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa who had said "it is time" for his country to "extend the hand of peace in all directions". The Pakistan Army chief had even called on both nations to resolve the Kashmir issue in a "peaceful and dignified manner", in comments seen as a possible outreach to India.

On Thursday evening, Pakistan's NSA tweeted: "I have seen claims by Indian media that attribute today's ceasefire announcement between Pakistani and Indian DGMOs to back-channel diplomacy between me and the Indian NSA. This is baseless. No such talks have taken place between me and Mr Doval. The welcome development on the LoC is a result of discussions through the established channel of DGMOs."

He added: "Pakistan continued to call for the 2003 ceasefire agreement to be honoured and I am glad we have reached the understanding. It must be followed now in letter and spirit."

# Nirav Modi to be extradited to India

■ Continued from Page 1

in a London prison, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, his risk of suicide does not meet the high threshold to satisfy him that his mental state is such that it would be "unjust or oppressive" to extradite him.

Under the UK Extradition Act 2003, the judge will now send his findings to the secretary of state for home affairs, Priti Patel. It is the UK Cabinet minister who is authorised to order an extradition under the India-UK Extradition Treaty and has two months within which to make that decision.

The home secretary's order rarely goes against the court's conclusions, as she has to consider only some very narrow bars to extradition which are unlikely to apply in this case, including the possible imposition of a death penalty.

Whatever the ministerial decision, Nirav Modi's legal team has up to 14 days within which to approach the high court and seek leave to appeal after the home secretary has made her decision known.

Nirav's legal team did not immediately confirm if he intends to appeal against Thursday's ruling. Any appeal, if granted, will be heard at the Administrative Division of the High Court in London.

Nirav Modi, meanwhile, remains on remand at Wandsworth Prison until the home secretary's decision to sign off on the extradition order.

The flashy diamond merchant was arrested on an extradition warrant on March 19, 2019, and has appeared via videolink from Wandsworth Prison for a series of court hearings in the extradition case. His multiple attempts at seeking bail have been repeatedly turned down, both at the Magistrates' and High Court level, as he was deemed a flight risk.

Nirav is the subject of two sets of criminal proceedings, with the CBI case relating to a large-scale fraud upon PNB through the fraudulent obtaining of letters of undertaking (LoUs) or loan agreements, and the ED case relating to the laundering of the proceeds of that fraud. — *PTI*

## Modi targets 'North-South' Rahul swipe

■ Continued from Page 1

to make it the "BEST" — a hub of Business, Education, Spirituality and Tourism.

Training his guns against the Congress, whose party-led government fell on Monday after it was reduced to minority in the wake of resignations, he said: "The Congress culture you saw in Puducherry for five years is how the party works nationally."

"Our colonial rulers had a policy of divide and rule. The Congress has a policy of divide, lie and rule. Sometimes their leaders put region against region, sometimes they put community against community."

"They are gold, silver and bronze medal winners in telling lies," he said, apparently referring to Mr Gandhi's recent statement in Kerala.

During his Kerala visit on Tuesday, Mr Gandhi had said he was used to a "different type of politics" in North India, and coming to the southern state was "very refreshing" as people are interested in "issues", which drew condemnation from the BJP, whose leaders accused him of an opportunistic anti-North bias.

Mr Modi also took on Mr Gandhi over his statement that there was no dedicated fisheries ministry at the Centre, adding the NDA government had set it up in 2019. "The Congress leaders says we will make a fisheries ministry. I was shocked. The truth is, it is the current NDA government that had made a ministry for fisheries in 2019." — *PTI*

## Explosives found near Ambani's residence 'Antilia'

■ Continued from Page 1

device, an official said, adding that further investigation was on.

"A Scorpio with 20 gelatin sticks was found near Mukesh Ambani's Mumbai residence. The crime branch of Mumbai Police is investigating the entire matter and the truth will emerge soon," Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh said.

According to reports, CCTV footage of the area revealed the SUV was parked beside a tree on the Carmichael Road at around 1 am. More than one person was seen alighting from the car. Mr Deshmukh said that the car was parked some distance away from Mr Ambani's palatial house.Mumbai Police spokesperson, DCP S. Chaitanya, said, "The gelatin sticks recovered in the SUV were not an assembled explosive device. But details of the risks they posed would be known only after a thorough probe."

SHORT TAKES

## I-T RAIDS OFFICES, RESIDENCES OF HARYANA MLA

**Chandigarh, Feb. 25:** The Income Tax Department carried out raids on the offices and residences of Haryana's Independent MLA from Meham, Balraj Kundu, in Rohtak on Thursday, officials said here.

A residential building linked to his relatives in Hisar district and another one in Gurgaon which is connected to the legislator himself were searched as well, they said.

Kundu, a vocal supporter of the ongoing farmer's agitation against the new central farm laws, had in February 2020 withdrawn support to the M.L. Khattar dispensation in Haryana, saying he was "deeply hurt" with the government giving "clean chit" to those involved in the alleged corruption in sugar which he had flagged.

In October 2020, the Haryana Police booked him and three other people in a cheating case. The FIR was registered in Gurgaon based on a complaint from a resident of the city, the police had said.

The MLA had then hit back, saying the FIR, like another one lodged against him in January 2020, was due to "political considerations" and that he had been raising his voice against the BJP-led government in Haryana on various issues. The state police had in January 2020 booked Kundu and his brother Shivraj for allegedly cheating a Rohtak resident.

When the case was registered, Kundu had claimed that he was being framed in the case due to political vendetta at the behest of a BJP leader and former minister from the state.

Kundu, who runs a construction company along with his brother, was not answering calls.

## MAHARASHTRA BUDGET SESSION CURTAILED

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, FEB. 25

Maharashtra government on Thursday announced curtailed budget session of state Assembly citing rising number of Covid cases. However, the Opposition walked out from the business advisory committee accusing the government of running away from its responsibility towards people. The budget session will have eight working days from March 1 to 10. The budget will be presented on March 8.

The decision was taken on Thursday in a meeting of the Business Advisory Committee (BAC), which was attended by chief minister Uddhav Thackeray and leader of opposition in Maharashtra Assembly Devendra Fadnavis among others.

Mr. Fadnavis said, "The government is not interested in holding discussions… In a first, the government does not want to complete the budget process. The budget will be tabled and discussion will be held on it but the demands would not be made on it. It is totally unlawful."

Parliamentary affairs minister Anil Parab said that the decision was taken considering Covid-19 situation in the state. "Many ministers and legislators have been infected with the Coronavirus.

The session will begin from March 1 to March 10. The governor's address to the two Houses will be on the first day of the session. According to state officials, RT-PCR test has been made mandatory for all the legislators, officials, employees, securitymen and mediapersons for the session.

## EMPTY ARTILLERY SHELLS GO MISSING FROM TESTING UNIT

**Jabalpur, Feb. 25:** Three empty shells of artillery went missing from the laboratory of heavily-guarded Long Proof Range (LPR), an ammunition testing facility, at Khamaria in Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur district on Thursday, police said.

The police received a complaint about three empty shells of artillery going missing from LPR, Khamaria police station in-charge Nirupa Pandey said.

These shells, weighing 6 to 7 kg each, are made of a combination of various metals that fetch good money in the open market, she said.

The police have been alerted and scrap vendors operating in nearby areas are under scanner, the official added.

*— PTI*

# Nirav: From diamantaire to fugitive

*He has been lodged at Wandsworth prison since his arrest in March 2019*

**London, Feb. 25:** Nirav Modi's story up until the UK court verdict on Thursday, just two days before his 50th birthday, is one of stark contrasts. From someone flush with diamonds, quite literally, as a member of a Gujarati family of gem traders who grew up in the European jewellery hub of Antwerp in Belgium, to ending up holed up in a jail cell in one Europe's most overcrowded prisons.

The diamond merchant wanted in India on charges of fraud and money laundering in the estimated USD 2-billion Punjab National Bank (PNB) scam case, lost his legal battle against extradition as a UK judge ruled that he does have a case to answer before the Indian courts.

He has been lodged at Wandsworth Prison in south-west London since his arrest on an extradition warrant in March 2019 at a central London bank branch, where he was trying to set up a new account.

He had been staying nearby at a plush penthouse in Centrepoint in the heart of the UK capital, regularly walking his dog to an apparently new jewellery business nearby.

It later emerged during remand hearings at Westminster Magistrates' Court in London that he had hired Boutique Law LLP in anticipation of the extradition proceedings on charges of fraud and money laundering by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Enforcement Directorate (ED), trying to strike a voluntary surrender and bail deal.

However, as the CBI and ED evidence was presented in court by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), arguing on behalf of the Indian authorities, his offer of up to GBP 4 million as security to be allowed to be bailed under strict house arrest conditions was repeatedly rejected.

His detention in a shared cell with one other inmate is a far cry from his past billionaire lifestyle, which involved hobnobbing with high-profile celebrities and his diamond designs finding red carpet favour with stars.

"I was totally impressed with the craftsmanship at the workshop [in India]. It was the best quality I could see anywhere in the world, Thierry Fritsch, a high-end French jewellery expert, told the UK court during the course of the extradition hearing last year.

As someone who had served on the Advisory Board of Nirav Modi's company for three years since 2015, Fritsch was deposed by the defence team to vouch for Nirav's integrity and skills as an entrepreneur and creative person, who was passionate about establishing the first international brand of luxury jewellery out of India.

A gems expert, Dr Richard Taylor, was also fielded to go into the nitty-gritties of the diamond trade and how the Nirav Modi brand had succeeded in making a mark around the world.

"The industry relies on sending out high-value product to companies and to do that they require trust and confidence," said Taylor, in an attempt to establish Modi's credibility in the business.

"India is the largest and most important centre of diamond cutting it was a very significant trend that he [Modi] was part of," he added.

The picture painted in court was one of a talented jewellery designer who was only driven by one mission to make the Nirav Modi brand worthy of competition with the likes of global luxury jewellery brands such as Tiffany or Cartier. And, the accusations associated with the extradition case were painted as nothing more than a commercial dispute.

The CPS, in turn, presented documents and video evidence in an effort to establish a complex web of misuse of a bank credit facility called letters of undertaking (LoUs) and threats issued to so-called dummy directors of front companies to keep them out of the reach of Indian investigative authorities. *— PTI*

### LONG ROAD TO EXTRADITION

A UK court on Thursday ruled that fugitive diamantaire Nirav Modi can be extradited to India to face charges of fraud and money laundering amounting to an estimated USD 2 billion. Following is the chronology of the case and its origin:

Nirav Modi

**JAN. 29, 2018:** Punjab National Bank (PNB) files police complaint against Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi and others accusing fraud to the tune of ₹2.81 billion

**FEB. 5:** The CBI launches an investigation into the alleged scam

**FEB. 16:** The ED seizes a cumulative ₹56.74 billion worth of diamonds, gold and jewellery from Nirav Modi's home and offices.

**FEB. 17:** The CBI makes first arrest in the case. Two PNB employees and an executive of Nirav Modi group were detained.

**FEB. 17:** Govt suspends passports of Nirav and Mehul for four weeks in connection with the PNB fraud.

**FEB. 21:** CBI arrests CFO of Nirav Modi's firm and two other senior executives. It also seals his farmhouse in Alibaug.

**FEB. 22:** ED seizes 9 luxury cars belonging to Nirav and his firms.

**FEB. 27:** A magistrate's court issues a bailable arrest warrant against diamond trader Nirav Modi.

**JUNE 2:** Interpol issues Red Corner Notice against Nirav for money laundering.

**JUNE 25:** ED moves a special court in Mumbai seeking Nirav's extradition.

**AUG. 3:** The Indian Government sends a request for the extradition of Nirav to the UK authorities.

**AUG. 20:** CBI requests Interpol Manchester to detain Nirav after the latter informs about his presence in London to Indian authorities.

