

IN BRIEF

Man found dead inside Noida house

Noida: A man was found dead inside his house in Noida on Tuesday, with the city police saying he might have died three to four days ago. The Phase-3 police station officials were alerted in the morning about a foul stench emanating from a locked house in the Janta Flats in Sector 71, an official said. "The local police reached the spot and found that a man was dead inside the house. They traced the contact of his brother, who lives in Sector 41, and called him to the spot after which the door of the house was broken to get inside," a police spokesperson said. "The body, which appeared to be three-four days old, was found on the bed. The man worked as a labourer in the Noida Authority," the spokesperson said. Prime facie, it does not look like a criminal case as the house was locked from inside but forensic experts are examining the spot and further probe is underway, the official added. — PTI

Couple arrested for snatching mobile

New Delhi: A 22-year-old man and his wife were arrested for allegedly snatching a mobile phone in Sainik Farm area, police said on Tuesday. The accused have been identified as Aash Mohammad and Kajal (20), residents of Sangam Vihar, they said. Following a complaint, the couple were arrested from near Tigri T-point on MB Road on Monday when they were riding a motorcycle from Batra Hospital to Devli, Deputy Commissioner of Police (South Delhi) Atul Kumar Thakur said.

Mamata visits Abhishek as CBI questions wife

■ **Continued from Page 1** afternoon, a source close to the CM's nephew said: "All the questions of the CBI team were replied to, and all cooperation was extended. The questioning session was done smoothly."

Attacking the CM for her visit to her nephew's house ahead of the CBI's arrival, BJP spokesman Shameek Bhattacharya said: "Common people understand it well that the CBI does not enter someone's residence to unleash a political vendetta. In such a situation, the CM's presence is unexpected. It was an attempt to create mental pressure on the CBI. Had she refrained from paying a visit, it would have been better for her as the CM."

TMC spokesman Kunal Ghosh however alleged the BJP has been trying to politicise the issue. "Abhishek has been on the forefront boldly. First, he himself tweeted the CBI notice to his wife. Now Rujira has also cooperated with the CBI. However, there are many others with allegations of corruption against them who are in the BJP. Still no action is taken against them. Rather, those who are out of the BJP are being targeted unnecessarily," he said.

Pondy all quiet as L-G mulls options

■ **Continued from Page 1** sure how the Centre will deal with the present situation, particularly with Prime Minister Narendra Modi scheduled to visit Puducherry on Thursday.

Since the decision to impose President's Rule must be approved by the Union Cabinet, no announcement has come on that, with the lieutenant-governor's office only making it clear that Mr Narayanasamy's letter of resignation has been accepted.

The imposition of President's Rule might not be a good idea at the moment as it might impede the Prime Minister from announcing a slew of attractive schemes for the Union territory, besides launching some projects, with a view to endearing himself to the people of Puducherry.

But then the public is angry over the dismissal of the government and might not be happy over the Prime Minister announcing grandiose schemes for the Union territory.

The dismissal may in fact help Mr Narayanasamy in the

popularity stakes as there is now a collective fear that all that he had portended during his confrontation with Ms Kiran Bedi might come true.

Mr Narayanasamy had been warning the people of a conspiracy to strip Puducherry of its Union territory status and turn it into something without political power like Ladakh (which does not have a legislature) or merge it with neighbouring Tamil Nadu, giving scant respect for its quintessential culture and traditions.

People now fear that all that might come true and the BJP trying to take control of the Union territory has something more than meets the eye. The manner in which the MLAs of other parties have defected, besides those of the Congress, has also created a sense of uncertainty among many people. The popular perception is that the BJP could wreak havoc in the Union territory. Otherwise too the party was quite unpopular in the former French colony, which is known for its unique traditions that are more liberal than some of the neighbouring regions.

BJP's aim is to destroy farmers' market: Rahul

Thiruvananthapuram, Feb. 23: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday lashed out at the Centre over the three contentious farm laws and said the aim of the BJP government is to destroy farmers' market and not getting them the right price for their produce.

While the first two laws destroy the country's agriculture sector, the third one denies justice to the farmers, he said after inaugurating a mass rally here, marking the culmination of the 22-day-long Aishwarya Yatra, led by leader of opposition in the state assembly Ramesh Chennithala.

"The first one destroys the farmers market. The second one is to allow the richest to procure as much as grain and unlimited hoarding. These two laws allow them to control the price of grains and vegetables," he alleged.

"They (government) have only one aim: the farmer does not get the right price for their produce. That everybody, the middle class, farmers labourers have to pay more," he said.

"And that's why lakhs of lakhs of farmers are protesting. What did the PM say? That they are terrorists," Mr Gandhi alleged.

The Congress leader also attacked the central and state governments over the rising fuel prices despite a low oil price in the international market and claimed both the governments are giving the money to the richest in the country.

— PTI



Bharatiya Kisan Union President Naresh Tikait wearing a turban plays dhol during an agitation against the new farm laws and observe Pagdi Sambhal Jatta day in the memory of Sardar Ajit Singh on his birth anniversary at Ghazipur border in New Delhi on Tuesday.

— PTI

UP farmers to observe fast, send messages to PM: Singh

New Delhi, Feb. 23: Five farmers from each Uttar Pradesh village will fast for eight hours daily and send messages to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking withdrawal of the three farm laws and legal guarantee for MSP, Rashtriya Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan president V.M. Singh said on Tuesday.

The RKMS had withdrawn its support from the ongoing farmers' agitation against the three con-

tentious central laws following the violence in Delhi on Republic Day. It joined 21 other farmer outfits on Sunday to form the UP Kisan Mazdoor Morcha. "Five farmers from each village in UP will observe a fast from 9 am to 5 pm. At 3 pm, these farmers will record two-minute messages, introducing themselves to PM and sharing their grievances on the new farm laws," Singh said. — PTI

Farmer leader among 2 held from Jammu by Delhi Police

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 23

The Crime Branch of Delhi Police has arrested two persons, including the president of Kashmir United Front organisation, from Jammu in connection with Red Fort riot violence, officials said on Tuesday. They were apprehended with the support of Jammu and Kashmir Police, police said.

The accused have been

identified as Mohinder Singh (45), a resident of Chatta Mill, Satbari, Jammu, and Mandeep Singh (23), a resident of Gole Gujral, Jammu, they said. "Mohinder is the president of Kashmir United Front organisation and key conspirator in the riot case. As per the information received, both the accused persons are active participants and key conspirators in the riot case of Red Fort," Police said.

Covid-19 in Delhi: 145 new cases; positivity rate 0.25%

New Delhi, Feb. 23: Delhi recorded 145 fresh Covid cases and two new fatalities on Tuesday, while the positivity rate stood at 0.25 per cent, authorities said.

With this, the toll from the coronavirus infection has grown to 10,903.

On Monday, 128 cases and one death were registered.

No death due to Covid was recorded in Delhi on February 17, the third time single-day fatality count stood nil in this month.

● **NO DEATH** due to Covid was recorded in Delhi on February 17, the third time single-day fatality count stood nil in this month.

On February 9 too, no fatality due to Covid was registered in the national capital, first time this month, and after a gap of nearly nine months.

No death from Covid was recorded on February 13 as well, the second time in February when the single-day fatality count was nil.

— PTI

Sensitise students, parents about cyber threats: Govt to schools

New Delhi, Feb. 23: The Delhi government has directed schools in the national capital to sensitise students and parents about cyber bullying and online threats during Covid pandemic and how to protect children from these risks.

The teaching and learning activities moved online since March last year when a nationwide lockdown

was imposed in view of the pandemic.

In a letter to school heads, the DoE said school education has shifted from the carefree days of learning together in the safe school environment to online mode of gaining knowledge during Covid.

"The internet spaces are growing and multiplying and data security, privacy

● **THE TEACHING** and learning activities moved online since March last year when a nationwide lockdown was imposed in view of the pandemic.

and protection is inadequate to keep a check on this. It is important that everyone is aware of the risks that could be associat-

Don't call us 'Your Honour', it's not US Supreme Court: SC to law student

New Delhi, Feb. 23: The Supreme Court Tuesday cautioned a law student not to address the judges as Your honour as it was not the US Supreme Court.

When you call us Your Honour" it appears that you have the US Supreme Court in mind, a bench of Chief Justice S.A. Bobde and Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian told the law student.

He immediately apologised to the bench and said that he would address the court as Your Lordship.

To this, CJI Bobde said: Whatever, but don't use inappropriate terms.

The bench told him that

in the US SC and in magisterial court here, the court can be addressed as Your honour but not in Indian SC. The bench then asked him what his case was, to which the student, who appeared in-person, said that his plea seeks that infrastructure of the judiciary on the criminal jurisdiction side be strengthened. The bench told him that does he know that there is already a matter pending in the SC in which directions have been passed to strengthen the infrastructure of judiciary right up to subordinate judiciary level in a phased wise manner. — PTI

Disha gets bail, court says no call for violence

■ **Continued from Page 1**

The judge also added in his bail order that there was not "even an iota of evidence brought to my notice connecting the perpetrators of the violence on 26.01.2021 with the said PJF or the applicant/accused."

"The perusal of the said 'Toolkit' reveals that any call for any kind of violence is conspicuously absent. In my considered opinion, citizens are conscience keepers of the government in any democratic nation. They cannot be put

behind the bars simply because they choose to disagree with the state policies." "In my considered opinion the freedom of speech and expression includes the right to seek a global audience. There are no geographical barriers on communication. A Citizen has the fundamental rights to use the best means of imparting and receiving communication, as long as the same is permissible under the four corners of law and as such have access to audience

abroad," he said. Ms Ravi was asked to submit two sureties of ₹1 lakh each.

Shortly afterwards a second judge — Pankaj Sharma, the chief metropolitan magistrate of the Patiala House Court — disposed of a Delhi Police application seeking extended custody. The police had sought further four days of custody.

Ms Ravi has already spent six days in police custody and two days in jail.

In last week's hearing, Judge Rana had picked holes in the argument that

Ms Ravi and two others — activist Shantanu Muluk and lawyer Nikita Jacob — were in league with secessionists and conspiring to cause violence during the farmers' Republic Day tractor rally. The judge dubbed Delhi Police's reasoning "conjecture".

"What is the evidence collected by you to show the link between her and the January 26 violence?" he added, "How do you connect actual violators with Disha?" After learning that those who were involved in the tractor rally violence were arrested in another case, the judge stressed,

"Where is the connection between conspiracy and offence? I have still not got the answer."

Appearing for Ms Ravi, counsel Siddharth Agarwal said she had had no contact with secessionists.