**DEC. 27:** The UK informs India that Nirav is living in the country.

**MARCH 9, 2019:** British newspaper *The Telegraph* confronts Nirav on London streets and confirms his presence in the country.

**MARCH 9:** The ED says the government of the UK has sent an extradition request of fugitive diamantaire to a UK court for further proceeding.

**MARCH 18:** Westminster Court in London issues arrest warrant against Nirav after the Indian government request was forwarded to the court by the UK home office

**MARCH 20:** Nirav arrested in London and produced in Westminster court, which denies him bail.

**MARCH 20:** Nirav sent to her majesty's prison (HMP) Wandsworth till March 29

**MARCH 29:** A Westminster magistrates court rejects Nirav's second bail application, saying there are 'substantial grounds' to believe that he will fail to surrender. The judge fixes April 26 as the next date of hearing when he will appear via video link from jail.

**May 8:** Nirav denied bail for a third time, to remain in UK jail.

**JUNE 12:** UK court rejects Nirav's bail for fourth time over fears he would abscond.

**AUG. 22:** Nirav's remand extended till September 19.

**NOV. 6:** UK court rejects Nirav's new bail application.

**MAY 11, 2020:** Nirav's five-day extradition trial begins in UK.

**MAY 13:** Indian govt submits more proof against Nirav in money laundering case.

**SEPT. 7:** UK court given fresh video tour of Mumbai's Arthur Road Jail.

**JAN. 8, 2021:** A UK court decides to pronounce judgement in Nirav's extradition case on February 25

**FEB. 25:** UK court rules Nirav can be extradited to India to face charges of fraud and money laundering.

*— PTI*

## 'Will liase with UK for early extradition'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 25

India on Thursday said the "Westminster magistrate's court in London has pronounced that Punjab National Bank (PNB) bank scam-accused Nirav Modi be extradited to India to stand trial", and that while "dismissing the mental health concerns raised by Nirav Modi, the judge observed that Nirav Modi conspired to destroy evidence and intimidate witnesses". New Delhi added that "since the Westminster court has recommended Nirav Modi's extradition to the UK home secretary, the Government of India would liaise with the UK authorities for his early extradition to India"

On Thursday, the ministry of external affairs (MEA) said, "Nirav Modi is wanted in India in connection with the multi-million dollar PNB fraud case. At the request of CBI and ED, his extradition from the UK was sought in August 2018. He was arrested and produced before the senior district judge at Westminster magistrate's court on March 20, 2019. Since then he is facing extradition proceedings while in judicial custody. The final hearing, in this case, was held on January 7-8, 2021. Today, the court has pronounced that Nirav Modi be extradited to India to stand trial."

"Dismissing the mental health concerns raised by Nirav Modi, the judge observed that Nirav conspired to destroy evidence and intimidate witnesses," the MEA added.

## 'Centre, states should talk to cut fuel prices'

**Ahmedabad/Mumbai, Feb 25:** Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman and RBI governor Shaktikanta Das on Thursday said the Centre and states should talk to each other and look for a "coordinated action" over reducing taxes on diesel and petrol whose prices have risen sharply in the recent weeks.

As the political protests against the mounting fuel prices took different forms, Ms Sitharaman also said the question during an an interaction with students asking if the Centre is mulling reducing cess or other taxes on fuel to give some respite to consumers has put her in "dharmsankat" (dilemma).

A Congress spokesperson on the other hand conducted a press conference at the AICC headquarters in Delhi sitting on an empty gas cylinder in protest against the LPG price hike, as the Opposition party accused the Modi government of being "anti-people".

"No hiding the fact that the Centre gets revenue from it (taxes). Same is the case with states. I agree that there should be less burden on the consumers.

"For that, both the Centre and states should talk with each other (for reducing central as well as state taxes on fuel)," she said during an interaction with students of the IIM, Ahmedabad.

Earlier in the day, RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said there is a need for coordinated action between the Centre and state governments to reduce taxes on petrol and diesel.

There is a need for coordinated action between the Centre and the states because there are inherent taxes levied by both, the Governor said, adding that calibrated reduction of taxes is important.

He, however, said both the Centre and the states have their revenue pressures and they are required to spend high sums of money to enable the country and the people to come out of the Covid-19 pandemic stress. So the revenue requirement and the compulsion of the governments are fully understood. But having said that the impact on inflation also is something, which comes in from the fact that petrol and diesel prices do have an impact on the cost of manufacturing, production, the governor said at an event organised by Bombay Chamber of Commerce in Mumbai. *— PTI*

NORTHERN RAILWAY

TENDER NOTICE

The **Deputy Chief Engineer/Survey & Const., Tilak Bridge, Northern Railway, New Delhi,** for and on behalf of the President of India invites open e-tender for the following work:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Mode of Tender** | **E-Tender (Single Packet)** |
| **Tender Notice No.** | **257-W/SURVEY/TKJ Dated : 24.02.2021** |
| **Full name of work** | Renovation of existing Survey and construction office space on first floor building of DyCE/S&C Office at Tilak Bridge, Near ITO, New Delhi. |
| **Approx. cost** | **Rs. 8399151/-** (Rs. Eighty Three Lakhs Ninety nine thousand One Hundred and Fifty one). |
| **Completion period** | 05 months (Five months) |
| **Earnest money amount** | **Rs. Nil.** |
| **Sale/availability of tender document on Rly. Website** | Tender documents will be available on IREPS website i.e. **www.ireps.gov.in** from **02.03.2021 to 17.03.2021 upto 11:30 hrs.** |
| **Last date/Time of upload of tenders** | **17.03.2021** upto **11:30** hours. Tender documents can be uploaded by the tenderer(s) on IREPS website w.e.f. **02.03.2021 to 17.03.2021.** |
| **Date and time of opening of tender** | **17.03.2021** at **11:30 hours** (immediately after close of uploading of tender (D2) in the office of **Deputy Chief Engineer/Survey & Const., N.Rly. Tilak Bridge, New Delhi-110002.** |

This notice is available on **www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in** website and documents on **www.ireps.gov.in** site is available.

**Tender Notice No. 257-W/SURVEY/TKJ Dated : 24.02.2021** **434/2021**

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

## Pak stays in FATF 'grey list' till June

*Asked to address 'strategic deficiencies'*

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 25

Pakistan will remain in the "grey list" of the global anti-terror-financing watchdog Financial Action Task Force (FATF) at least till June this year, the FATF announced after concluding that Islamabad failed to address its strategically important deficiencies.

Pakistan "remains under increased monitoring", said media reports late on Thursday night quoting FATF. The FATF's "grey list" comprises nations like Pakistan that have failed to fulfil their obligations to combat terror-financing. Pakistan was put on the FATF grey list in June 2018.

After its latest meeting on Thursday, the FATF was quoted by media reports as saying, "Pakistan should continue to work on implementing the three remaining items in its action plan to address its strategically important deficiencies, namely by demonstrating that TF investigations and prosecutions target persons and entities acting on behalf or at the direction of designated persons or entities; demonstrating that TF prosecutions result in effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions and demonstrating effective implementation of targeted financial sanctions against … terrorists, specifically those acting for or on their behalf."

**THE GLOBAL watchdog had in October last year asked Pakistan, which has been on the FATF grey list over issues related to terror financing, to deliver on all 27 points by this February.**

The FATF reportedly stated that Islamabad has now largely addressed 24 of the 27 action items and gave Islamabad time till June 2021 to complete the full action plan. According to reports, the FATF president Marcus Pleyer was quoted as saying that Pakistan has made "significant progress" but that "some serious deficiencies remain" and all these deficiencies are "in the realm of terror financing".

It may be recalled that in a major boost to India's position on the menace of terrorism, the FATF had last October decided to retain Pakistan in the FATF grey list at least till February this year for its failure to take action on six important action items out of a total of 27.

India had last year accused Pakistan of "continuing to provide safe havens to terrorist entities and individuals" and not taking any action "against several terrorist entities and individuals including those proscribed by the UNSC such as Masood Azhar, Dawood Ibrahim, Zakir-ur-RahmanLakhvi".

# J&K border residents heave sigh of relief

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, FEB. 25

Tired of unending military tensions and frequent bouts of skirmishes between the facing troops, the border residents of Jammu and Kashmir have heaved a sigh of relief over India and Pakistan agreeing to strictly observe all agreements on ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) and other sectors.

"It has come as a great relief to us. We hope and pray that both sides will really ensure strict observance of all agreements, understandings and cease firing along the LoC," said Irshad Ahmad Khawaja, a resident of Uri while speaking to this newspaper over the phone.

He said that the border residents were happy. Echoing their and his own sentiment, he said, "If the two countries' armies follow the promise we won't suffer any further human and property losses. *Kam se kam chen ki sans ley payengay* (At least, we will breath in peace)."

Bashir Ahmed Wathloo, chairman of Rural Development Society, Uri said, "I will get a good night's sleep now. My joy knows no bounds today."

However, Bashir Ahmad Dar, who lives at Balkote, a hamlet at a stone's throw from the LoC, said he would keep his fingers crossed. Dar who lost his wife Farooqa Begum, 35, in cross-LoC shelling in November last year said, "I feel lost since I have lost my spouse. Had the two sides abided by the ceasefire agreement they had reached in 2003, my world would not have been ruined".

**IN WRITTEN RESPONSE to a question in Lok Sabha earlier this month, MoS for home G. Kishan Reddy said a total of 10,752 cases of ceasefire violations have taken place along India's border with Pakistan in the last three years, in which 72 security personnel and 70 civilians were killed**

Though the two countries pushed on with the ceasefire agreement signed after months of tortuous negotiations in 2003, the facing armies and border guards have often clashed both along the LoC and international border , the 198-km stretch of the 2,912-km India-Pakistan border from Gujarat to J&K called 'working boundary' by Islamabad as it passes through a "disputed region" particularly.

### J&K parties too welcome the pledge

Apart from the border residents, the fresh pledge of the two sides to revert to the November 2003 ceasefire agreement and hold to it has been welcomed by J&K's political parties across the board.

Former chief minister and NC president Farooq Abdullah said that the measure will go a long way towards sustainable peace between the two neighboring countries. "The agreement between the DGMOs of India and Pakistan will go a long way in ushering long lasting peace alongside LoC and IB. NC has always been a strong votary of Indo-Pak peace. It is the people of J&K who have been facing the brunt of escalating tensions alongside the borders. I hope the agreement is followed in letter and spirit. The development, I sincerely believe, will allow people living alongside LoC and IB to go about their normal lives with minimal disruption and risk," he said.

PDP president Mehbooba Mufti said, "It is a big and welcome development."

"I have been saying all along that dialogue is the only way forward if both countries want to stop the unending cycle of violence and bloodshed across the borders and J&K," she added.

Separatist Hurriyat Conference faction headed by Mirwaiz Umar Farooq said, "It is a move in the right direction. It will provide huge relief to the beleaguered people living under constant threat on the LoC and end the bloodshed there."

SPECIAL TRAINS-2021

For the convenience of passengers, Railways have decided to run following fully reserved Special Trains as per schedule given below:-

04321/04322 Bareilly - Bhuj - Bareilly Special Express (4 Days a week)

| Train No. 04321 ARR. | Train No. 04321 DEP. | ↓ STATIONS ↑ | Train No. 04322 ARR. | Train No. 04322 DEP. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ---- | 06:35 | BAREILLY | 20:35 | ---- |
| 11:35 | 11:50 | DELHI JN. | 14:35 | 14:55 |
| 08:50 | ---- | BHUJ | ---- | 18:05 |

**DAYS OF RUN: 04321 Ex Bareilly Jn.** on every Monday, Wednesday, Friday & Sunday from 01.03.2021 to till further advice **and 04322 Ex Bhuj** on every Monday, Thursday, Saturday & Sunday from 01.03.2021 to till further advice.