There is no evidence to show "she is one (a secessionist)", Ms Ravi's lawyer had said, adding that the only text messages submitted (by the police as proof of its claims) were with PJF (Poetic Justice Foundation), which is not a banned organisation.

India allows overflight by Imran Khan

■ **Continued from Page 1** cancelled Mr Khan's planned speech to Parliament, citing the Covid-19 pandemic. It is said the Parliament speech, due on February 24, was included in Mr Khan's itinerary at the Pakistan government's request. Some reports in the Sri Lankan media said some elements within the government did not want the speech to take

place as they feared this could further damage ties with India, which have already been strained after the cancellation of a deal over the East Container Terminal in Colombo port. Meanwhile, it may be recalled that in October 2019, India approached the International Civil Aviation Organisation against Pakistan's then decision to refuse permis-

sion for overflights through Pakistani airspace for VVIP Air India One aircraft that carried Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Saudi Arabia. Pakistan had also similarly refused permission to allow the VVIP Air India One aircraft carrying Mr Modi to the United States to overfly its airspace. Two weeks prior to that, Pakistan had also refused permission for

the flight carrying VVIP Air India One aircraft carrying Ram Nath Kovind to use its airspace to fly to Iceland. The VVIP aircraft then had to take detours over the Arabian Sea avoiding Pakistani airspace. India's Air India One aircraft carries the country's three VVIPs—the President, vice-president and Prime Minister—on overseas official visits.

New Covid strains not behind surge in Maha, Kerala: Govt

■ **Continued from Page 1** Kerala — had been sent for genome sequencing in the past month. Samples for genome sequencing — to understand the complete genetics of the virus — have also been sought from Punjab and Bengaluru, where, in the past few days alone, two apartment complexes have been declared containment zones and sealed.

So far genome sequencing of nearly 6,000 samples has been done. Amid a spike in Covid cases, a meeting was held at the PMO on Tuesday to review the situation. On Monday, Union home minister Amit Shah held a meeting and directed multiple central agencies to monitor the situation on a daily basis in states where Covid cases have started increasing.

SHORT TAKES

136 MISSING PEOPLE 'PRESUMED DEAD' IN TAPOVAN

Dehradun, Feb. 23: The Uttarakhand government has issued a notification authorising 136 people still missing after the flash flood in Chamoli district over two weeks ago to be declared "presumed dead".

Sixty-eight bodies have so far been recovered after the February 7 disaster. There is a tunnel in which around 35 people are suspected to have been trapped, but rescuers have not been able to reach it till now due to the sludge. Authorities say clearing the debris from the tunnel could take months.

A glacial lake was formed upstream of Tapovan over Rishiganga following the devastating flash flood which had demolished a 13.2 MW hydel project along the river besides causing extensive damage to the NTPC's Tapovan-Vishnugad hydel project along Dhauliganga.

Uttarakhand health secretary Amit Singh Negi said on Tuesday that the presumption of death can be made by officials in the affected district only in case of missing people who in all likelihood have died in the disaster but their bodies have not been found.

Normally the missing are declared dead only when they are not traced for seven years after the incident responsible for their disappearance but in case of an extraordinary occurrence like the one witnessed in Uttarakhand special provisions can be made, he said.

The move to declare those who continue to be missing in the flash flood as presumed dead has been initiated to expedite the process of distribution of compensation among the affected families, he said.

SIX KILLED WHILE DISPOSING GELATIN STICKS IN K'TAKA

Bengaluru/Chikkaballapur, Feb. 23: Six people were killed when the gelatin sticks they were trying to dispose of clandestinely exploded accidentally at a stone quarry site in a village in Chikkaballapur early Tuesday, police said.

The government has ordered a CID probe into the blast. Police said preliminary investigation indicated use of petroleum gel and Ammonium Nitrate in the quarry that was operating clandestinely and was closed a few days ago following raids.

The incident comes close on the heels of a similar blast at a quarry site in Yediyurappa's hometown of Shivamogga on January 22, which left six dead. Karnataka health minister K. Sudhakar, who represents the Chikkaballapur constituency, visited the spot and said the bodies of the victims were badly mutilated and scattered all over the place. Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted his condolences to the families of the victims of the blast.

"Pained by the loss of lives due to a mishap at Chikkaballapur in Karnataka. Condolences to the bereaved families. Praying that the injured recover quickly," he said.

Expressing shock over the incident, Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa said he has ordered a thorough investigation into the case and directed the officials to take stringent action against the guilty.

"A high-level investigation into the incident is underway and stringent action will be taken against the guilty," he added. "Whoever is involved in illegal activities, we will take merciless action," he said.

Karnataka home minister Basavaraj Bommai ordered a CID inquiry into the blast after visiting the spot.



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee along with the daughter of TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee Azania Banerjee, at his residence in Kolkata on Tuesday. — PTI

Kolkata cops arrest his sons for not letting them enter house
BJP leader held after party leader claims he framed her in drugs case

Kolkata, Feb. 23: The police on Tuesday night arrested BJP leader Rakesh Singh from Galsi area of West Bengal's Purba Bardhaman district in connection with his alleged involvement in a drug seizure case, a senior officer said.

He was allegedly fleeing the state by road in an Audi. His two sons were also arrested by the Kolkata police's narcotics section for stopping its personnel from entering the residence of the BJP state committee member in the port area of the city, he said.

Pamela Goswami, state secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM), was arrested along with a friend and her personal security guard from south Kolkata's New Alipore area on February 19 after seizing around 90 gm of

cocaine from her car. Ms Goswami has accused Mr Singh — a close aide of senior BJP leader Kailash Vijayvargiya — of implicating her in the drugs case.

"They have been trying to frame me for a long time. Rakesh Singh has done this. I have credible information. I have evidence," she had told reporters in Bengali outside a local court.

The Kolkata police served a notice to Singh asking him to appear before investigators at Kolkata police headquarters Lalbazar during the day in connection with the case. However, he said that he is travelling to Delhi for some work and appear before the police on February 26.

The BJP leader is being brought to Kolkata, the officer said.

Earlier on Tuesday, a



Rakesh Singh

huge police force reached outside Mr Singh's house. His children, however, refused to let the police in.

An argument ensued as Mr Singh's son Saheb stopped the police, seeking legal documents for the visit to their house in the Watgunge police station area in south-west Kolkata, officials said.

However, police said they have shown the fami-

ly all the documents and were acting in accordance with law.

The high-intensity drama played out on a day when a CBI team visited chief minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew Abhishek Banerjee's house to question his wife Rujira over some bank transactions allegedly linked to a scam.

Mr Singh's sons said the police action against their father was vendetta and politically motivated, perhaps because of the CBI's questioning of the wife of Abhishek Banerjee earlier in the day.

"My father is being victimised. I don't know anything about Pamela Goswami and the drugs case. My father is not involved. He is being victimised. I don't know why," Saheb Singh, had told a TV news channel.

— Agencies

As Covid cases spike, Punjab orders curbs on indoor, outdoor gatherings

Move comes amid growing concern over upswing in coronavirus cases

Chandigarh, Feb. 23: The Punjab government on Tuesday ordered curbs on indoor and outdoor gatherings from March 1 and authorised deputy commissioners (DCs) to impose night-curfew in Covid-19 hotspots in their districts, if needed.

The move comes amid a growing concern over an upswing in the number of coronavirus cases in the state.

Chairing a virtual meeting to review the coronavirus situation, Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh ordered restrictions on gathering of people from March 1, with 100 people allowed indoors and 200 people allowed to gather outdoors, according to a government statement.

He also directed that wearing of face masks and social distancing norms be strictly enforced, with testing to be ramped to 30,000 a day, it said.

Health officials said presently 200 people were allowed to gather indoors and 500 people outdoors, while 20,000 to 22,000 tests are conducted every day.

Chief secretary Vinni Mahajan ruled out closure of government schools again and said the department is taking all steps to ensure the safety of students.

Mr Amarinder Singh authorised deputy commissioners to impose night curfew in hotspots in their districts, if needed, with a micro-containment strategy to be adopted.

He also directed the police force to ensure strict enforcement of wearing masks.

There will be monitoring of adherence to Covid-19 norms at all restaurants and marriage palaces and the department of excise and taxation will be the nodal agency for it.

The chief minister said a decision on reducing occupancy in cinema halls will be taken after March 1.

Private offices and restaurants shall be encouraged to display the last tests done for all



A BMC health worker wearing protective gear takes a swab sample of a girl for the Covid-19 test at Dharavi in Mumbai on Tuesday. — PTI

Kerala CM writes to PM over K'taka border curbs

GILVESTER ASSARY
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
FEB. 23

Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Tuesday sought immediate intervention of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to lift the restrictions on movement of people and vehicles from Kerala to Karnataka.

In a letter to Modi, the Chief Minister said that the people and vehicles from Kerala were being blocked at the interstate check posts along areas bordering Karnataka in the name of Covid restrictions. Following the stringent restrictions, people seeking medical treatment in hospitals in

Mangalore and Dakshina Kannada districts and students pursuing studies in various higher education institutions in Karnataka were facing a harrowing time. Even vehicles bringing in essential commodities were being blocked.

He said the Karnataka action was against the Centre's standing direction that there should be no restrictions in the interstate transportation. Hence the Prime Minister should intervene and ensure the matter is settled amicably at the earliest, he added.

Meanwhile, the workers of CPM, CPI, Congress and Muslim League led organisations took out

separate marches to the Karnataka border demanding the lifting of restrictions on interstate travel. The workers took out processions towards the Talapady interstate border and blocked vehicles coming from Karnataka. They demanded that the restrictions which warrant mandatory Covid negative test reports for entering Karnataka should be lifted completely.

Though the Karnataka government had put the restrictions on hold for two days, political parties in Kasargod are demanding a complete roll back. The ensuing Assembly elections has also aggravated the situation.

While issuing directions for increased testing, Amarinder Singh also ordered mandatory testing of 15 contacts per positive, with monitoring to be done by CPTOs (Covid Patient Tracking Officer) and review to be undertaken by the health department. The chief minister also took stock

employees, he added.

Punjab is among the five states that have been asked by the Centre to refocus on strict surveillance, containment and RT-PCR testing to check the growing number of cases. The other four states are Maharashtra, Kerala, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh.

will be signed.

The Arjun Mk-1A tanks would be joining the fleet of the first batch of 124 Arjun tanks which have already been inducted into the Army and are deployed in the western desert along the Pakistan front.

Arjun Mk-1A has 72

improvements over the existing version, of which 14 are major upgrades.

The 118 Arjun tanks would also form two regiments in the Armoured Corps of the Indian Army like the first 124 tanks. Arjun Mark 1-A is equipped with a 120mm main gun

and weighs 68 tonnes.

The Arjun has been designed by the DRDO's Combat Vehicles Research and Development Establishment (CVRDE) based out of Chennai.

"To meet the Atmanirbhar Bharat goals of the government on time-

bound defence procure-

ment process and faster decision making and to systematically work towards reducing the time taken for capital acquisition, the DAC also approved that all capital acquisition contracts (delegated and non-delegated) other than design and development (D&D) cases shall be concluded in two years," said defence ministry in a release.

It said that the ministry, in consultation with the services and all stakeholders, will come up with detailed plan of action for achieving the same.

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Maha mantri denies link to woman's death, visits temple

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, FEB. 23

Maharashtra forest minister Sanjay Rathod made his first public appearance on Tuesday after being linked with the death of a 22-year woman in Pune. Though the minister dismissed the allegations against him, he landed himself in another soup over his show of strength defying chief minister Uddhav Thackeray's public appeal against large gatherings due to coronavirus pandemic.

Mr Rathod visited Pohradevi temple in Maharashtra's Washim district, where he sought blessings and took part in rituals. The temple is revered by the Banjara community, to which he belongs.

The Shiv Sena leader was conspicuous by his absence in public eye after his name was connected to the death of Pooja Chavan (22). On February 8, the deceased, hailing from Beed district, allegedly committed a suicide by jumping off a building in Pune. Her death had kicked off a political storm as several audio clips of her purported conversation have gone viral in the social media, linking the incident to Mr Rathod.

However, the minister claimed "dirty politics" was being played in the name of



Sanjay Rathod

the woman's "unfortunate" death. "The death of Pooja Chavan, who belonged to our community, was unfortunate. The entire community is pained by the death. Me and our entire community is part of the Chavan family's grief," he said.

Mr Rathod also said that Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has ordered a probe into the matter and the truth will come out following a probe into the matter.

On the images of him and the woman doing rounds on social media, the minister said his community loves him and several people get themselves photographed with him. "I have been working in the social sector for 30 years. Don't put me in the wrong box just because of one incident," he added.

However, his visit to Pohradevi proved controversial as the minister's supporters thronged the venue defying the Covid guidelines.

DEFENCE | PROPOSALS

Prime Minister had formally handed over the Arjun Mk-1A to Army

DAC clears 118 main battle tanks for ₹8,379cr

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, FEB. 23

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) headed by defence minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday accorded Acceptance of Necessities (AoNs) to proposals worth ₹13,700 crore including indigenous main battle tank Arjun Mk-1A.

The DAC — India's apex procurement body — accorded AoNs for 118 indigenous Arjun Mk-1A tanks for Indian army worth ₹8,379 crore.

This is the second biggest "Make-in-India" project cleared in 2021 after the

Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) last month approved procurement of 83 Tejas Mk-1A fighter jets for the Indian Air Force (IAF) in a deal worth around ₹48,000 crore.

The tank has been fully designed and developed by the DRDO in close coordination with the Indian Army.

Last week Prime Minister Narendra Modi had formally handed over to the Army the Arjun Mk-1A in Chennai.

The Indian Army will now issue Request for Proposal (RFP) to DRDO and after which a contract



will be signed.

The Arjun Mk-1A tanks would be joining the fleet of the first batch of 124 Arjun tanks which have already been inducted into the Army and are deployed in the western desert along the Pakistan front.

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SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES
APPENDIX- IV-A [See proviso to rule 9 (1)]

SALE NOTICE for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 9(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002

NOTICE is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of Can Fin Homes Ltd. Noida Branch, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" on 16/03/2021 for recovery of Rs.21,44,880/- (Rupees Twenty One Lakh Forty Four Thousand Eight Hundred Eighty Only) due to Can Fin Homes Ltd. Noida from Mr. Pawan Kumar And Mrs. Khushi (Borrowers) and Mr. Arun Kumar (Guarantor) as on 08/05/2019 together with further interest and other charges thereon. The reserve price will be Rs.17,00,000/- (Rupees Seventeen Lakh Only) and the earnest money deposit will be Rs.1,70,000/- (Rupees One Lakh Seventy Thousand Only).

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPERTY
Residing at Plot No. 31 A, Flat No. UG-1, Friends Colony, Guldhar -2, Sec-23, Sanjay Nagar, Ghaziabad.
The boundaries of the property are as under: North-Other Property, East-Road, West: Property of Gopal Sharma, South: Other's Property Encumbrances: Nil
The detailed terms and condition of sale are provided in the official website of Can Fin Homes Ltd., (www.canfinhomes.com). Please refer to the following link https://www.canfinhomes.com/Search/Auction.aspx Sd/-
Date : 23.02.2021 Authorised Officer
Place: NOIDA Can Fin Homes Ltd.

CAN FIN HOMES LTD.
Plot No.C-3, Above Canara Bank, Sec-1, Noida-201301.
General: 0120-2970184/65/67, 7625079126 Email: noida@canfinhomes.com, Web: www.canfinhomes.com. CIN: L85110KA1987PLC008699

SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES
APPENDIX- IV-A [See proviso to rule 9 (1)]

SALE NOTICE for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 9(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002

NOTICE is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of Can Fin Homes Ltd. Noida Branch, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" on 16/03/2021 for recovery of Rs.15,26,298/- (Rupees Fifteen Lakh Twenty Six Thousand Two Hundred Ninety Eight Only) due to Can Fin Homes Ltd. from Mr. Manoj Saini and Mrs. Pushpa Saini (Borrowers) and Mr.Suresh Kumar(Guarantor) as on 08-11-2018 together with further interest and other charges thereon. The reserve price will be Rs.12,75,000/- (Rupees Twelve lakh Seventy Five Thousand Only) and the earnest money deposit will be Rs.1,27,500/- (Rupees One Lakh Twenty Seven Thousand Five Hundred Only)

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPERTY
Residing At Plot No.-113, Flat No.-F-3, First Floor, Vishnu Enclave, Ghaziabad, UP.
The boundaries of the property are as under: North-Road, South: Plot No. 14, East: Other, West: Flat No. F-1&F-2 Encumbrances: Nil
The detailed terms and condition of sale are provided in the official website of Can Fin Homes Ltd., (www.canfinhomes.com). Please refer to the following link https://www.canfinhomes.com/Search/Auction.aspx Sd/-
Date : 23.02.2021 Authorised Officer
Place: NOIDA Can Fin Homes Ltd.

SHORT TAKES

6 of family killed in Bihar road accident

Katihar, Bihar: Six members of a family were killed when their car rammed into a truck on a highway in Bihar's Katihar district on Tuesday. The mishap took place on NH-31 in the Kursela police station area when the deceased were returning to their home in Samastipur from Purnea where they had gone to finalise a marriage, SHO Aman Raj said. The driver lost control of the vehicle while trying to overtake the truck. Three occupants of the truck were also injured in the accident which disrupted traffic movement on the highway until the damaged vehicles were removed, he said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi came out with a tweet, saying "heard the sad news about the loss of lives in a road mishap at Katihar in Bihar. I express deep condolences for the bereaved family members and pray for the early recovery of those who have been injured." — *PTI*

Crocodile rescued from a sewer

Thane: A crocodile was rescued from a sewer in Belapur area of Navi Mumbai on Tuesday, an official from the forest department said. The reptile, measuring 6.43 ft and weighing 35.4 kg, had been roaming in sewers and creeks of Navi Mumbai for many years, and several videos of it have gone viral in the past, the official from the Thane forest range said. According to a release issued by the department, the crocodile had roamed in a creek and later inhabited an artificial pond used for fish rearing. A trap cage was set up in the sewer on Sunday and the reptile was rescued on Tuesday afternoon, the official said. The animal has been taken for a medical evaluation and will be relocated to a safe location, he added. — *PTI*

Man, 2 grandsons killed by elephants

Sidhi, MP: An elderly man and his two minor grandsons have been killed by a herd of wild elephants near the Sanjay Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh's Sidhi district, a forest official said on Tuesday. The incident took place on Monday night in Haiki village, about 85 km from the district headquarters, she said. After the herd of elephants entered the village, Goralai Yadav and his grandsons Ramkripal (12) and Ramprasad (13) rushed out of their house to move to a safer place, the tiger reserve's sub-divisional officer Jaya Tripathi said. The jumbos, however, caught hold of the trio and banged them on the ground with their trunks. The three victims died on the spot, the official said. — *PTI*

TAX RAIDS LEADS TO 'UNDISCLOSED MONEY' OF ₹450CR

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, FEB 23

The income-tax (IT) raids in the companies of Madhya Pradesh Congress MLA Nilay Daga and his brothers have yielded undisclosed income of over ₹450 crore. The search and seizure operations by IT sleuths at 22 premises of a Betul-based soya product group owned by the lawmaker and his brothers in and out of Madhya Pradesh began on Thursday and ended on Sunday. "From the investigations so far, undisclosed income of over ₹450 crore have been detected", a statement issued by IT department said without naming the MLA. The statement said, "During the course of search operation, unexplained cash of over Rs 8 crore and unexplained foreign currency of various countries amounting to more than ₹44 lakh have been seized. Nine bank lockers have also been found during the search. We have detected tax evasion through shell companies during the searches," a senior I-T department officer said on Tuesday requesting not to be quoted while confirming raids in the companies of the lawmaker. "The group has introduced undisclosed income of ₹90 crore in its books of accounts by way of sale of paper investments in shell companies to another set of shell companies of Kolkata," the statement said.

BJP sweeps Gujarat municipal polls

Cong wins only 55 seats and fails to open account in Surat; AAP opens account, becomes No. 2 in Surat

Ahmedabad, Feb. 23: The BJP on Tuesday swept elections to six municipal corporations in Gujarat by winning 483 out of 576 seats.

The ruling party retained power in all the six municipal corporations in the state — Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodara, Rajkot, Jamnagar and Bhavnagar. The polls had been held on February 21.

The main Opposition Congress got a drubbing, as it won only 55 seats and failed even to open account in Surat.

On the other hand, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) put up an impressive show by winning 27 seats, all in

Surat, and emerged as the main opposition in the Surat Municipal Corporation.

The AAP had for the first time fielded 470 candidates across all the six corporations.

The BJP won 159 out of 192 seats in Ahmedabad, 68 out of 72 seats in Rajkot, 50 out of 64 seats in Jamnagar, 44 out of 52 seats in Bhavnagar, 69 out of 76 seats in Vadodara and 93 out of 120 seats in Surat.