**STOPPAGE:** Milak, Rampur, Moradabad, Amroha, Gajraula Jn, Hapur, Pilkhua, Ghaziabad, Delhi, Delhi Sarai Rohilla, Delhi Cantt, Palam, Gurgaon, Garhi Harsaru, Pataudi Road, Rewari, Khairthal, Alwar Jn, Malakhera (only 04321), Rajgarh, Bandikui Jn, Dausa, Getor Jagatpura (only 04322), Gandhinagar Jpr, Jaipur, Phulera Jn, Naraina, Kishangarh, Madar Jn., Ajmer, Beawar, Marwar Jn, Falna, Abu Road, Palanpur Jn, Disa, Bhildi, Diyodar, Radhanpur, Santalpur, Samakhiali, Bhachau, Gandhidham Bg, Adipur & Anjar station.

**ACCOMMODATION**: AC 2 Tier, AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Second Seating (Reserved).

04311/04312 Bareilly - Bhuj - Bareilly Special Express (3 Days a week)

| Train No. 04311 ARR. | Train No. 04311 DEP. | ↓ STATIONS ↑ | Train No. 04312 ARR. | Train No. 04312 DEP. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ---- | 06:35 | BAREILLY | 20:35 | ---- |
| 11:35 | 11:50 | DELHI JN. | 14:35 | 14:55 |
| 11:00 | ---- | BHUJ | ---- | 15:50 |

**DAYS OF RUN: 04311 Ex Bareilly Jn.** on every Tuesday, Thursday & Saturday from 02.03.2021 to till further advice. **and 04312 Ex Bhuj** on every Tuesday, Wednesday & Friday from 02.03.2021 to till further advice.

**STOPPAGE:** Milak, Rampur, Moradabad, Amroha, Gajraula Jn, Hapur, Pilkhua, Ghaziabad, Delhi, Delhi Sarai Rohilla, Delhi Cantt, Palam, Gurgaon, Garhi Harsaru, Pataudi Road, Rewari, Khairthal, Alwar Jn, Malakhera (only 04311), Rajgarh, Bandikui Jn, Dausa, Getor Jagatpura (only 04312), Gandhinagar Jpr, Jaipur, Phulera Jn, Naraina, Kishangarh, Madar Jn., Beawar, Sojat Road, Marwar Jn, Falna, Abu Road, Palanpur Jn, Mahesana Jn, Chandlodiya (only 04311), Viramgam Jn, Dhrangadhra, Halvad, Samakhiali, Bhachau, Gandhidham BG, Adipur & Anjar station.

**ACCOMMODATION**: AC 2 Tier, AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Second Seating (Reserved).

For any kind of information such as detailed Time-Table of stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in or NTES App.

All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., must be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

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SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

LIVE RICH
FINANCIAL Chronicle
FRIDAY | 26 FEBRUARY 2021 | NEW DELHI



# quick BITES

| INDICATORS | | % |
|---|---|---|
| Sensex | 51,039.31 | 0.51 |
| Nifty 50 | 15,097.40 | 0.77 |
| S&P 500* | 3,868.82 | -1.44 |
| Dollar (₹) | 72.43 | -0.12 |
| Pound Sterling (₹) | 102.54 | -0.09 |
| Euro (₹) | 88.17 | -0.21 |
| Gold (10gm)* (₹) | 45,959▼358 | 0.77 |
| Brent crude ($/bbl)* | 67.04 | 0.00 |
| IN 10-Yr bond yield | 6.182 | 0.00 |
| US 10-Yr T-bill yield* | 1.458 | 0.069 |

* As of 8:30 PM IST

## RBI: New ARC won't jeopardise existing players

The proposed asset reconstruction company (ARC) for management of NPAs, announced in the latest Budget, will not 'jeopardise' the activities of existing players in the space, RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said. "(In) no way will it (proposed ARC) jeopardise the activities of the existing ARCs. I think, there is scope to have one more strong ARC...," the governor said at an event. There are close to 28 ARCs in the country.

## Moody's sees 13.7% growth in India next fiscal

The Indian economy is expected to clock a growth of 13.7 per cent in FY22, registering a strong rebound from a 7 per cent contraction this fiscal, Moody's Investors Service said. Moody's had in November projected 10.6 per cent contraction in the current fiscal and 10.8 per cent growth in 2021-22. The Economic Survey had projected the economy to contract 7.7 per cent this fiscal and grow by 11 per cent next fiscal.

## DCB Bank wants to turn focus on tractor loans

Private sector lender DCB Bank said it is seeing a good business prospects from rural areas and wants to focus on the "encouraging" tractor loans demand from the farming community. The bank is offering customised loans in Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Rajasthan, which saw a growth in demand last year.

## State transporter KSRTC gets into parcel, cargo biz

The Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation will now venture into the parcel and cargo business in order to increase its revenue, Karnataka deputy chief minister Laxman Savadi said. The three State Road Transport Corporations have been generating a revenue of Rs 35 crore by transporting luggage. He said Strategic Outsourcing Pvt Ltd will be the business facilitator for five years to make the project happen.

Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at BFL Infotech Ltd, C-9 Sector 3, Noida-201301. Published at 219, N D Tiwari Bhawan, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Editor: T.Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 30074/09, Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle ® is prohibited.

### Country scores in digitalisation & connectivity

# India top over-performer in frontier technologies

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 25

India is the top "over-performer" in terms of readiness in using, adopting and adapting frontier technologies like artificial intelligence, big data, block chain and robotics, as per the Unctad global index.

The global index rates 158 countries on their readiness for frontier technologies based on five building blocks: information and communication technologies (ICT) deployment, skills, research and development (R&D), industry activity and access to finance. Frontier technologies are those that take advantage of digitalisation and connectivity. They include artificial intelligence (AI), the internet of things, big data, block chain, 5G, 3D printing, robotics, drones, gene editing, nanotechnology and solar photovoltaic.

The Unctad report finds that a few developing nations are exhibiting stronger capabilities to use, adopt and adapt frontier technologies than their per capita GDPs would suggest.

"The greatest over performer is India, whose actual index ranking was 43, while the estimated one based on per capita income was 108. Hence, India over performed by 65 ranking positions. It is followed by the Philippines, which over performed by 57 ranking positions," says the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Over-performance is measured as the difference between the actual index rankings and the estimated index rankings based on per capita income. Ukraine, Vietnam and China are also in the top five over-performers.

Outliers like India and China exceeded expectations by performing well for R&D. This reflects their abundant supplies of qualified and highly skilled human resources available at a comparatively low cost. They also have large local markets, which attract investment by multinational enterprises. In China, the progress is partly a reward for spending 2 per cent of GDP on R&D.

The Philippines has a high ranking for industry, reflecting high levels of foreign direct investment in high-technology manufacturing, particularly electronics. Multinational enterprises are attracted by the country's strong supply chains and solid base of parts manufacturing. The country also has pro-business policies along with a skilled, well-educated workforce and a network of economic zones.

As per the global index, economies in Northern America and Europe are most ready for frontier technologies while those least ready are in sub-Saharan Africa.

# Budget marks a directional change: FM

**Ahmedabad, Feb. 25:** Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said this year's budget has negated the notion that welfare state is a socialist prerogative, and added that it has given a directional change to the Indian economy, wherein the government trusts wealth creators and citizens.

She lauded the reform of faceless assessment for direct and indirect taxes, saying that tax terrorism will be a thing of the past, but also warned that "technology terrorism" will now gain ground.

"This is a budget for new decade. This budget clearly says, private sector we trust you and you are welcome to participate in the development of the country. It's a budget in which we are recognising what a government can do or how far it can do...So it's a budget that gives directional change to the Indian economy," Sitharaman said while addressing an event.

"We inherited a system from the USSR, where glories of socialism were spoken about...That only socialism can take care of the welfare of the entire population. They say welfare state is a socialist prerogative," she said.

"So we went for socialism, which could not fit into the Indian ethos."

She said, "technology can identify where loopholes exist, where people are misusing the system...

"So technology terrorism will happen next."

She said corporate taxes are the lowest in India and companies want to set up their base in India. *— PTI*

# Blank-cheque buyers eye corporate spinouts

KIEL PORTER & CRYSTAL TSE
FEB. 25

> **Acquiring spun-off subsidiaries of public firms seems less risky for Spacs in terms of due diligence, accounting, reporting and governance considerations**
>
> **— Ivana Naumovska,** *professor, Insead Business School, Singapore*

Blank-cheque companies, flush with cash and on the hunt for a private business to take public, have started adding corporate carve-outs to their list of potential purchases.

The surge in special purpose acquisition companies (Spacs), which have raised more than $137 billion over the past 12 months, has set off a global search for suitable targets-- usually startups with little revenue or mature companies sitting in private equity portfolios. Now Spacs are also looking at divisions of public companies, with an eye on those that have the potential to be carved out as standalone businesses.

Publicly traded Ireland-based packager Ardagh Group SA on Tuesday agreed to sell its beverage-can unit to a blank-cheque company backed by financier Alec Gores. The transaction valued the can business at $8.5 billion, including debt, making it the biggest Spac deal involving a corporate carve-out since the surge began, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

This type of transaction could become popular as more blank-cheque firms move to the deal-making stage of their life cycle, crowding the market with suitors looking for a transaction.

"It's a pretty sizable deal," said Christopher Anthony, a partner at Debevoise & Plimpton LLP. "It'll be interesting whether this gets on people's radar and stokes interest for this type of transaction."

US-based Eventbrite Inc's co-founder Kevin Hartz, whose Spac on Wednesday announced a $2.1 billion deal to merge with Markforged Inc, said that a public-company spinout was among the targets it reviewed before choosing the manufacturer of 3D printers.

"Spacs have the ability to offer a path to liquidity not just for standalone-type private companies, but also public companies," Hartz said.

While blank-cheque companies have circled carve-outs before, some haven't made it to the finish line. Hartz said it's easier to complete a deal with a private company than a spun-out entity, whose financials and accounting functions must be separated from its parent.

Michael Klein's Churchill Capital Corp IV, months before it announced a deal with Lucid Motors Inc, held talks with AT&T Inc about acquiring a part of satellite provider DirecTV.

Some do succeed. Intercontinental Exchange Inc in January said it would list its cryptocurrency platform Bakkt Holdings LLC through a Spac in a deal that valued the unit at $2.1 billion. International Business Machines Corp (IBM), which is exploring a sale of its Watson Health business, may consider listing it via a Spac as one option, according to a person familiar with the matter. IBM declined to comment.

There could be benefits for a Spac's management team in buying a company that's already been part of a public entity, said Ivana Naumovska, a professor of entrepreneurship at Insead Business School, based in Singapore.

"Compared to acquiring private targets, acquiring spun-off subsidiaries of public firms seems less risky for Spacs in terms of due diligence, accounting, reporting, and governance considerations," Naumovska, said. "Spun-off entities seem better equipped for the public market."

Spac spinouts particularly appeal to companies that want to get value out of a unit without giving up control. *—Bloomberg*

# MTAR Tech's ₹600-crore IPO opens on March 3

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, FEB. 25

MTAR Technologies, Hyderabad-based precision engineering solution company and high-tech equipment-maker for space research and defence related requirements, on Thursday announced a Rs 600-crore initial public offering (IPO).

The company has set a price band of Rs 574 to Rs 575 per equity share of Rs 10 face value for the public issue that opens on March 3 and closes on March 5.