Congress, on the other hand, won seats in single digit in three corporations, and drew a blank in Surat.

The party won 25 seats in Ahmedabad, four in



BJP workers and supporters celebrate outside the counting station in Ahmedabad after the party won civic body election on Tuesday. — *PTI*

Rajkot, 11 in Jamnagar, eight in Bhavnagar and seven in Vadodara. Asaduddin Owaisi's

AIMIM, which also contested local body polls in Gujarat for the first time, won seven seats in

Kejriwal to hold roadshow in Guj

New Delhi: Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal will hold a road show on February 26 in Gujarat, where his party registered impressive gains in the civic body polls.

In a tweet in Hindi, the AAP chief thanked the people of Gujarat for ushering in an era of "new politics" in the state. Party leaders said Mr Kejriwal will hold a road show in Surat. — *PTI*

Ahmedabad's Muslim-dominated Jamalpur and Maktampur wards. Three candidates of the

BSP won in Jamnagar, while an independent candidate won only in Ahmedabad. The BJP had won 389 seats and Congress 176 across these six municipal corporations in the 2016 elections. The saffron party gained 94 seats while Congress lost 121 seats this time.

In a series of tweets, Prime Minister Narendra Modi thanked the people of Gujarat and BJP workers for the victory.

"Thank you Gujarat! Results of municipal elections across the state clearly show the unwavering faith people have towards politics of development and good governance. — *PTI*

'Results show people's faith in politics of development'

New Delhi, Feb. 23: With the BJP set to retain power in six Gujarat municipal corporations, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday termed the victory "very special" and said for a party that has been serving in a state for over two decades to record such a phenomenal win is noteworthy.

He said the results of municipal elections clearly show the unwavering faith people have in politics of development and good governance. The BJP appeared on course to retain power in the six municipal corporations, winning 409 of the 474 seats where results were declared till evening.

"Thank you Gujarat! Results of municipal elections across the state clearly show the unwavering faith people have towards politics of development and good governance," Modi said in a series of tweets.

"Grateful to the people of the state for trusting BJP yet again. Always an honour to serve Gujarat," he said. Mr Modi also hailed the efforts of Gujarat BJP workers who reached out to people and elaborated on the party's vision for the state. The Gujarat government's pro-people policies have positively impacted the entire state, he said.

"Today's win across Gujarat is very special. For a party that is serving in a state for over two decades to record such a phenomenal win is noteworthy. It is heartening to see widespread support from all sections of society, particularly the youth of Gujarat towards BJP," he said.

Polling for 576 seats in Ahmedabad and five other civic corporations was held on February 21. — *PTI*

Terrorism a crime against humanity, says Jaishankar

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 23

Terrorism "continues to be one of the gravest threats to humankind and India has been in the forefront of the global action against terrorism", external affairs minister S. Jaishankar said on Tuesday, while pointing to the global need for "a clear realisation, including in bodies dealing with human rights, that terrorism can never be justified, nor its perpetrators ever equated with its victims". The EAM was addressing the "High-level segment of the 46th Session of the Human Rights Council" and his remarks are being seen as a thinly-veiled jibe at the international human rights body.

"The human rights agenda continues to face severe challenges, most of all from terrorism. ... Terrorism continues to be one of the gravest threats to humankind. It is a crime against humanity and violates the most fundamental human right - namely 'the Right to Life'. As a long-standing victim, India has been at the forefront of global action against terrorism. This is possible only when there is a clear realisation, including in bodies dealing with human rights, that terrorism can never be justified, nor its perpetrators ever equated with its victims," the EAM said in his address.



S. Jaishankar

"We presented, last month, at the UNSC, an 8-point Action Plan to deal with the scourge of terrorism. We will continue to work together with members of the UNSC and other States to ensure implementation of our Action Plan," he added.

Mr Jaishankar further said, "India's abiding commitment to promotion and protection of basic human rights has been manifest in our strategy to deal with Covid-19 pandemic. By giving direct food support to 800 million Indians and financial support to 400 million, many of them women, we ensured that basic needs were very effectively addressed even during the lockdown. ... In the same spirit, India has pledged to use its vaccine manufacturing capacity to make vaccines accessible and affordable to all. From Bangladesh to Brazil and from Morocco to Fiji, the pharmacy of the world is today supplying millions of vaccine doses to more than 70 countries."

'Farmers will gherao Parl if demands are not met'

Sikar, Feb. 23: Farmer leader Rakesh Tikait said on Tuesday that if the Centre does not repeal the three new agriculture laws, the protesting farmers will gherao Parliament.

He appealed to farmers to be ready as the call for "Delhi march" can be given at any time.

Mr Tikait was addressing the Kisan Mahapanchayat of United Kisan Morcha in Sikar, Rajasthan Tuesday. "This time the call will be for Parliament gherao. We will announce it and then march towards Delhi. This time 40 lakh tractors will be there instead of four lakh tractors," he said.

Mr Tikait said the protesting farmers would plough the parks near India Gate and grow crops there. Leaders of the United Front will decide the date to gherao the Parliament, he added. He also said there was a conspiracy to malign the country's farmers on January 26, when violence had broken out in the national capital during their tractor parade.

"The farmers of the country love the tricolour, but not the leaders of this country," he said. — *PTI*



Rakesh Tikait

College girl found lying with severe burns along NH in UP

Shahjahanpur (UP), Feb. 23: (PTI) A girl student of a college run by a trust of former union minister Swami Chinmayanand was found lying without clothes and severely burnt along a national highway in Shahjahanpur district in Uttar Pradesh, police said on Tuesday.

It was not immediately known how the BA second-year student suffered burns and ended up on the roadside, the police said, adding that she was not in a state to record her statement before a magistrate.

According to superintendent of police S. Anand, the student suffered 60 per cent burns and has been referred to a hospital in Lucknow for better treatment. The girl had come to attend her classes accompanied by her father on Monday. As she did not come out after the classes, her father

started looking for her. He was later informed that she has been found lying along the Lucknow-Bareilly National Highway naked and with severe burns and that she was being taken to a hospital by the police.

The police said villagers had covered the girl with a sheet and that there was no trace of her clothes. The only thing the girl could recollect while talking to police personnel was that she was on the third floor of the college building. The girl's father said that he used to bring his daughter to the college

once in a week or fortnight and used to wait outside till classes ended.

The girl from a village in the Jalalabad police station area is a student of Swami Shukdevanand Postgraduate College, run by Mumukshu Ashram of Chinmayanand.

The Mumukshu Ashram was in the centre of a controversy in 2019 after a female student of a law college run by it accused Chinmayanand of sexual assault. However, the student later withdrew her charges against Chinmayanand, who was arrested in the case in September 2019 and released on bail nearly five months later.

In a separate incident in the district, the body of a five-year-old girl was recovered and her seven-year-old cousin sister was found injured in the Kanth police station area. — *PTI*

Army says it is ready for safe Amarnath yatra

Khanbal (J&K), Feb. 23: The security situation in the restive south Kashmir has improved significantly and the Army is prepared to meet challenges like the threat of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and the conduct of incident-free annual Amarnath Yatra, a senior Army officer said on Tuesday.

The prevailing security situation in south Kashmir is stable which is a drastic improvement from 2019, he said, noting

that recruitment into militant ranks was on a decline. A testimony to the improved situation was the huge influx of tourists to the Valley including at south Kashmir's Pahalgam resort, the officer said.

We are not saying that it is terrorism-free, but it has vastly improved and there is an increasing support of 'Awaam' (people) to our efforts and (anti-militancy) operations, he said.

The officer said the summer months ahead were a

challenge for the security forces, especially in view of the expected rush of tourists and the Amarnath yatra.

We are ready to deal with those challenges. We will take care of the deployment of forces on the route (of the yatra) as well as put additional forces wherever needed. We will be able to conduct a safe and secure yatra, he said.

We are looking at good days ahead, he added. The annual Amarnath pilgrimage usually starts



Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal looks at arms and ammunitions surrendered by five militants outfits of Karbi-Anglong at Srimanta Sankardev Kalashetra in Guwahati on Tuesday. — *PTI*

in June-July on the traditional 36-km-long Pahalgam route in Anantnag district and the shorter 14-km-long Baltal route in Ganderbal district. It concludes in August, coinciding with Raksha Bandhan. The officer said the threat of IEDs was real and on the immediate radar of the security forces. It is generally the cadre of Jaish (Jaish-e-Mohammad) which are trained for IEDs. This is a real threat. "But, we have preventive

drills and procedures in place and have IED detection devices. Defeating the IEDs is a difficult task as it is a hidden enemy, but we are at it, he said.

While the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) remain core outfits and were the prime targets of the security forces, the Army officer said the Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) consisting mostly of local militants had taken a drastic hit over the last few years. — *PTI*

2 die, 26 hurt in chemical plant fire

New Delhi, Feb. 23: Agro-chemical major UPL Ltd on Tuesday said that two workers died and 26 were injured after a "serious fire" broke out at its Jhagadia plant in Bharuch district of Gujarat.

Other than that, five workers were missing, according to the company. UPL said the accident might have happened due to fire/explosion in the solvent, but did not rule out a "foul play". The company, meanwhile, said it would offer compensations to deceased and affected workers.

In a regulatory filing, UPL said that "unfortunately, a serious fire broke out in a plant in shutdown condition in the early hours of this morning at our Jhagadia unit in Gujarat". It further said that fire broke out at around 1.35 am, followed by "explosion at one of our plants which was shut since 5th February 2021 for its planned annual boiler inspection".

Since the plant was shut, UPL said there was no chemical reaction in progress at this plant. There were no chemical or gas leaks because of the fire/explosion either during or after this incident, it added.

The fire broke out after a blast at United Phosphorus

LD's plant in Jhagadia GIDC industrial area, said inspector P.H. Vasava of the local police station.

While local sources said it was a boiler blast, the police official did not specify and said probe was on. The factory made chemicals used in the pharmaceutical industry, sources said. "Two bodies have been found so far from the debris inside the factory.

Search is underway for five workers who are still missing," inspector Vasava said. The blast was so powerful that it was heard a long distance away, the inspector said. Around 15 fire tenders were rushed to the spot and the fire was brought under control by 6.30 am, he added. "Given the intensity, prima facie, it appears that the fire may have been caused due to fire/explosion in the solvent which could have been caused due to electric short circuit. We do not rule out possible foul play, as there was no operation at the plant," the company filing said. — *PTI*

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Priyanka calls PM 'arrogant', 'coward'

Mathura, Feb. 23: Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Tuesday lashed out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a "kisan mahapanchayat" here, calling him "arrogant" and a "coward" who does not own up the responsibility for his policies.