MTAR Technologies is engaged in the manufacturing and development of mission critical precision components and critical assemblies catering to clean energy, nuclear and space and defence sectors," the company said during a virtual press meet.

The IPO comprises a fresh issuance of equity shares aggregating up to Rs 124 crore and an offer for sale of shares aggregating up to Rs 473 crore by selling shareholders.

The company proposes to utilise the net proceeds from the fresh issue towards repayments of borrowings, funding of working capital requirements and general corporate purposes.

MTAR Technologies said its key portfolio comprises three kinds of products in the clean energy sector, 14 kinds of products in the nuclear sector and six kinds of products in the space and defence sectors.

MTAR has a long-standing relationship with its customers such as Nuclear Power Corporation of India, Isro, DRDO and Bloom Energy (USA), the company said.

# World's top meat supplier mulls separate plant-based company

TATIANA FREITAS
FEB. 25

Demand for faux burgers is growing so rapidly that JBS SA, the world's biggest meat supplier, said it will likely set up a new global company focused solely on plant-based products.

Meat from animals will be a pricey luxury in the future, and people will have to turn to vegetable-derived alternatives, which will be cheaper, JBS's chief executive officer Gilberto Tomazoni told Bloomberg in an interview. In addition, the world's population is booming and expected to reach 10 billion by 2050. The amount of meat needed to satisfy the world's protein needs won't be possible to produce.

"Plant-based will help us to reduce this protein gap with more affordable products compared with animal protein, which will be more premium," Tomazoni said. "We see plant-based as an independent business in the future."

Brazil-based JBS is just one of many sprawling, legacy food companies trying to up their meat-substitutes game as burgers and sausages made from plant proteins become mainstream. Consumer demand has soared after startups like Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods popularised veggie burgers that imitate real beef. The likes of McDonald's and Starbucks have added alternative meat items to their menus.

JBS, like US rival Tyson Foods Inc, entered the plant-based meat market in 2019, and regional teams across the globe developed products. The new company Tomazoni envisions would gather all those regional businesses in a global enterprise.

The company already has a sizable footprint, with about 57 per cent of the plant-based burger market in Brazil. In Europe, its Moy Park subsidiary supplies faux chicken burgers. It also has 10 plant-based products in more than 3,000 US stores under the OZO brand, where sales rose 300 per cent last year.

It will still be a challenge to compete with companies like Beyond Meat that created the fake meat craze. Investment money has been pouring into alternative protein startups, which raised a record $2.4 billion of funding in 2020, according to market researcher CB Insights.

"We have the basis to grow on plant-based: innovation capacity, investments in research, agreements with global companies for ingredient supplies, presence in retail," Tomazoni said.

For now, JBS's focus is developing new products and trying to better understand the market, Tomazoni said. *— Bloomberg*

# Solar capacity exceeds wind power in 2020

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 25

Despite a 56 per cent decline in capacity addition, the share of installed solar power capacity exceeded wind power sources for the first time.

India added 3,239 megawatts of solar capacity in 2020, 56 per cent lower compared to 7,346 MW installed in 2019, according to Mercom India Research.

Large-scale solar projects saw a 60 per cent decline and rooftop installations a 35 per cent drop.

"India's solar installations in 2020 were the lowest in five years. While other top solar markets in the world have experienced positive growth, India, which had one of the most stringent lockdowns in response to the pandemic, took a while to get back up and running. However, we expect the industry to experience significant positive growth in 2021," said Raj Prabhu, CEO of Mercom Capital Group.

The difficulty in getting distribution companies (discoms) to sign power sale agreements (PSA) was another bottleneck. This

has left about 17-18 GW of projects without a PSA.

Once economic activity resumed post-lockdown, installations picked up in the second half of 2020.

Nevertheless, the share of solar power in India's installed power capacity mix reached 10.3 per cent in 2020, for the first time exceeding that of wind-based power sources at 10.25 per cent. Solar, with 48 per cent, accounted for the majority of new power capacity additions in 2020. Renewable energy sources accounted for 78 per cent of the power capacity added in 2020. Electricity generated from solar in 2020 crossed 58.2 billion units.

Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Gujarat were the top three states for large-scale solar capacity additions, representing around 51 per cent of 2020 installations.

# Households keep faith in future: CMIE survey

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 25

Both urban and rural households have greater confidence in their future than in their current economic conditions. Their continued confidence in their future is critical to sustain the economic recovery seen thus far, according to CMIE, a private think-tank.

CMIE's Consumer Sentiments Index (CSI), based on consumers' perception of the current economic conditions and expectations for the future, had hit a low during the lockdown, falling to 46 in April 2020 from 97 in the previous month. Sentiments have recovered marginally since then, reaching 54 in January 2021. The index has a base of 100 in September-December 2015.

Interestingly, urban sentiments are somewhat worse than rural sentiments. The rural Consumer Sentiments Index was 55.8 in January while the urban index was at 50.3.

But both rural and urban Indian households indicate greater confidence in their future. While the Current Economic Conditions Index stood at 51.6 in January 2021, the Consumers Expectations Index was higher at 55.7. The difference between the two indices is usually about 1.5 per cent.

"This continued confidence in the future is vitally important to sustain the recovery seen thus far. If households remain hopeful of their future they are likely to spend and help in the recovery process. But, this cannot be taken for granted. It is important to build upon the confidence of households," said Mahesh Vyas, managing director and CEO, CMIE.

MISHANDLING | GLITCH **Anmi says trading could have been continued without a hitch**

# Brokers squarely blame NSE for losses

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, FEB 25

A brokers' body has resented that the investing community was kept in the dark about the glitches in the National Stock Exchanges' trading systems on Wednesday, which led to a three-hour stoppage of trading on the bourse.

In a letter to regulator Sebi, the Association of National Exchanges Members of India (Anmi) has complained that there were no announcements by the NSE in public channels about the root cause of the glitch or its solution. Members ought to have been updated by the exchange about the problem and solution, the letter said.

"The problem started at 10.08 am when benchmark Nifty Index was not updating stock prices. Thereafter, the cash market prices at the exchange stopped getting updated . Suddenly, NSE announced suspension of trading till further intimation," the Anmi said.

"All open positions remained at peak levels. The glitch happened one day before the expiry of monthly and weekly contracts, which has caused huge monetary loss to members and investors including intra-day traders. Hence there is a greater need for deeper investigation in the matter," it said.

"There was an issue with 2 spot indices & all other things were working fine for more than an hour. Hence trading could have been continued…Also despite having a disaster recovery site as back up, it was a grand failure to switch over to a back up site. Reasons for not activating recovery site even after 45 minutes of glitch were unknown even at the end of the day," it said.

It said proper communication on trading resumption by the NSE could have averted panic sell-off by online brokers on the BSE and prevented huge monetary loss to investors. "They only informed after all cash positions were cross-settled at abnormally high discounts and premiums on the BSE. A simple proactive communication from all could have avoided this sell-off," the Anmi said.

## CAUSES, INSTITUTIONAL DEFICIENCIES TO BE ADDRESSED: SEBI

**Mumbai, Feb. 25:** A day after technical glitches halted trading at the NSE for around four hours, market regulator Sebi on Thursday affirmed it will take all necessary measures to ensure the underlying causes, including "institutional deficiencies", are addressed.

The regulator said the decision to stop trading was taken by the NSE due to "issues with the telecom service providers" and the Sebi was informed of it only 10 minutes ahead of the halt of trade.

The Sebi said its interoperability framework allowed market participants to continue their transactions at other stock exchanges, thereby allowing them to seamlessly trade/square off their existing positions. *—PTI*

THE ASIAN AGE
26 FEBRUARY 2021

# Disha bail order should set welcome precedent

The order of the additional sessions judge of Patiala House Courts, Delhi, granting bail to Bengaluru-based climate activist Disha A. Ravi, arrested for her alleged role in the preparation of a "toolkit" that the police claimed led to the violent incidents in the nation's capital on January 26, has sought to right two wrongs. One, it has made a timely intervention and stopped the state from using legal tools to put dissenting citizens behind the bars for no end. Two, it has reassured the people that Article 19 (1) of the Constitution which guarantees the freedom of speech and expression has the strength to come to the aid of a legitimate dissenter.

The court demolished the Delhi police's case by pointing out that it was devoid of material evidence to connect the activist with the case slapped on her; and more importantly, whatever she did was protected by the Constitution. The court found that the investigating agency which charged the activist with sedition has produced "not an iota of evidence" to link her with seditious or violent acts; and reminded the police that it cannot resort to "surmises or conjectures" to convince itself of the culpability of an accused. The "scanty and sketchy" pieces of evidence the agency has produced are not enough to send a 22-year-old young woman with absolutely blemish-free criminal antecedents to jail, it said. The strong words on the nature of the evidence were, in fact, a censure of the police, which went overboard picking up a citizen violating the Supreme Court's guidelines and her basic rights.

**It's an irony that a government manned by people who have participated in the greatest freedom restoration movement in Independent India is resorting to suppressing voices of legitimate dissent**

The court made a series of observations on the citizen's rights that a democracy would love the judiciary to assert and protect in the face of state assault. "Citizens are conscience keepers of the government in any democratic nation," it said. "They cannot be put behind the bars simply because they choose to disagree with the state policies." In a warning to the self-appointed "patriots" who miss no chance to threaten dissenters with the label "traitor" and the state which has a profligacy to slap sedition charge at the drop of a hat, the court said, "The offence of sedition cannot be invoked to minister to the wounded vanity of the governments." The court observed that difference of opinion, disagreement, divergence, dissent, or even disapprobation, are recognised legitimate tools to infuse objectivity in state policies. If the Constitution was not enough, the judge referred to the nation's 5,000-year old civilisation and the Rig Veda to remind everyone that we were "never been averse to ideas from varied quarters".

It's an irony that a government manned by people who have participated in the greatest freedom restoration movement in Independent India is resorting to suppressing voices of legitimate dissent. They should not ideally expect the nation to experience the silence of a graveyard when they go about implementing their agenda. They will face, to quote the judge, an "aware and assertive citizenry, in contradistinction with an indifferent or docile citizenry", which is, "indisputably a sign of a healthy and vibrant democracy". The refreshing thoughts must set in motion a process to free many more that are languishing in prisons facing similar charges.

# An act of sycophancy

The Gujarat Cricket Association succumbed to the temptation of naming the stadium after the Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The cricket arena had many earlier monikers like Gujarat and Motera, besides having borne the name of a famous son of the soil in Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

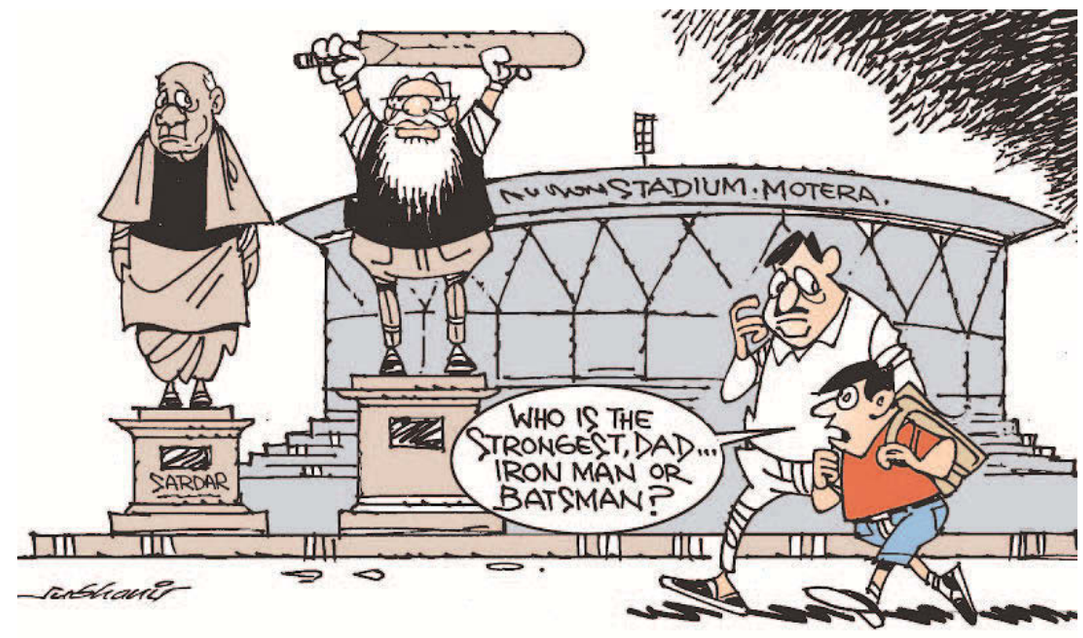
The baptism does break an unwritten law that no edifice should be named after a living person even if it seemed apt to honour a person who headed GCA in the long running Indian tradition of politicians getting themselves elected as presidents of cricket associations. The concept of a magnificent, cricket arena that cost more than ₹800 crores came from his grand vision and its creation was carried out by the other leading contemporary political personality, Union home minister Amit Shah, and his son who is the BCCI secretary. Donald Trump, as US President, even paid a ceremonial visit there just before the pandemic was declared in 2020.