She also accused the PM of insulting farmers by making a mockery of them in Parliament through his "andolanjeevi" (habitual agitators) remark.

Promising that her party will repeal the new farm laws when it comes to power, Priyanka alleged that they have been enacted by those engaged in making money ("noton ki kheti") to benefit their "billionaire friends". "People have always taught a lesson to arrogant governments, and the time for it has arrived," she said, claiming that all election promises made by the ruling party have turned out to be false.

"The truth is that the prime minister is not only arrogant ('ahankari') but also a coward ('kayar'). As soon as his policies are questioned, he backtracks," said the Congress leader,



Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi is greeted by women during a kisan mahapanchayat in Mathura. — *PTI*

accusing the PM of wrongly blaming her party's policies for high fuel prices.

Thank God the previous Congress governments had developed industries, otherwise, the present government would not have been able to sell anything, she said.

She also said the GST and demonetisation were introduced to benefit "billionaire friends" of the prime minister.

She said the government is "intoxicated" by the idea of selling public sector assets and asked people at the gathering to save the sacred Govardhan hill "lest the BJP should sell it". — *PTI*

THE ASIAN AGE

24 FEBRUARY 2021

Puducherry: Democracy on backfoot, hold polls on time

The V. Narayanasamy-led Congress government lost a trust vote in Puducherry paving the way for an alternative mode of governance till the elections in April-May. Those wishing to bring down an elected government have succeeded in their efforts at demolishing democratic functioning backed by the will of the people as reflected from free and fair polls. The southern Union Territory is just another regime which in being brought down fulfils the “Congress *mukt*” aims of the national ruling party. The indecent hurry shown in dismantling the regime even at the cost of sacrificing a faithful “lieutenant” in Kiran Bedi has been linked to the Prime Minister’s visit to Puducherry on February 25 to inaugurate a renovated landmark. The machinations were complete once the Speaker was convinced into falling line with a Supreme Court order investing three nominated MLAs with the vote on such matters as the Budget and trust vote.

The Puducherry imbroglio follows the classic pattern of destabilisation of regimes not owing allegiance to the ruling dispensation at the Centre. It began with Arunachal Pradesh and swept through Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh and is another milestone for the BJP as it sought more footholds in the south while denying the Congress any share in power in a vast region. An emaciated Congress had not been politically smart enough to nominate three MLAs to the UT in time and now suffers the fate of ruling only in Punjab, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, besides backing the Shiva Sena

and NCP government in Maharashtra. The laidback manner of political operations in the grand old party played into the hands of a manoeuvring BJP, so brazen in its use of the office of governors and lieutenant governors in throttling the functioning of governments.

The Puducherry question should help bring the focus back to whether nominated members of Parliament and legislatures can be allowed to vote. The Speaker’s decision to abide by a Supreme Court judgment may have helped avert an awkward confrontation with the higher judiciary. Whether this only places a crown on the supremacy of the judiciary in present-day India is moot and needs a lot more debating on the delineation of powers among three pillars in a democracy. The Puducherry Speaker’s action can be questioned as to due procedure not followed in the trust vote though the chief minister and his alliance MLAs walking out before the confidence motion may only have helped him arrive at his own conclusion within the sweeping ambit of a Speaker’s power in the House.

The hunger for power driving toppling games is as old as the hills in India and may have evolved from ancient palace intrigues. This does not absolve those who continue to bring down governments through the clever strategy of resignations when anti-defection laws are in place. This is not a good advertisement for a democracy that mandates honouring of popular verdicts in a modern setting. It remains to be seen if Puducherry is in for a spell of President’s Rule but the aim should be to give an immediate opportunity for the people to vote again and it is incumbent on the forces that be to support the case for elections to be held in Puducherry as slated.

Judiciary’s late intervention

The order of Bombay high court on Monday granting bail to poet Varavara Rao, an accused under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) in the Bhima-Koregaon violence case, is a welcome intervention by the judiciary to stop state agencies from using stringent special laws to keep citizens behind bars as undertrials forever. Given his age and health condition, “sending him back to Talaja central prison would amount to endangering his life, thereby violating his fundamental right under Article 21”, the court held, and said it could not be a “mute spectator” as Mr Rao’s health deteriorated in government facilities.

While granting him bail, the court also widened the scope of the writ jurisdiction of the high court under Article 226 of the Constitution to invoke Article 21 on the right to life and offer relief to people who face the stringent sections in special laws, which make it difficult even for the courts to grant relief.

In a similar case earlier this month, the Supreme Court held that statutory restrictions should not stop constitutional courts from granting bail on grounds of violation of Part III of the Constitution. It had also asked the constitutional courts to consider the inordinate delay in the start of the trial while considering bail petitions. “Such an approach would safeguard against the possibility of provisions like Section 43-D (5) of UAPA being used as the sole metric for denial of bail or for wholesale breach of constitutional right to speedy trial,” it said.

These two orders together send a message to the law enforcement and investigating agencies that they have to use their professional excellence to get people convicted of crimes and keep them in jail instead of using provisions in special laws to do so. The courts’ resolute interventions also offer a ray of hope to hundreds of undertrial prisoners languishing in our jails due to the delay in the legal system.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani



Afghan challenges for India & Taliban factor



Anand K. Sahay

Far & Near

In the Afghanistan context, the present juncture can be characterised as the twilight hour embedding the deepest uncertainty. India cannot but be greatly concerned as it has indicated interest in being invested over the long term. It has unmistakable strategic interests in a geopolitical (and geo-economic) area that marks the junction of South Asia, West Asia and Central Asia.

India’s interest has lately been underlined in spite of the unsettling political and military situation in Afghanistan, which may well permit the return of the Taliban to the seat of power in Kabul. Indeed, India’s commitment to the people of Afghanistan was restated when earlier this month it signed the \$300 million Shahoot dam project that will provide clean drinking water to the once great city of Kabul, which has fallen on hard times in recent decades.

The Taliban, a strong politico-military outfit specialising in the terrorist method, are a special product of Pakistan, manufactured to permit Islamabad to have a long-term hold over Kabul. This is widely recognised. The Taliban leadership lives in Pakistan. Whether the Taliban will continue to be under Pakistan’s thumb over the long haul is a matter for the future.

Pakistan influences Afghanistan in deep, malignant ways as it has a long border with that country. Pakistan’s best friend China, now militarily and economically very powerful, also has a border with Afghanistan. India, on the other hand, does not, and is thus disadvantaged by geography.

And yet, it must remain engaged with Afghanistan. Whether the Taliban’s recapture

of Kabul comes to pass or not, staying engaged with Afghanistan is India’s foremost challenge in the region.

New tools need to be devised. A new diplomacy with the friendly countries of the region, in particular Iran and Russia, which enjoy contiguity with Afghanistan (Russia via Tajikistan, where Moscow’s influence is paramount), must be envisioned. Indeed, the process of better gauging the Taliban, and forging the terms on which a relationship with this group can be reached, is also a part of the challenge for India.

The uncertainty in the Afghan theatre has been precipitated on account of the agreement reached by America’s erstwhile Trump administration with the Taliban one year ago this month. Under the Doha accord, all US troops must leave Afghanistan by May 1 this year in return for the Taliban cutting links with Al Qaeda. Alongside, the Taliban are enjoined to engage in an intra-Afghan dialogue in which the Afghan government is included. This is with a view to the formation of a government that will enjoy wide acceptability in the country.

The Taliban have, however, scuttled meaningful negotiations. They have instead unleashed violence on an unheard-of scale, killing around 50 people daily over the past year, and engaging in targeted assassinations. The prognosis is dire. If the American forces pull out wholesale as planned, it is widely thought that civil war will break out. Armed factions are likely to emerge to resist the Taliban as the latter attempt to take control in Kabul with the help of Pakistan (and possibly China), while some

groups may strike deals with the Taliban.

All eyes are on the new US administration of President Joe Biden. Will he stick to the timetable of withdrawal of American forces envisaged by his predecessor? Or will he, as many have urged, adopt a conditions-based approach whereby the US forces will persevere with a withdrawal scheme that will be guided by conditions on the ground and not by an artificial timetable.

The Afghans, and the regional powers, are naturally watching the situation closely. Iran and Russia, which carry considerable weight in Afghanistan, would want the Americans to withdraw soonest, but not in a rush. They fear that a hasty US pullout will inexorably pave the path for a quick Taliban or Pakistan takeover as other leading political and armed factions (over which Iran and Russia have natural leverage) will be disadvantaged if the Taliban cut through militarily, pre-empting a political process.

India — while it has commonalities with Tehran and Moscow on the Afghan issue — desires that the US ensure a smooth political process for the future governance of Afghanistan in which all participants, including the Taliban if they are interested, engage in political competition on the basis of an agreed Constitution, without resort to arms, in a sovereign, democratic, Afghanistan.

New Delhi has nursed such a goal for long but has done all too little to work in that direction. It practically found itself rooted to the ground for more than six months after the US and Taliban signed the Doha agreement in February 2020,

Zamir Kabulov, the Russian President’s special envoy for Afghanistan and a respected Kabul hand, is said to have noted wryly: ‘If India wants to come to the party, it must dance!’

uttering diplomatic pieties and doing little else.

India showed yet again that while it has influence in Afghanistan, especially with the people, it possesses little leverage. Lately, however, attempts are being made to change this state of affairs. To the satisfaction of the Ashraf Ghani government in Kabul, New Delhi actively engaged the United States and Nato to resist a precipitate military withdrawal and has shown other signs of engaging more deeply.

It may be appropriate to make mention in this context of the Afghan charge d’affaires in New Delhi, Tahir Qadiri, who worked with energy, and some foresight, in a most difficult moment to impress upon India to step up its act and be proactive to mobilise Afghan factions in the democratic direction even as the US-sanctioned Doha process (which may conceivably unravel) plays its music in a different register.

Kabul has not had an ambassador in New Delhi for more than two years and it fell to this young diplomat to fill a big gap. It is this spirit that saw in the recent period the arrival in New Delhi of senior Afghan personalities such as Abdul Rashid Dostum and Ata Mohammad Noor and others although the Covid-19 pandemic inhibited travel. The building of a viable consensus among the top political figures of Afghanistan is crucial in the context of a post-US Afghanistan.

India enjoys the goodwill to be a catalyst. But will it play that part? Zamir Kabulov, the Russian President’s special envoy for Afghanistan and a respected Kabul hand, is said to have noted wryly: “If India wants to come to the party, it must dance!” Perhaps preliminary steps have been taken in that direction. But it is still early days. What New Delhi must really prepare for is to remain on *terra firma* in the Afghan theatre even if the US troops pull out completely in the next two months.

LETTERS

MAXIMUM GOVERNANCE

This refers to the editorial, “Withdraw restrictions on academic webinars” (Feb. 23). Is this minimum government and maximum governance? Why does the government have a penchant to breathe down the necks of even scientists of public funded institutions and colleges? In the BJP’s eyes almost every second citizen, except its dyed-in-the-wool supporters, are conspiring against the nation, including the hapless farmers, journalists of repute, minors et al. This jingoism does not augur well for democracy.

Deepak Singhal
Noida

BE RID OF CENTRE BIAS

YOUR EDITORIAL, “Cong’s Punjab lesson” (Feb. 20), has an important message for all political parties. The local functionaries and satraps should be accorded their due primacy and not given the short shrift by the helmsmen or party honchos. Of late, there has been a pronounced tendency among all the parties to take important decisions without bothering a whit for local aspirations. Excessive centralisation in decision-making and demanding unquestioning subservience at the grassroots level have often proved to be the death knell of many promising outfits. Decision-making by general consensus and bidding good-bye to command performance must needs be the new norm.

Amit Banerjee
Mumbai

MAN-ANIMAL CONFLICT

THE CAPTURE OF an injured tigress at a coffee plantation in Manchalli by forest officials on Sunday must bring cheer to the people of Kodagu. Authorities suspect the big cat of killing a boy and a woman in Kumatur and T Shettigeri. The tigress, which initially made away with cattle, had of late turned its attention on humans. It will be shifted to the animal rescue centre at Koorgalli on Mysuru city’s outskirts. Man-animal conflict on the forest fringes thanks to rapid encroachment of jungle land continues to be a matter of concern.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

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

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



‘Takeover’ of Gymkhana Club strikes fear in Lutyens’ Delhi

The capital’s Gymkhana Club, the 107-year-old watering hole favoured by the high and mighty of currently beleaguered Lutyens’ Delhi, is back in the news. With its seemingly endless saga of mismanagement and irregularities, the Club has been in the limelight a lot, unfortunately.

The present crisis has emerged after the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) dissolved the Club’s governing council and appointed M.M. Juneja, director general of the ministry of corporate affairs, as “administrator” to oversee the club’s functioning even as the legal case continues. Among Mr Juneja’s first actions after his appointment sent a notice to all members to clear pending dues amounting to Rs 1.2 crores!

This is the first time in the Club’s history that an administrator has been appointed to run its affairs. Mr Juneja has been given the mandate to introduce “the best practices that can bring the club to the

21st-century norms”.

The current imbroglio dates back four years when the ministry of corporate affairs decided to open an inquiry into the Club’s management after the growing number of complaints and court cases against the Club. The petition was filed early last year at the NCLAT in which the ministry sought to take over the Club management. It seems to have got its way, for now. Other clubs in Lutyens’ Delhi are trembling now that serious action has begun. Any guesses about who’s next? DKB is listening to your chatter, so send it in...

ED ON AN EXPANSION SPREE As it seeks to become nimbler as well as to strengthen its reach due to growing responsibilities, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is on an expansion spree. This requires more officers for new zonal and sub-zonal offices.

The agency, a part of the revenue department of the Union finance ministry, is responsible for enforcing

economic laws and fighting economic crime. But with a wider jurisdiction now with new responsibilities under the FEMA, PMLA and FEO acts, it will need to expand its footprint.

According to sources, the expansion will involve a considerable restructuring of its cadre strength. At present, ED has a sanctioned strength of 2,064 posts including five special directors and 27 joint directors. Since there is a shortage of officers for even the sanctioned posts, there is a greater urgency for selecting more officers to fill existing vacancies as well as for the new offices. Apparently, there is a move to create new posts of additional/joint directors and deputy directors for the new zonal and sub-zonal offices.

Recently, ED promoted 10 assistant directors as deputy directors of enforcement. They include P. Radhakrishnan, P. Vinod Kumar, P. Nandini, Rajesh Kumar, M. Nair, Shubhendu Parthi, Diptesh Mondal, Benjamin S.N. Chattair, Pad-

ma, V.G. Thomas and Krishna Jain. The agency has also recently opened two new zonal offices in Bhopal and Gurugram and raised the status of sub-zonal offices in Raipur and Bhubaneswar to zonal offices. It has also opened several sub-zonal offices across the country.

BIHAR EX-DGP’S POLITICAL CAREER STILL AT START LINE

The political ambitions of the high-profile former DGP of Bihar Guptaeshwar Pandey have been thwarted, yet again.

Though Mr Pandey waited patiently for his hoped-for induction into the NDA government, chief minister Nitish Kumar has instead appointed another former IPS officer, Sunil Kumar, as a cabinet minister in the state with the excise and prohibition portfolio, barely a few months after his retirement.

Mr Pandey shot into the headline with his comments during the furore over actor Sushant Singh’s suicide. Even as the controversy

raged, Mr Pandey took voluntary retirement and joined the Janata Dal (United) Party hoping to get a party ticket. However, the ticket went to the BJP candidate under the seat-sharing agreement within the NDA.

This denied, many were certain that Mr Pandey would be inducted into the Nitish Cabinet sooner than later. But Sunil Kumar has piped him to that. Neither has Mr Pandey been made an MLC either.

Curiously, this was Mr Pandey’s second attempt at a career in politics. In 2009, he had taken voluntary retirement in the hope of getting a BJP ticket, which he was denied. Luckily for him, Nitish Kumar allowed him to withdraw his resignation from the IPS and subsequently even elevated him as state police chief.

Will Mr Pandey’s patient wait fruitfully or has he run out of options? We’ll wait and see.

Share a babu experience! Follow [@dilipthecherian](https://twitter.com/dilipthecherian) on Twitter.

SHORT TAKES

U.S. CURBS ON 2 MORE MYANMAR JUNTA LEADERS

Washington, Feb. 23: The United States on Monday announced sanctions against two more leaders of Myanmar's junta and warned of further action as hundreds of thousands defiantly rallied for the restoration of the nation's democracy.

The US said it was blocking any US property and suspending the entry into the country of two members of the newly ruling State Administrative Council — General Maung Maung Kyaw, who commands the air force, and Lieutenant General Moe Myint Tun.

"We will not waver in our support for the people of Burma," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said, using Myanmar's former name.

ZUMA GRAFT TRIAL SET TO BEGIN IN MAY

Johannesburg, Feb. 23: Former South African president Jacob Zuma's corruption trial is set to begin in May, more than 16 years after he was first implicated in the graft allegations.

Zuma, South Africa's president from 2009 to 2018, is accused of receiving bribes from French arms manufacturer Thales. However, both Zuma and Thales have refuted the charges levelled against them, which include corruption, fraud, racketeering, and money laundering.

Zuma's trial and the order for him to appear before a judicial inquiry into corruption are seen as tests of President Cyril Rampahosa's campaign against corruption.

NEPAL: HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES REINSTATED

Kathmandu, Feb. 23: Nepal's Supreme Court on Tuesday reinstated the dissolved House of Representatives, in a major setback to embattled Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli who was preparing for snap polls amidst a tussle for power with his rivals in the ruling communist party. In a landmark ruling, a five-member Constitutional bench led by Chief Justice Chandra Shumsher annulled the Oli government's "unconstitutional" decision to dissolve the 275-member lower house of Parliament.

The court also ordered the government to summon the House session within the next 13 days. Nepal plunged into a political crisis on December 20 after President Bidya Dev Bhandari dissolved the House.

PUTIN HOSTS BELARUSIAN PREZ FOR TALKS

Moscow, Feb. 23: Russian President Vladimir Putin hosted his Belarusian counterpart Alexander Lukashenko for talks on Monday, amid media reports suggesting that he was coming to Russia to secure another loan. The Kremlin extended both economical and political support to Lukashenko after his disputed re-election in August triggered the largest and the most sustained wave of mass protests in Belarus' history. In September, Putin said Moscow would provide a \$1.5 billion loan to its ex-Soviet neighbor. Earlier this month, the Kommersant newspaper cited government sources saying that another loan, this time of over \$3 billion, would be discussed during his visit to Russia.

AFGHAN PEACE TALKS RESUME IN QATAR

Islamabad, Feb. 23: After more than a month of delays, escalating violence and a flurry of diplomatic activity, peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government have resumed in the Middle Eastern State of Qatar. Taliban spokesman Dr. Mohammad Naeem tweeted on Monday night that talks had resumed.

There were no details other than the atmosphere was "cordial", a commitment that negotiations should continue and an announcement that the first item of business will be setting the agenda. When talks ended abruptly in January, both sides submitted their wish lists for agendas. The task now is for the two sides to sift through the respective wish lists, agree on items to negotiate and the order in which they will be tackled.

FB to restore news services in Oz

Firm to pay local media companies for content after deal on pending landmark legislation

Sydney, Feb. 23: Facebook said Tuesday it will lift a contentious ban on Australian news and pay local media companies for content, after a last-gasp deal on pending landmark legislation. Australia's Treasurer Josh Frydenberg announced a face-saving compromise that will see Google and Facebook plunge tens of millions of dollars into the struggling local news sector.

In return the US digital firms will, for now, avoid being subjected to mandatory payments that could cost them vastly more and create what they see as an alarming global precedent.

Just hours after the compromise was unveiled, Facebook announced its first proposed deal with an Australian media company, Seven West, and was said to be pursuing commercial deals with other

local news organisations.

The company is expected to use the content to launch a dedicated news product in Australia later this year. "As a result of these changes, we can now work to further our investment in public interest journalism, and restore news on Facebook for Australians in the coming days," said Will Easton, managing director of Facebook Australia. The social media firm sparked global outrage last week by blocking out news for its Australian users in protest at the proposed legislation, and inadvertently blocking a series of non-news Facebook pages linked to everything from cancer charities to emergency response services.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison had angrily accused Facebook of making a decision to "unfriend" Australia. Google has already brokered deals worth mill-

ions of dollars with local media companies, including the two largest: Rupert Murdoch's News Corp and Nine Entertainment. Commentators described the eleventh-hour amendments — which came as parliament looks set to pass the law this week — as "a reasonable compromise". "Everybody can walk away saying, well we

got what we wanted," University of New South Wales business professor Rob Nicholls said.

Both companies now have an additional two months to reach further agreements that would stave off binding arbitration.

The tech firms had fiercely opposed the legislation from the get-go, fearing it would threaten their business models.