The honour bestowed spontaneously and sentimentally on Narendra Modi is somewhat akin to India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru being awarded the Bharat Ratna by the first President Rajendra Prasad. But it does rankle considering this is a stadium named like this since the Maharashtra politician and chief minister S.K. Wankhede named one in Churchgate in Mumbai after himself in 1974. A second cricket stadium within a stone's throw of historic Brabourne was owed to a clash of egos between Maharashtra Cricket Association and Cricket Club of India. The era of building an edifice of homage to members of one political family is thought to be well and truly over. And so the Congress playing the Sardar Patel card in criticism seems hypocritical now. The issue, however, is to do with the need for 21st-century India to evolve from a sycophantic, fetishist and neta-worshipping past.

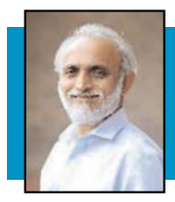
THE ASIAN AGE
T. VENKATRAM REDDY
*Editor in Chief*

*Printer & Publisher:* K. SUDHAKAR
THE ASIAN AGE office is located at:
**New Delhi:** Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 23211124.
**Published and Printed on behalf of and for**
◗ Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301.
◗ London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.
RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Subhani




# Arrests on flimsy basis undermine democracy



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

It has been the bad practice and bad habit of the Indian police and criminal investigators to slap a mountain of charges against any accused in the hope that at least some, or even one, of them would stick. This amounts to indulging in slander in more than a legal sense. And this is what the Delhi police and its investigators have tried to do with the violence that erupted on January 26, 2021 when the farmers' tractor parade went off the rails at some points. Instead of focusing on what went wrong during the tractor parade, the Delhi police went off on a tangent, distracted by the tweets of American pop singer Rihanna and teenage climate protester/warrior Greta Thunberg. Greta Thunberg put out a toolkit, retracted and put it back again. And it is here that Bengaluru climate activist Disha Ravi, 22, entered the picture. The Delhi police saw it as a good opportunity to nail the international linkages of the imagined conspiracy when they found the toolkit linkage between Ms Ravi and Ms Thunberg. The police discovered that Ms Ravi had a hand in the toolkit when she edited it for Ms Thunberg.

In the heightened atmosphere of the exaggerated nature of the petty violence that broke out at Red Fort on January 26, the reckless overreach of the police under the guidance of an authoritative Union home ministry came into play. The Delhi police went off to Bengaluru, arrested Ms Ravi and brought her to Delhi in total violation of all legal norms in a democratic polity. The courts did not cover themselves in glory when the legal process was short-circuited in bringing Ms Ravi from Bengaluru to New Delhi as though this country was under martial law and no questions could be raised about the way the Delhi police went about hauling up an ordinary citizen in Bengaluru. The pusillanimity of the courts was further underscored when the police custody of Ms Ravi was readily granted for five days by duty judge Dev Saroha on February 14. This was the police riding roughshod over the law and the judge allowing it tamely. It is at the end of five days of police custody, two days of judicial custody and another day of police custody, with the police wanting to confront Ms Ravi with the other two accused, Nikita Jacob Shantanu Muluk, that she was finally granted bail and released.

**DISHA RAVI & DELHI POLICE**

The excesses committed by the cybercrime branch of the Delhi police should have been condemned by additional sessions judge Dharmender Rana. It was easier for him to excoriate the police on the serious charge of sedition that they brought against the young woman from Bengaluru. The judge tore into the flaky evidence on which they based their charge. It was necessary that the judge had said what he had about the innocuous toolkit and the laboured connect that the police wanted to make between the toolkit, Ms Ravi and the Poetic Justice Foundation (PJF). And he rightly pointed out that the PJF was not a banned organisation for the police to charge Ms Ravi with having associated herself with an illegal entity.

Judge Rana could have avoided the homilies about pluralist Indian civilisation going back to the Rig Veda and rapped the police for creating a faux chargesheet. He did admit that the investigation was on, but the evidence produced by the police so far to oppose bail to Ms Ravi was paper-thin. But in times when the government is keen to spread the pall of fear by invoking demons who are less than paper tigers, Judge Rana seems to have found refuge in pious platitudes about democracy, liberty, and the right of the citizen to dissent. It would however be mistaken to get carried away by Judge Rana's quiet plaint. Something more serious is amiss in the police's line of investigation into the violence of January 26. Traces of "Khalistani" elements behind the three-month-old farmers' agitation against the new laws brought by the Narendra Modi government has been the theme song of the government and the ruling party. It seems that the police just follows the lead of their political masters.

The "Khalistani" elements have been simmering beneath the surface for many years now, but it is quite clear that the farmers have nothing to do with them, and the people, whether Indian or foreign, who sympathise with the farmers' agitation have nothing to do with them either. The government and the police are fully aware that showing support for protesting farmers cannot be an offence and it cannot be deemed sedition. It is only by bringing in the "Khalistani" factor that people like Ms Ravi can be charged with a crime, and even if the charge fails, they can be defamed. It is in this diabolical bid to outlaw dissent and protest that the government and the Delhi police are committing the crime of undermining democracy.

**Judge Rana could have avoided the homilies about pluralist Indian civilisation going back to the Rig Veda and rapped the police for creating a faux chargesheet**

The Disha Ravi case goes much beyond the Delhi police's cybercrime cell. It is a blatant misuse of the laws of the land. The police can claim that they investigate charges against people in good faith, and they nurse no animus against anyone. We can readily concede the point if they had gone about the investigation in a sober manner. They could have easily built up more evidence, they could have interrogated MsRavi in Bengaluru without the cheap theatrics of arresting her and bringing her to Delhi.

There is a clear need for the courts to rule clearly and loudly that the police have no right to arrest people as long as they are cooperating with the investigation, and there is no danger of the person absconding. In the case of Ms Ravi, it is self-evident that she would have cooperated with the police investigation. Arresting Ms Ravi was an attempt by the police to humiliate and intimidate her and make an example of her to other dissidents. This just cannot be allowed in a democracy. The powers of the police to arrest people and keep them in custody for 24 hours before they are brought before a magistrate for being remanded smacks of a police state. A citizen's liberty cannot be left to the mercy of a policeman or policewoman.

*The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst*

## LETTERS

### BJP LIKE CONGRESS?

The news report, "Stadium renamed after Modi" (Feb. 25), says it all. It is disgusting that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's name has replaced that of the Sardar (Vallabhbhai Patel). This could not have been done without the knowledge of Mr Modi. He should have turned down the proposal and pulled up the person who proposed the renaming. We often talk of the culture of sycophancy in the Congress Party but in this case the BJP sycophants have proved to be the biggest among the species.

**M.C. Joshi**
**New Delhi**

### UNSUSTAINABLE

**THIS REFERS TO** the editorial, "Business trumps nationalism". The trade between China and India is by necessity and not by choice; therefore, a hardline position by India, which rather makes us more than heavily dependent on our northern neighbour for a host of products in an indirect fashion, is unsustainable. However, this "on again, off again" strategy derails business and deters potential investors. The government's cry of "vocal for local" rings hollow as the country is replete with traders and not serious businessmen who can indeed make India Atma Nirbhar. It ought to reflect upon this instead — when we are unable to measure up to China then how does needlessly resorting to knee-jerk embargos make sense?

**Deepak Singhal**
*Noida*

### LPG CRISIS

**FOR THE THIRD TIME** in a row this month, the price of the LPG gas cylinder has been hiked. It is a total hike of 100 rupees. With this, the situation has gone out of control for the common man who is already under a heavy burden and is struggling for survival. The government is proving to be a flop when it comes to fulfilling its basic duties to citizens.

**Bhagwan Thadani**
*Mumbai*

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

SHORT TAKES

## GERMAN POLICE RAID ISLAMIC EXTREMISTS

**Berlin, Feb. 25:** Hundreds of German police officers conducted coordinated raids early Thursday in Berlin and the surrounding state of Brandenburg in the investigation of an organisation banned over allegations of Islamic extremism.

Some 800 police, including SWAT teams, were involved in the raids of apartments linked to members of the organisation, authorities told the *DPA* news agency. The raids were carried out with the primary focus of obtaining evidence. No arrests were immediately reported. Berlin authorities said further details would be released at a press conference later Thursday.

## MINE COLLAPSE IN INDONESIA KILLS SIX

**Jakarta, Feb. 25:** An illegal gold mine in Indonesia's Sulawesi island collapsed on nearly two dozen people working inside, killing three and leaving another five missing, officials said Thursday.

Survivors estimated about 23 people were trapped in the rubble when the mine in Central Sulawesi province's Parigi Moutong district collapsed late Wednesday due to unstable soil, said Andrias Hendrik Johannes, who heads the local search and rescue agency. Rescuers were able to pull 15 people from the debris and recover the bodies of three women during a gruelling search effort, he said. Police, emergency personnel, soldiers and volunteers were all taking part in the efforts.

## DRONE HIT ON SAUDI PALACE WAS FROM IRAQ

**Baghdad, Feb. 25:** Explosive-laden drones that targeted Saudi Arabia's royal palace in the kingdom's capital last month were launched from inside Iraq, a senior Iran-backed militia official in Baghdad and a US official said.

Speaking to *The Associated Press* this week, the militia official said three drones were launched from Iraqi-Saudi border areas by a relatively unknown Iran-backed faction in Iraq and crashed into the royal complex in Riyadh on January 23, exacerbating regional tensions.

Attacks on the Saudi capital have been sporadic amid the kingdom's years-long war against Houthi rebels who control large part of neighbouring Yemen.

## SRI LANKA SEEKS $2.2 BN FROM CHINA

**Colombo, Feb. 25:** Sri Lanka is seeking $2.2 billion from Chinese banks, the government said Thursday, in echoes of a borrowing binge more than a decade ago that resulted in the country having to give up a strategic port to China.

Money and capital markets minister Nivard Cabraal said the government was hopeful of finalising a $1.5-billion swap facility with China's central bank. "Within the next two weeks we should be able to finalise it," Cabraal told reporters in Colombo while maintaining that the funds would be used as a "buffer" to meet the government's foreign currency needs.

Official figures show Sri Lanka's foreign reserves plummeted to $4.8 billion at the end of January.

## GAY SEX: MALAYSIAN WINS CHALLENGE

**Kuala Lumpur, Feb. 25:** A Malaysian man Thursday won the country's first legal challenge against Islamic laws banning gay sex, a victory hailed as "monumental progress" in combating persecution of the LGBT community.