In particular, the companies objected to rules that made negotiations with media companies mandatory and gave an independent Australian arbiter the right to impose a monetary settlement.

That process will now be avoided if companies are deemed to have made a "significant contribution" to the Australian news industry through unspecified "commercial agreements". "We now face the strange possibility that

the news media mandatory code could be passed by parliament and it applies to precisely no one," said Marcus Strom, head of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, a union.

"It will just sit in the Treasurer's (drawer) as a threat to misbehaving digital companies," Google was also keen to avoid creating a precedent that platforms should pay anyone for links, something that could make their flagship search engine unworkable.

Facebook — which is much less reliant on news content — had initially said being forced to pay for news was simply not worth it and shut down content. "There is no doubt that Australia has been a proxy battle for the world," said Frydenberg.

Critics of the law say it punishes innovative companies and amounts to a money grab by struggling

but politically connected traditional media.

Thousands of journalism jobs and scores of news outlets have been lost in Australia alone over the past decade as the sector watched advertising revenue flow to the digital players.

For every \$100 spent by Australian advertisers today, \$49 goes to Google and \$24 to Facebook, according to the country's competition watchdog.

Tech insiders see the legislation as driven, in particular, by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, which dominates the local media landscape and has close ties with Australia's conservative government.

A new provision in the law gives Facebook and Google more discretion over who they do deals with, and what the sums involved would be.

— PTI



Javad Zarif

IRAN IMPOSES CURBS ON UN N-INSPECTIONS

Tehran, Feb. 23: Iran officially has begun restricting international inspections of its nuclear facilities, state TV reported Tuesday, a bid to pressure European countries and US President Joe Biden's administration to lift crippling economic sanctions and restore the 2015 nuclear deal. The state TV report gave little detail beyond confirming that Iran had made good on its threat to reduce cooperation with International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors. Iran's move to limit international inspections underscores the daunting task facing Biden as he seeks to reverse Trump's policies and return to the deal, the most significant pact between Iran and major world powers since its 1979 Islamic revolution.

"The law has gone into effect from this morning," said Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, reiterating that Iran would no longer share surveillance footage of its nuclear facilities with the UN agency. "We never gave them live video, but (recordings) were given daily and weekly," Zarif said of the IAEA's access to information recorded by camera monitors. "The tape recording of our (nuclear) programme will be kept in Iran."

— AP

DRUG KINGPIN EL CHAPO'S WIFE ARRESTED

Washington, Feb. 23: The wife of Mexican drug kingpin Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman was arrested Monday in the United States and accused of helping her husband run his multibillion-dollar cartel and plot his audacious escape from a Mexican prison in 2015.

Emma Coronel Aispuro, a 31-year-old former beauty queen, was arrested at Dulles International Airport in Virginia and is expected to appear in federal court in Washington on Tuesday. She is a dual citizen of the United States and Mexico. Her arrest is the latest twist in the bloody, multinational saga involving Guzman, the longtime head of the Sinaloa drug cartel.

Guzman, whose two dramatic prison escapes in Mexico fed into a legend that he and his family were all but untouchable, was extradited to the United States in 2017 and is serving life in prison. And now his wife, with whom he has two young daughters, has been charged with helping him run his criminal empire.

— AP

Volcano erupts in Italy



The moon is partially seen in the sky as lava flows from the Mt. Etna volcano, near Catania, Italy, early Tuesday. The explosion started before midnight on Monday, provoking a huge plume that rose for several kilometres from the top of Etna, as reported by The National Institute of Geophysics and Volcanology, Etna Observatory. — AP/PTI

Ex-security officials to answer for Jan. 6 failures at Capitol

Washington, Feb. 23: Congress is set to hear from former US Capitol security officials for the first time about the massive law enforcement failures on Jan. 6, the day a violent mob laid siege to the building and interrupted the presidential electoral count.

Three of the four scheduled to testify Tuesday before two Senate committees resigned under pressure immediately after the deadly attack, including the former head of the Capitol Police. Much remains unknown about what happened before and during the assault, and lawmakers are expected to aggressively question the former officials about what went wrong.

How much did law enforcement agencies know about plans for violence that day, many of which were public?

— AP

China relation is one of strong competition: WH

Washington, Feb. 23: America's relationship with China is one of "strong competition" and the Biden administration will work in close coordination with partners and allies to make sure that it is coming from a position of strength, the White House has said, a day after Beijing urged the US to stop interfering in its internal affairs and lift trade sanctions.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki made the comments on Monday while responding to a question on a statement made by Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the China-US ties. Wang said that the US

should stop "smearing" the ruling Communist Party of China and its one-party political system, lift sanctions on trade and halt Washington's backing of "separatist forces" in Taiwan, Tibet, Hong Kong and Xinjiang. He also said that the Biden administration should "adjust" the hard-line policy pursued by former President Donald Trump towards Beijing to check its growing influence.

At the White House briefing, Psaki said, "there is, of course, a review of our tariffs and the tariffs that were put in place. I don't have any update on that at this point in time."

"We believe the relationship with China is one of strong competition. We want to come to that relationship from a position of strength."

"That means working in close coordination with our partners and allies around the world: Europeans, other partners in the region, also with Democrats and Republicans in Congress. And it also means we want to do work at home, and focus on doing work at home, to make sure we are coming to that from a position of strength," Psaki said.

The relations between China and the US are at an all time low.

— PTI

3-MINUTE | TRAILER

Rover searching for signs of ancient microscopic life

Nasa releases video of Mars landing

Cape Canaveral (US), Feb. 23: Nasa has released the first high-quality video of a spacecraft landing on Mars, a three-minute trailer showing the enormous orange and white parachute hurtling open and the red dust kicking up as rocket engines lowered the rover to the surface. The quality was so good — and the images so breathtaking — that members of the rover team said they felt like they were riding along.

"It gives me goosebumps every time I see it, just amazing," said Dave Gruel, head of the entry and descent camera team. The Perseverance rover landed last Thursday near an ancient river delta in Jezero Crater to search for

signs of ancient microscopic life. After spending the weekend binge-watching the descent and landing video, the team at Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, shared the video at a news conference on Monday.

"These videos and these images are the stuff of our dreams," said Al Chen, who was in charge of the landing team. Six off-the-shelf cameras were devoted to entry, descent and landing, looking up and down from different perspectives. All but one camera worked. The lone microphone turned on for landing failed, but Nasa got some snippets of sound after touchdown: The whirring of the rover's systems and wind

gusts. Flight controllers were thrilled with the thousands of images beamed back — and also with the remarkably good condition of the rover. It will spend the next two years exploring the dry river delta and drilling into rocks.

The core samples will be set aside for return to Earth in a decade. Nasa added 25 cameras to the \$3 billion mission — the most ever sent to Mars.

The space agency's previous rover, 2012's Curiosity, managed only jerky, grainy stop-motion images, mostly of terrain. Curiosity is still working. So is Nasa's InSight lander, although it's hampered by dusty solar panels.

Deputy project manager Matt Wallace said he was inspired several years ago to film Perseverance's harrowing descent when his young gymnast daughter wore a camera while performing a backflip.

Watching the video "I think you will feel like you are getting a glimpse into what it would be like to

land successfully in Jezero Crater with Perseverance," he said.

Thomas Zurbuchen, Nasa's science mission chief, said the video and also the panoramic views following touchdown "are the closest you can get to landing on Mars without putting on a pressure suit." The images will help Nasa prepare for astronaut flights to Mars in the decades ahead, according to the engineers.

There's a more immediate benefit. "I know it's been a tough year for everybody," said imaging scientist Justin Maki, "and we're hoping that maybe these images will help brighten people's days."

— AP



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,751.41	0.01
Nifty 50	14,707.80	0.22
S&P 500*	3,841.84	-0.89
Dollar (₹)	72.44	-0.08
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.73	-0.13
Euro (₹)	88.05	-0.31
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,372.337	0.72
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	65.24	0.00
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.172	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.372	0.003

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Punjab & Sind Bk to allot ₹5,500 cr shares to govt

Punjab & Sind Bank will allot preferential shares to the government next month in lieu of Rs 5,500 crore capital infusion. An EGM of the shareholders is scheduled on March 25 in this respect, the bank said. In September, the government had approved a Rs 20,000 crore fund through Parliament for capital infusion into public sector banks. Of this, Rs 5,500 crore was approved to be infused into P&SB.

NTPC inks pact to buy Gail's 25% in Ratnagiri Gas



NTPC said it has signed a share purchase agreement to buy Gail's 25.51 per cent stake in Ratnagiri Gas and Power Pvt Ltd (RGPPPL), commonly known as Dabhol project. Once the transaction is complete, NTPC will have 86.49 per cent stake in RGPPPL. Earlier in January, NTPC had announced acquiring 35.47 per cent stake in RGPPPL from its lenders. Initially, NTPC and Gail had 25.51 per cent stake each in the Dabhol project.

Sebi: Pre-expiry margins to curb -ve prices soon

The Sebi will put in place pre-expiry margins on cash settled contracts wherein the underlying commodities are deemed to be susceptible to possible near zero or negative prices—like that happened in crude oil futures last year. The decision, to be effective from April 1, is aimed at encouraging reduction of open interest as the contract approaches the expiry date. The margin will be applicable on some commodities under ARMF.

Bajaj launches new Pulsar 180 priced at ₹1.08 L

Bajaj Auto has launched the new version of Pulsar 180 bike priced at Rs 1,07,904, ex-showroom Delhi. The 178.6 cc model gets sporty split seats, black alloy wheels, LED tail lamp, five-speed transmission gear box with telescopic anti-friction bush in the front suspension and a five-way adjustable nitrox shock absorber at the rear. Currently, 20 per cent of the sports biking segment is in the 180-200cc motorcycles.

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■ Separation could help revive stake sale to Aramco RIL to spinoff O2C unit with \$25 billion loan

DEBJIT CHAKRABORTY & ARCHANA CHAUDHARY FEB. 23

Reliance Industries Ltd has started carving out its new oil-to-chemicals (O2C) operation into an independent unit with a \$25 billion loan from the parent, as billionaire Mukesh Ambani steps up efforts to unlock the value of his businesses.

The wholly owned unit's assets will be funded by the interest-bearing loan, which will be an "efficient mechanism to upstream cash, including any potential capital receipts," in the unit, according to a presentation filed with the stock exchanges.

Oil-to-chemicals contributed more than 60 per cent in the last financial year to the group's revenue that's been lately pivoting toward consumer businesses such as technology and retail. Splitting the business will make it easier for Ambani to bring in investors and help expedite a proposed stake sale to Saudi Arabian Oil Co.