He was charged in an Islamic court in 2019 with attempting to have "intercourse against the order of nature", and several others in the same case have already pleaded guilty and were caned as a punishment.

Critics say the climate is worsening for the gay community in Muslim-majority Malaysia, with government officials often speaking out against LGBT people.

In Thursday's landmark case, the legislation banning gay sex was enacted in Selangor state, outside Kuala Lumpur.

# Biden revokes Green Card ban

## Lawyers: Was blocking legal immigration

**San Diego, Feb. 25:** President Joe Biden has lifted a freeze on green cards issued by his predecessor during the pandemic that lawyers said was blocking most legal immigration to the United States. Former President Donald Trump last spring halted the issuance of green cards until the end of 2020 in the name of protecting the Coronavirus-wracked job market — a reason that Trump gave to achieve many of the cuts to legal immigration that had eluded him before the pandemic. Trump on December 31 extended those orders until the end of March. Trump had deemed immigrants a "risk to the US labour market" and blocked their entry to the United States in issuing Proclamation 10014 and Proclamation 10052.

Biden stated in his proclamation on Wednesday that shutting the door on legal immigrants "does not advance the interests of the United States". "To the contrary, it harms the United States, including by preventing certain family members of United States citizens and lawful permanent residents from joining their families here. It also harms industries in the United States that utilize talent from around the world," Biden stated in his proclamation.

Most immigrant visas were blocked by the orders. As many as 120,000 family-based preference visas were lost largely because of the pandemic-related freeze in the 2020 budget year, according to the American Immigrant Lawyers Association. Immigrants could not bring over family members unless they were US citizens applying for visas for their spouses or children under the age of 21.

It also barred entry to immigrants with employment-based visas unless they were considered beneficial to the national interest such as health care professionals. And it slammed the door on thousands of visa lottery winners who were randomly chosen from a pool of about 14 million applicants to be given green cards that would let them live permanently in the United States. The blocked visas add to a growing backlog that has reached 437,000 for family-based visas alone, said California immigration lawyer Curtis Morrison, who represented thousands of people blocked by the freeze. "I'm thrilled for my clients who are now in a position that they can now enter the US," he said.

"But that backlog will take years if the administration does not take ambitious measures." A federal judge last year issued a ruling that all but lifted Proclamation 10052 by allowing temporary foreign workers to enter the United States if their employers are members of the US Chamber of Commerce or several other large organisations that represent much of the US economy. But Proclamation 10014 continued to block thousands of immigrants. Immigration lawyers said they were surprised Biden did not immediately lift the freeze like he did with Trump's travel ban imposed against people from mostly Muslim-majority countries. — *AP*

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan (centre) surrounded by his supporters, speaks through a loudspeaker during a rally in Yerevan, Armenia, on Thursday. He accused top military officers on Thursday of attempting a coup after they demanded he step down, adding fuel to months-long protests calling for his resignation following the nation's defeat in a conflict with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. — *AP*

# Coup attempt: Armenia PM

**Yerevan, Feb. 25:** Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan accused the military of an attempted coup and brought supporters to the streets on Thursday, as months of tensions over its defeat in last year's war with Azerbaijan came to a head.

Thousands marched through the streets of the capital Yerevan in support of Pashinyan, with the opposition urging him to step down to avoid bloodshed or even civil war.

President Armen Sarkisian, whose role is largely symbolic, said he was taking urgent steps to try to defuse the crisis, calling on all involved to "show restraint and common sense." Under pressure for his handling of the conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region, Pashinyan has ignored repeated calls to resign for losing swathes of territory to Azerbaijan in the war.

**Under pressure for his handling of the conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has ignored repeated calls to resign for losing swathes of territory to Azerbaijan in the war. President Armen Sarkisian said he was taking urgent steps to try to defuse the crisis.**

After largely backing the prime minister for months, the military's general staff on Thursday joined calls for him to step down, saying in a statement that he and his cabinet "are not capable of taking adequate decisions".

Pashinyan hit back with an accusation that top brass were mounting an "attempted military coup" and fired the chief of the general staff Onik Gasparyan. Hundreds of supporters then joined Pashinyan to march through central Yerevan, chanting "Nikol Prime Minister!"

Speaking to supporters through a megaphone, Pashinyan called for calm, as dozens of police deployed outside the main government offices. "The situation is tense, but we must agree that there cannot be clashes," said Pashinyan, who was joined by his wife, daughters, ministers and security detail.

He said the situation in the country was under control and that the military's call had been an "emotional reaction" to his firing the previous day of the deputy chief of the general staff Tigran Khachatryan. Khachatryan had ridiculed claims by Pashinyan that Iskander missiles supplied by Russia — Armenia's main military ally — had failed to hit targets during the war over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Armenia's opposition — who have been calling for Pashinyan's resignation since a ceasefire deal in November — urged him to heed to military's call.

"We call on Nikol Pashinyan not to lead the country towards civil war and to avoid bloodshed. Pashinyan has one last chance to avoid turmoil," Prosperous Armenia, the country's largest opposition party, said in a statement.

Prosperous Armenia and another opposition party, Bright Armenia, called for the holding of an extraordinary session of parliament. — *AFP*

# German charged with espionage

**Berlin, Feb. 25:** A German man has been charged with espionage for allegedly passing information on properties used by the German parliament to Russian military intelligence, prosecutors said Thursday.

The suspect, identified only as Jens F. in line with German privacy rules, worked for a company that had been repeatedly contracted to check portable electrical appliances by the Bundestag, or the lower house of parliament, federal prosecutors said in a statement. As a result of that, he had access to PDF files with floor plans of the properties involved. Prosecutors said, at some point before early September 2017, the suspect "decided of his own accord" to give information on the properties to Russian intelligence.

They said he sent the PDF files to an employee of the Russian Embassy in Berlin who was an officer with Russia's GRU military intelligence agency. They didn't specify how his activities came to light. The charges against the suspect, who is not in custody, were filed at a Berlin court on February 12. The court will have to decide whether to go ahead with a trial.

Relations between Germany and Russia have been buffeted by a growing list of issues in recent years. In October, the European Union imposed sanctions on two Russian officials and part of the GRU agency over a cyberattack against the German parliament in 2015. In addition, a Russian man accused of killing a Georgian man in downtown Berlin on Moscow's orders in 2019 is on trial in Berlin. And last year's poisoning of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, flown to Germany for treatment and then arrested immediately after he returned to Russia, has added another layer of tensions. — *AP*

## WHO: LONG COVID PRIORITY FOR AUTHORITIES

**Copenhagen, Feb. 25:** The World Health Organisation on Thursday urged national authorities to make a priority of understanding the consequences of long-term coronavirus infections to help those suffering from worrying symptoms after many months.

"It's a clear priority for WHO, and of the utmost importance. It should be for every health authority," Hans Kluge, regional director for WHO Europe, said while addressing a press conference.

While some studies have begun to shed light on the illness, it is still unclear why some patients with Covid-19 continue to show symptoms for months, including tiredness, brain fog, and cardiac and neurological disorders.

"The burden is real and it is significant. About one in 10 Covid-19 sufferers remain unwell after 12 weeks, and many for much longer," Kluge said. — *AFP*

# Oz passes law to make Google, FB pay for news

**Canberra, Feb. 25:** Australia's laws forcing Google and Facebook to pay for news are ready to take effect, though the laws' architect said it will take time for the digital giants to strike media deals. The Parliament on Thursday passed amendments to the so-called News Media Bargaining Code agreed between Treasurer Josh Frydenberg and Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg on Tuesday.

In return for the changes, Facebook agreed to lift a ban on Australians accessing and sharing news.

Rod Sims, the competition regulator who drafted the code, said he was happy that the amended legislation would address the market imbalance between Australian news publishers and the two gateways to the internet.

All signs are good, Sims told Australian Broadcasting Corp. The purpose of the code is to address the market power that clearly Google and Facebook have. Google and Facebook need media, but they don't need any particular media company, and that meant media companies couldn't do commercial deals, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission chair added.

The rest of the laws had passed earlier, so they can now be implemented.

Google has already struck deals with major Australian news businesses in recent weeks including News Corp and Seven West Media.

Frydenberg said he was pleased to see progress by Google and more recently Facebook in reaching commercial deals with Australian news businesses. — *PTI*

## FB bans Myanmar military accounts

**Yangon, Feb. 25:** Social media giant Facebook announced Thursday it was banning all accounts linked to Myanmar's military as well as ads from military-controlled companies in the wake of the army's seizure of power on Feb. 1.

It said in a statement that it was treating the post-coup situation in Myanmar as an "emergency," explaining that the ban was precipitated by events since the coup, including "deadly violence." Facebook already has banned several military-linked accounts since the coup, including army-controlled *Myawaddy TV* and state television broadcaster *MRTV*. The bans are also being applied on Instagram, which is owned by Facebook.

Facebook and other social media platforms came under enormous criticism in 2017 when right groups said they failed to act enough to stop hate speech against Myanmar's Muslim Rohingya minority.

The army launched a brutal counterinsurgency operation that year that drove more than 700,000 Rohingya to to seek safety in neighbouring Bangladesh, where they remain in refugee camps. — *AP*

## RIOT PANEL IS PRO-DEMOCRATS: REPUBLICANS

**Washington, Feb. 25:** Republican leaders in the House and Senate say a proposed plan for an independent commission to study the Capitol insurrection is overly tilted toward Democrats, arguing that the panel should have an even party split like the one formed to study the September 11 terrorist attacks. House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy and Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said Wednesday that a legitimate commission would be comprised of an equal number of Republicans and Democrats.

A draft proposed by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi would create an 11-member commission with four Republicans and seven Democrats, three of whom would be chosen by President Joe Biden, according to one of multiple aides who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the details under negotiation.

Pelosi has not commented on the draft or said why there should be more Democratic members. Last week, she said the commission must be "strongly bipartisan" and have the power to subpoena witnesses.

But on Wednesday, House Democratic Conference Chair Hakeem Jeffries said McCarthy hasn't operated in good faith and "set a bad tone" when he supported former President Donald Trump's efforts to overturn Biden's legitimate election victory.

The partisan bickering before the commission gets off the ground is raising questions about whether lawmakers can coalesce around a thorough review of the Jan. 6 riot that interrupted the presidential electoral count and led to five deaths. Both parties support creating an independent investigation, but much of the consensus ends there, with Democrats demanding accountability for lawmakers who amplified Trump's falsehoods about the election. — *AP*

# Completely eradicated poverty in China, says Xi

**Beijing, Feb. 25:** President Xi Jinping on Thursday declared that China has scored a "complete victory" in its fight against poverty by lifting over 770 million people out of it in the last four decades, calling it another "miracle" created by the country that will go down in history. Absolute poverty has been eradicated in the world's most populous country, Xi announced while addressing a gathering held here to mark the country's accomplishments in poverty alleviation and honour its model poverty fighters.

China has a population of around 1.4 billion. "No country has been able to lift hundreds of millions of people out of poverty in such a short time," Xi said. Xi said that all poor people in rural areas have been lifted out of poverty. With this, China has achieved the UN goal of poverty eradication 10 years ahead of the 2030 deadline, he said. Over the past eight years, the final 98.99 million impoverished rural residents living under the current poverty line have all been lifted out of poverty. All the 832 impoverished counties and 128,000 impoverished villages have been removed from the poverty list, he said. Since the launch of the reform and opening up in the late 1970s, 770 million impoverished rural residents have shaken off poverty when calculated according to China's current poverty line, he said. China has contributed to more than 70 per cent of global poverty reduction over the same period, Xi, also General Secretary of the ruling Communist Party of China, said. — *PTI*

ORNITHOLOGISTS | ASTOUNDED

## More than 150 bird species are 'lost' with no confirmed sightings

# Black-browed babbler emerges after 170 years

**Jakarta, Feb. 25:** A bird last seen more than 170 years ago in the rainforests of Borneo has been rediscovered, amazing conservationists who have long assumed it was extinct.

The Black-browed Babbler has only ever been documented once — when it was first described by scientists around 1848 — eluding all subsequent efforts to find it.

But late last year, two men in Indonesian Borneo saw a bird they didn't recognise and snapped photos of it before releasing the palm-sized creature back into the forest, according to Global Wildlife Conservation.

**RESEARCHERS HOPED to go back to the area where it was recently spotted, but Covid-19 travel restrictions could slow the effort.**

Ornithologists were astounded to find that the Black-browed Babbler was alive and well, despite not having been seen since before Charles Darwin published "On the Origin of Species".

"It was a bit like a 'Eureka!' moment," said Panji Gusti Akbar, lead author of a paper on the discovery published Thursday in the journal *BirdingASIA*.

"This bird is often called 'the biggest enigma in Indonesian ornithology.' It's mind-blowing to think that it's not extinct and it's still living in these lowland forests." Little is known about the creature with brown and grey feathers, which has been "missing" longer than any other Asian bird, according to the paper.

Researchers hoped to go back to the area where it was recently spotted, but Covid-19 travel restrictions could slow the effort.

"There is now a critical window of opportunity for conservationists to secure these forests to protect the babbler and other species," said Ding Li Yong, a co-author on the paper and a Singapore-based conservationist with BirdLife International.

More than 150 species of birds around the world are considered "lost" with no confirmed sightings in the past decade, conservationists say.

"Discoveries like this are incredible and give us so much hope that it's possible to find other species that have been lost to science for decades or longer," said Barney Long, Global Wildlife Conservation's senior director of species conservation. — *AFP*

# AXARDHAM

## Patel hits back, makes Motera his own

**Ahmedabad, Feb. 25:** Left-arm spinner Axar Patel created an illusion of turn with 11 straighter deliveries that put India on the brink of the World Test Championship final with a 10-wicket demolition of England inside two days in the day-night third Test here on Thursday.

In only his second Test, Patel (15-0-32-5), with a match-haul of 11/70, relentlessly hit the good length area and hoodwinked England batsmen, who played for turn only to find that there was none on offer from him.

The result was their lowest total against India — 81 all out in 30.4 overs leaving the hosts with a target of 49 which they achieved with minimum fuss taking a 2-1 lead in the four-match series.

At the other end, off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin (15-3-48-4) was an ideal foil, becoming the fourth Indian bowler and second fastest in the world to complete a commendable milestone of 400 Test wickets with the dismissal of Jofra Archer.

Incidentally, after Afghanistan's debut Test in 2018 in Bengaluru, this was the second time that India won a Test match, well inside two days.

This was after England skipper Joe Root's fabulous career-best spell of 6.2-3-8-5 resulted in India's dramatic collapse from 114 for 3 to 145 all out.

India lost as many as seven wickets for only 31 runs after looking solid at 114 for 3 at one stage in the game but England lost all 10 in an entire session in which no pacer was seen in action.

Ironically, it was the non-turning deliveries from Patel that had the England's rank and file pressing the panic button as they pre-empted away turn every time.

Whether it was Zak Crawley, Jonny Bairstow or skipper Root, everyone lost the mind-game as Ashwin also joined the fun with records tumbling one after another.

When Patel sent back Ben Foakes, he became the first spinner to get 11 wickets in a pink ball Test match.

While a bowler might end up getting the man of the match, Rohit Sharma's 66 off 96 balls in the first essay was 24-carat gold given that other batsmen looked like sitting ducks.

But Indian batsmen save Rohit did have a torrid time during an afternoon session when Root and Leach made their lives miserable.

Ajinkya Rahane was rapped on the pads as Leach fired one in and it was not much of an issue for umpire Nitin Menon to adjudge him leg before. — *PTI*

Axar Patel of India appeals for England's Zak Crawley's wicket during Day Two of their third Test at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Thursday. — *BCCI*

### SCORECARD

**England 1st innings: 112**

**India 1st innings (Overnight 99/3):** Rohit Sharma lbw b Jack Leach 66, Ajinkya Rahane lbw b Jack Leach 7, Rishabh Pant c Foakes b Root 1, Ravichandran Ashwin c Zak Crawley b Root 17, Washington Sundar b Root 0, Axar Patel c D Sibley b Root 0, Ishant Sharma not out 10, Jasprit Bumrah lbw b Root1. Extras (B-2, LB-2, W-1) 5. **Total (all out in 53.2 overs) 145. FoW:** 1-33, 2-34, 3-98, 4-114, 5-115, 6-117, 7-125, 8-125, 9-134.

**Bowling:** James Anderson 13-8-20-0, Stuart Broad 6-1-16-0, Jofra Archer 5-2-24-1, Jack Leach 20-2-54-4, Ben Stokes 3-0-19-0, Joe Root 6.2-3-8-5.

**England 2nd innings:** Z. Crawley b Axar Patel 0, D. Sibley c Pant b Patel 7, J. Bairstow b Axar Patel 0, J. Root lbw b Axar Patel 19, B. Stokes lbw b Ashwin 25, O. Pope b Ashwin 12, B. Foakes lbw b Axar Patel 8, J. Archer lbw b Ashwin 0, J. Leach c Rahane b Ashwin 9, S. Broad not out 1, J. Anderson c Pant b Sundar 0. Extras 0. **Total (all out in 30.4 overs) 81.**

**FoW:** 1-0, 2-0, 3-19, 4-60, 5-56, 6-66, 7-68, 9-80.

**Bowling:** Axar Patel 15-0-32-5, Ashwin 15-3-48-4, Sundar 0.4-0-1-1.

**India 2nd innings:** Rohit Sharma not out 25, Shubman Gill not out 15. Extras (B-8, LB-1). **Total (for no loss in 7.4 overs) 49.**

**Bowling:** J. Leach 4-1-15-0, J. Root 3.4-0-25-0.

### NUMBERS GAME

**RAVICHANDRAN ASHWIN JOINS 400-WICKET CLUB IN TESTS:**

- Ravichandran Ashwin became the fourth Indian and 16th bowler overall to claim 400 wickets in Tests. The off-spinner from Chennai reached this milestone by dismissing Jofra Archer, leg before, in England's second innings on the second day of the third Test macth at Ahmedabad on Thursday (February 25).
- By achieving this feat in his 77th Test match, he is the second fastest after Sri Lankan Muttiah Muraliatharan who took his 400th wicket in his 72nd Test match.
- Anil Kumble (619 wickets in 132 Tests), Kapil Dev (434 wickets in 131 Tests) and Harbhajan Singh (417 wickets in 103 Tests) are the other Indians to t ake 400 wickets before Ravichandran Ashwin.
- Joe Root recorded his best bowling performance by taking five wickets for eight runs in India's first innings. It was first time England skipper has taken five-wicket haul with his off breaks in any type of the game. His previous best in Tests was four for 87 against South Africa at Port Elizabeth in 2019-20.
- India slumped to their joint sixth lowest total against England at home by bowling out for 145 in 53.2 overs. India's lowest against England at home is 83 in 38.5 overs at Chennai in 1976-77.
- Jonny Bairstow became the eighth England batsman to receive ducks in the both innings of a Test match against India. He is only fifth England batsman to achieve this 'unwanted' feat on Indian soil.
- England were bundled out for 81 runs in 30.4 overs. It was first time when England were dismissed under 100 against India in Tests. Their previous lowest against India was 101 in 45.1 overs at The Oval in 1971.
- Axar Patel became the fourth Indian bowler to take 11 or more wickets in a Test match against England. His match figures of 11 for 70 is the fourth best for India against England.

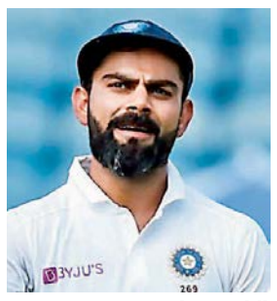
— *S. PERVEZ QAISER*

## Kohli bests MS with most wins

**Ahmedabad, Feb. 25:** Virat Kohli on Thursday surpassed Mahendra Singh Dhoni's record of winning maximum number of Test matches as captain on home soil after leading the side to a 10-wicket victory over England in the day-night third Test here.

Kohli now has 22 victories at home in 29 Tests as captain which is one better than Dhoni, who had 21 wins in 30 Tests. Kohli already is India's most successful Test captain with 35 wins.

India chased down a target of 49 runs in only 7.4 overs to win the Test by 10 wickets and go up 2-1 in the series.



Virat Kohli

Sourav Ganguly and Mohammed Azharuddin have 21 and 14 victories to their credit as captains. — *PTI*

## India sit atop as Eng out of WTC

**Ahmedabad, Feb. 25:** India knocked England out of contention from the ICC World Test Championship (WTC) final in June with their 10-wicket triumph in the day-night third Test here which propelled the hosts to the top of the standings.

India now have to either win or draw the final game here starting March 4 to claim the right to take on New Zealand at the Lord's. The Black Caps have already qualified and are placed second in the latest list.

"England have dropped to 64.1 percentage points on the points table, which is now led by India with 71 percentage points," the ICC stated.

"England are out of the race for a place in the final of the ICC World Test Championship after losing the third Test against India in Ahmedabad," it added.

England needed to win the four-match series 3-1 to play the June 18-22 final. New Zealand are assured of a place in the final with 70 percentage points.

If India lose the final Test then Australia will sneak in to make the final. — *PTI*

Mumbai's Prithvi Shaw celebrates his double century against Puducherry in the Vijay Hazare Trophy match at Sawai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur on Thursday. — *TWITTER*

## Shaw smashes record score

**Jaipur, Feb. 25:** Mumbai captain Prithvi Shaw on Thursday became the highest individual scorer in Vijay Hazare Trophy national 50-over championships as he smashed an unbeaten 227 off just 152 balls to help Mumbai beat Puducherry by 233 runs in their Elite Group D game here.

The 21-year-old Shaw, who has played in five Tests and five ODIs, broke the earlier record of the highest individual score held by Sanju Samson (212 not out against Goa in 2019). Puducherry's decision to put Mumbai in to bat backfired badly as Shaw and Suryakumar Yadav (133 off 58 balls) toyed with their bowling attack at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium and post a mammoth 457/4.

Prashant Solanki (5/48) then picked a five-for as Mumbai bundled out Puducherry for 224 to register their third win on the trot.

Shaw and Yashasvi Jaiswal (10) added 58 runs for the first wicket to lay the foundation. After Jaiswal was dismissed, Shaw found an able partner in Aditya Tare (56, 7x4) as the duo stitched a 153-run stand for the second wicket. Suryakumar, who came in at No. 4, was in his elements, hitting 22 fours and four sixes. He and Shaw added 201 runs for the third wicket stand and helped Mumbai go past the 400 mark. — *PTI*

**BRIEF SCORES**

- Mumbai 457/4 in 50 overs (Prithvi Shaw 227 not out, Suryakumar Yadav 133; Pankaj Singh 2/79) beat Puducherry 224 (Damodaran Rohit 63; Prashant Solanki 5/48)
- Himachal 251/8 (Nikhil Gangta 100 not out, Kulwant Kherjroliya 2/30) lost to Delhi 252/4 (Kshitiz Sharma 67 not out, Lalit Yadav 52 not out).

## GUPTILL STARS AS BLACK CAPS BEAT AUSSIES

**Dunedin (New Zeal-and), Feb. 25:** Veteran batsman Martin Guptill returned to form with a blistering 97 as New Zealand held on for a nail-biting victory over Australia in the second Twenty20 international in Dunedin on Thursday.

Guptill's Black Caps set Australia a challenging target of 220 after losing the toss but were made to sweat as Australia came within four runs of victory.

Both sides took advantage of University Oval's short boundaries in a thrilling match that featured 30 sixes and 434 runs at an average of 10.9 an over.

Marcus Stoinis starred for the Australians with 78 from 37 balls but Guptill's 97 from 50 laid the foundation for New Zealand's win. — *AFP*

**Brief scores: New Zealand 219/7** in 20 overs (Guptill 97, Kane 53, K. Richardson 3/43) bt **Australia 215/8** in 20 overs (Stoinis 78, Santner 4/31).

## Silva, Jesus score in Man City win

**Budapest, Feb. 25:** Premier League leaders Manchester City closed in on the Champions League quarterfinals after cruising past Borussia Moenchengladbach with a comfortable 2-0 win in Wednesday's Champions League last 16, first leg tie in Budapest.

A first half header from Bernardo Silva and a Gabriel Jesus strike in the second extended a winning streak by Pep Guardiola's high-flying side to 19 games in all competitions.

With six changes from the side which started Sunday's win over Arsenal City camped inside the Gladbach half for most of the game, moved to Hungary due to Germany's Covid-19 travel restrictions.

Although clear favourites City took time to break down a stubborn German defence however, often foiled by the interceptions of Algeria left-back Ramy Bensebaini. Debutants in the Champions League knockout stages, a nervy Gladbach had been urged by coach Marco Rose to be brave against Guardiola's side.

**REAL VICTORY FOR MADRID**

Ferland Mendy put Real Madrid within touching distance of the Champions League quarterfinals on Wednesday with the late strike that sank 10-man Atalanta 1-0 in Bergamo.

The French left-back's curling effort came four minutes from time in a last 16, first leg clash in which the hosts had to play a man down for over 70 minutes, giving Zinedine Zidane's side the advantage heading into the second leg in Madrid on March 16.

"We didn't have a great game tonight, but the most important thing was the result, scoring away was important for us," said Zidane.

Atalanta had attacked early but the game was transformed when Remo Freuler was harshly send off in the 17th minutes for tripping Mendy at the edge of the penalty area. — *AFP*

Gabriel Jesus (left) of Manchester City is challenged by Moenchengladbach's Florian Neuhaus during their Champions League Round of 16 first leg match at the Puskas Arena stadium in Budapest on Wednesday. Manchester City won the match 2-0. — *AP*

## REDS KEEPER ALLISON'S DAD DIES OF DROWNING

**Sao Paulo, Feb. 25:** Two Brazilian clubs have expressed condolences following the sudden death of the father of Liverpool goalkeeper Alisson Becker.

Fluminense posted on social media Thursday that it's deeply sorry for the death of Jos Agostinho Becker.

Alisson's brother, Muriel, is a goalkeeper at Fluminense.

Internacional, where both Alisson and Muriel played, also offered condolences.

Brazilian media reported that 57-year-old Jos Agostinho Becker had drowned after going for a swim on his property in the city of Lavras do Sul, in the south of the country.

Local police confirmed the body of man was found on Wednesday night.

The 28-year-old Alisson played at Internacional between 2013 and 2016 before he joined Roma. He left Roma after two seasons to join Liverpool. — *AP*

## Alli helps Spurs ease into Europa Last 16

**London, Feb. 25:** Jose Mourinho saluted Dele Alli after the Tottenham midfielder ensured his side can still save their troubled season with a virtuoso display in Wednesday's 4-0 rout of Austrian minnows Wolfsberger in the Europa League last 32 second leg.

Alli scored a brilliant opener early in the first half and provided the assist when Carlos Vinicius doubled their lead after the break.

Gareth Bale netted from another Alli assist before Vinicius bagged his second as Tottenham ran out 8-1 aggregate winners after cruising to a 4-1 victory in the first leg last week.

While progress to the last 16 looked a formality after the comfortable first leg success, nothing has come easy for Tottenham this term. So Mourinho will have breathed a sigh of relief that his team kept alive their best remaining hope of qualifying for the Champions League.

**MESSI NETS BRACE**

Lionel Messi soared past Luis Suarez to become La Liga's top scorer on Wednesday by adding his 17th and 18th goals of the season in a 3-0 victory for Barcelona over Elche.

Barca had followed up last week's crushing Champions League loss to PSG but eased the strain with a comfortable win at the Camp Nou.

Messi's double owed much to a pair of superb assists, with a supreme dribble by Frenkie de Jong coming after a sublime flick from Martin Braithwaite, who also set up Jordi Alba to score a third. — *AFP*

## LA SHERIFF CALLS WOODS CRASH PURELY ACCIDENTAL

**Los Angeles, Feb. 25:** The Los Angeles County sheriff characterised the crash that seriously injured Tiger Woods as "purely an accident" and appeared to rule out any potential criminal charges even as authorities were still investigating.

Deputies saw no evidence the golf star was impaired by drugs or alcohol after Tuesday's rollover wreck on a downhill stretch of road known for crashes, Sheriff Alex Villanueva said.

"He was not drunk," Villanueva said during a livestreamed social media event.

"We can throw that one out," he added. — *AP*

## SHORT TAKES

### Boxer Naveen makes semis

**New Delhi:** Naveen Boora (69kg) assured himself of at least a bronze by advancing to the semifinals while Manjeet Singh (+91kg) entered the quarters on an all-win day for Indian boxers at the 72nd Strandja Memorial Tournament in Sofia, Bulgaria.

Boora defeated Brazil's Eravio Edson in his quarterfinal bout, prevailing 5-0 in the contest. Manjeet, on the other hand, got the better of Ireland's Gytis Lisinskas in his last-16 stage bout on Wednesday night.

Earlier, Jyoti Gulia (51kg) upstaged two-time world champion Nazym Kyzaiby of Kazakhstan to enter the quarterfinals along with two others.

Gulia, a 2017 world youth champion, defeated the gold-winner from the 2014 and 2016 senior world championships. She will take on Romania's Perijoc Lacramioara in her quarterfinal bout later in the day.

Another Indian to enter the quarterfinals on the second day was Bhagyabati Kachari. — *PTI*

### Para archers cruise into final

**Dubai:** Para-archers Rakesh Kumar and Shyam Sundar Swami set up an all-Indian men's compound open final after brilliant victories in the last four stage of the 7th Fazza Para Archery World Ranking tournament here.

Jyoti Baliyan also cruised to the final in the women's event, defeating Russia's Dzhioeva Anastasia by a point (139-138). Thus, the archers have ensured at least two silver and a gold medal for the country in the individual events.

In the semifinal match, Rakesh defeated Turkey's Aygan Erdogan 143-138 before Swami overcame a strong challenge from Slovakia's former world No. 1 and last year's champion Marcel Pavlik by just two points (145-143).

Rakesh said: "He (Swami) will never be an opponent for me. We both will play for India and the best player will take the gold on Friday." — *PTI*

### Shooters on song at Shotgun WC

**Cairo:** Indian skeet shooters, including Olympic quota holders Mairaj Ahmad Khan and Angad Vir Singh Bajwa, were in line for medals in the team events at the Shotgun World Cup here.

On Wednesday, both the men's and women's three-member teams ended the first three qualification rounds in medal winning positions, with two more qualification rounds to go before the finals.

Mairaj and Angad shot scores of 70 and 67 each to end in 21st and 28th positions, respectively, in the individual competition.

Gurjoat Khangura, the third Indian in the fray, got ahead of them in 19th place, matching The women's team, comprising Karttiki Singh Shaktawat, Parinaaz Dhaliwal and Ganemat Shekhon, ended day one in third place behind Russia and Kazakhstan after producing a combined score of 188.

In the women's skeet individual competition, Karttiki was best placed in 27th spot with a score of 64 out of 75. — *PTI*

### Hockey nationals to begin in March

**New Delhi:** The restructured Hockey India National Championships will restart in March after a hiatus of one year following cancellation of last year's events due to pandemic.

The domestic competitions will resume in a new, restructured format this year, as HI looks to maximise athlete participation and develop the game in the states, union territories, institutional units and academies. The season will kick-start with the 11th Hockey India Sub Junior Women National Championship 2021 to be held in Simdega, Jharkhand from March 10 March to 18, followed by 11th Hockey India Sub Junior Men National Championship 2021 scheduled to be organised in Narwana district of Haryana from March 17 to 25. — *PTI*

### Live on TV

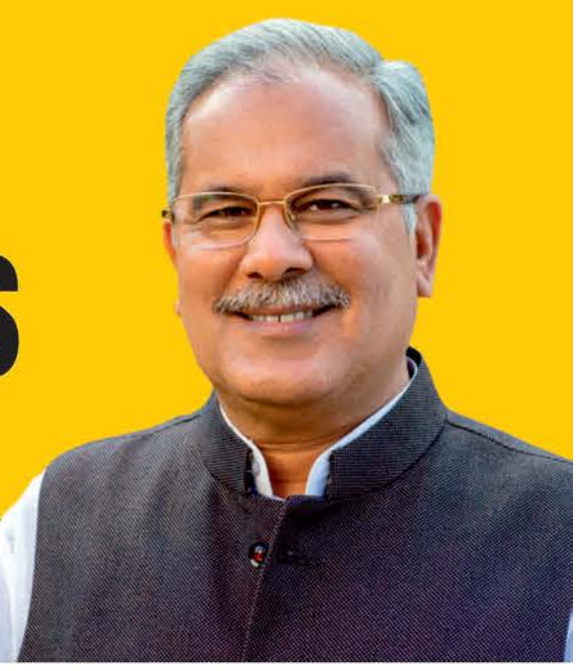
**FOOTBALL**

**Indian Super League:** North East United vs Kerala Blasters from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

Published by K. Sudhakar for and on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002. and Printed by him at BFL Infotech Limited, C – 9, Sector – III, Noida – 201301.
**Editor – T. Venkatram Reddy,**
RNI Registration number 57290/94,
Price in Nepal - Nep.
Rs. 20.00 per copy.

# Chhattisgarh

## CHAMPION AMID CHALLENGES



**Shri Bhupesh Baghel**
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Chhattisgarh

### First State to Procure Paddy at MSP from More than 95% of its Registered Farmers

- Registered Farmers : **21,52,980**
- Paddy Selling Farmers : **20,53,483**
- Paddy Procured : **95.40 lakh metric ton**

### New Record in Disbursement of Interest Free Agricultural Loan

- Short Term Agricultural Loan in FY 2020-21 : **₹4,755 cr**
- Kisan Credit Card Issued : **16 lakh**
- New Registered Credit Committees : **725**

### First State to Buy Cow Dung from Cattle Rearers

- Generating Employment Opportunities through Gothans (Cow Sheds)
- Payment towards Purchase of Cow Dung : **₹ 75.48 cr**
- Women Participation : **44.5%**

### Leading State in Creating Industrial Investment Opportunities despite Recession

- New Industries Established in 2 Years : **1,207**
- Investment : **₹17,000 cr**
- Employment Generated : **22,000**

### Leading State in Procurement of Minor Forest Produce Setting New Record

- Contribution to Country's Total Procurement : 72.5 %
- No. of Minor Forest Produce Procured at MSP : 52
- Raised Tendupatta Collection Remuneration : from ₹2500 to ₹4000 (per standard sack)

### Leading State in Utilization of CAMPA Fund

- Total Tree Plantation in FY 2020-21 : **54 lakh Saplings**
- Employment Generation during COVID-19 : **115 lakh Person Days**

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## WINNING STORY OF THE FASTEST GROWING STATE