Creating the unit "facilitates participation by strategic and financial investors," Reliance said. It expects the separation to be completed by September. Approvals have been received from the markets regulator and stock exchanges, and the company will seek a nod from shareholders and creditors in the first quarter of FY22.

Ambani amassed more than \$27 billion last year from global investors,

SLICING AND DICING VALUE

- ▶ RIL to house only upstream oil and gas E&P biz, including KG-D6 block, financial services, group treasury and legacy textile businesses
- ▶ Even though the O2C assets will move into a new arm, its debt will continue with RIL
- ▶ O2C unit houses Singapore and UK-based oil trading subsidiaries and Reliance Industries Uruguay Petroquimica SA.
- ▶ It also houses Reliance Ethane Pipeline Ltd that operates a pipeline between Dahej and Nagothane as well as a 74.9% stake RIL holds in the JV with Sibur

including Facebook Inc and Google through stake sales in his retail and digital ventures, turning Reliance net-debt-free.

Reliance has floated separate units twice earlier for funding two refineries on the west coast. The entities were merged with the parent on the completion of the plants, which can together now process 1.4 million barrels of crude daily, making it the world's biggest refining complex.

Once the spin-off is completed, Reliance Industries will house only the upstream oil and gas exploration and production business, including the KG-D6 block, financial services, group treasury and the legacy textile businesses, and act as a holding company of the group.

The retail business is held in Reliance Retail Ventures and telecom and digital ventures are nested in Jio Platforms. RIL holds 85.1 per cent of Reliance Retail and 67.3 per

cent of Jio Platforms. The rest it had sold to global investors for over Rs 2 lakh crore.

RIL will provide the \$25 billion loan to the O2C subsidiary at floating interest rate for 10 years. The subsidiary has about \$42 billion of assets (28 per cent of consolidated assets).

In August 2019, RIL had agreed to upstream Rs 1.08 lakh crore of Jio's debt to make its telecom venture debt-free, ahead of inducting strategic and financial investors like Facebook, Google and KKR.

As of December 2020, RIL's gross debt stood at Rs 2.57 lakh crore.

Even though the O2C assets will move into a new arm, its debt will continue to sit inside RIL.

The O2C unit also houses the firm's Singapore and the UK-based oil trading subsidiaries and marketing subsidiary, Reliance Industries Uruguay Petroquimica SA. It also houses Reliance

Ethane Pipeline Limited that operates a pipeline between Dahej in Gujarat and Nagothane in Maharashtra as well as a 74.9 per cent stake that Reliance holds in the joint venture with Sibur.

It's very large ethane carriers, gas pipelines such as one that transports coal-bed methane from its coal bed methane (CBM) blocks, overseas oil and gas asset holding company Reliance Industries (Middle East) DMCC, and domestic exploration and production assets would not form part of the O2C unit.

Also, RIL's textiles business as operated out of the Naroda site, Baroda township and land, including cricket stadium, Jamnagar power assets, and Sikka Ports and Terminals Limited would also not be part of the O2C unit.

RIL owns and operates twin oil refineries at Jamnagar in Gujarat, with a combined capacity of 68.2 million tonnes per annum.

It is also the country's largest petrochemical manufacturer with units at Jamnagar, Dahej, Hazira, Nagothane, Vadodara, Patalganga, Silvassa, Barabanki, and Hoshiarpur.

The company holds a 66.6 per cent stake in the KG-D6 block where it is investing about \$5 billion in developing a second set of gas discoveries along with BP.

It also has a similar stake in the NEC-25 block in the Bay of Bengal and operates two CBM blocks in MP. These upstream assets are not part of the O2C unit.

—Bloomberg/PTI

INDIA INC MAY OFFER 7.7% SALARY HIKE

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 23

Indian Inc is likely to offer an average salary hike of 7.7 per cent in 2021 after the decade's lowest hike of 6.1 per cent in 2020. The year will also see a reversal from the 10-year declining trend in salary hike. However, this may not increase higher cash-in-hand for employees if organisations make higher provident fund contributions as per the new labour codes.

According to a survey by global professional services firm Aon, almost 88 per cent of surveyed companies reported they intend to increase salaries in 2021, up from 75 per cent in 2020.

Over 34 per cent companies said that they would offer salary hike between 8 and 10 per cent, while 30.6 per cent would offer 5 to 8 per cent. Only 12.2 per cent companies said they would not give any hike and this is lower than 25.4 per cent in 2020.

Hirings are, meanwhile, picking up in India Inc. Job site Sciskey Market Network, which has analysed data from over 15,000 job postings, said the IT sector is experiencing a sequential growth in hiring since the lockdown. Job postings were up 39 per cent in January compared to December.

The IT sector was followed by BPO (10 per cent growth) and banking (6 per cent).

Job postings have seen a jump in several metro cities, including Hyderabad and Pune.

China returns as top trade partner amid border standoff

KARTHIKEYAN SUNDARAM & ARCHANA CHAUDHAR FEB. 23

China regained its position as India's top trade partner in 2020, as New Delhi's reliance on imported machines outweighed its efforts to curb commerce with Beijing after a border conflict.

Two-way trade between the economic and strategic rivals stood at \$77.7 billion last year, shows provisional data from India's commerce ministry. Although that was lower than the previous year's \$85.5 billion, it was enough to make China the largest commercial partner displacing the US-bilateral trade with which came in at \$75.9 billion amid muted demand for goods in the middle of a pandemic.

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi banned hundreds of Chinese apps, slowed approvals for investments from the neighbour and called for self-reliance after a deadly clash along their disputed Himalayan border, India continues to rely heavily on Chinese-made heavy machinery, telecom equipment and home appliances. As a result, the bilateral trade gap with China was at almost \$40 billion in 2020, making it India's largest.

Total imports from China at \$58.7 billion were more than India's combined purchases from the US and the UAE, which are its second- and third-largest trade partners, respectively.



Source: Ministry of Commerce. Note: Data for 2020 is provisional

That said, India did manage to lower imports from its neighbour amid demand disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic. India also managed to increase its exports to China by about 11 per cent from a year ago to \$19 billion last year.

The tense relations are already weighing on India's ambitions to bolster its manufacturing capabilities. New Delhi has been slow to issue visas to Chinese engineers needed to help Taiwanese companies set up factories under a so-called production-linked incentive programme, or PLI, to promote local manufacturing.

"Still a very long way to go" is how Amitendu Palit, an economist specialising in international trade and investment at the National University of Singapore, described New Delhi's efforts to wean itself away from Beijing. "The PLI schemes will take at least four-five years to create fresh capacities in specific sectors. Till then reliance on China would continue."

—Bloomberg

Broking income set to hit ₹27,500 cr

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, FEB. 23

Due to high turnover in the first nine months of current fiscal, the brokerage industry is estimated to clock a record broking income of Rs 27,500-28,500 crore in FY21, up 30-35 per cent growth compared to Rs 21,000 crore in FY20, says rating agency Ica.

The equity market reported an aggregate turnover of Rs 4,222 lakh crore in the first nine months of FY21, registering year-on-year (YoY) growth of 66 per cent. The average daily turnover (ADTO) rose to Rs 22.46 lakh crore till December

in FY21 compared to Rs 13.89 lakh crore in the comparable period last year and Rs 14.39 lakh crore in FY20.

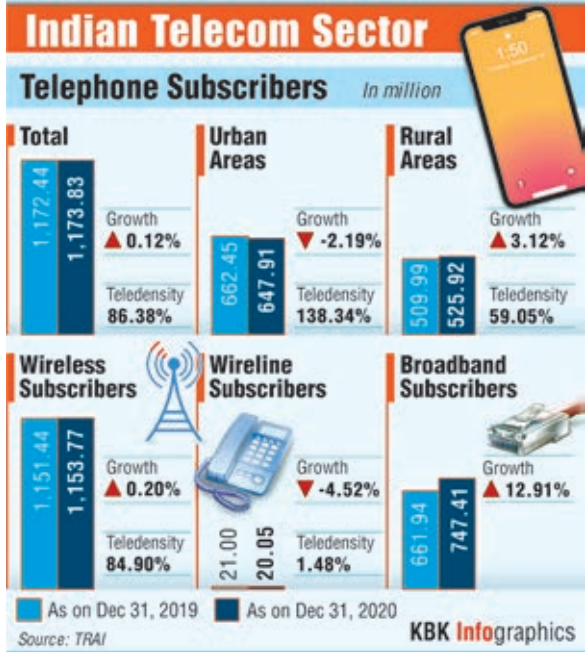
"The industry growth rate, however, is expected to moderate in the fiscal 2021-22 with gradual moderation in transaction volumes," Ica said.

The rating agency expects industry aggregate broking income of Rs 29,500-30,500 crore (YoY growth of 7-8 per cent), in FY22. Growing retail share along with increased interest and other fee income is expected to support profitability of brokerages.

Large established enti-

ties with strong presence in online broking have increased their market share in the current environment. As per NSE data, the top 20 brokerage houses together accounted for about 84 per cent of overall active client accounts as of December 2020, up from 75 per cent as of March 2020 and 57 per cent as of March 2019.

Discount brokerage houses have been able to garner a predominant share of the new accounts supported by their technology-driven business model. But many traditional brokerage companies had a slow start to the year in terms of client additions.



PIAGGIO ENTERS CARGO ELECTRIC 3-WHEELER SPACE

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, FEB. 23

Piaggio Vehicles, the Italian manufacturer of small commercial vehicles, on Tuesday entered the cargo electric three-wheeler segment with the launch of Ape' E-Xtra FX priced at Rs 3.12 lakh. This is the second product in the EV space by the company with the first being the passenger electric three-wheeler Ape' E-City which was launched in late 2019 and came with swappable battery technology.

These small commercial vehicles are powered by the FX (fixed) range of battery solutions. The Ape' E-City is priced at Rs 2.83 lakh. Both prices are introductory.

The Ape' E-Xtra FX gives 9.5 kW power output and has a payload capacity of 506kg.

The top-speed of both E-Xtra FX and E-City FX is 45km/hour. The drive range of the cargo variant is 90km and the passenger variant, 110km.

The charging time for both the vehicles is three hours and 45 minutes.

—Reuters

Airtel partners with Qualcomm to drive 5G services

Bengaluru, Feb. 23: Bharti Airtel Ltd said on Tuesday it will work with US chip-maker Qualcomm for 5G services in India, as telecom firms in the world's second-largest wireless market gear up to usher in the latest generation of wireless networks.

Airtel, placed second to Reliance Industries-owned Jio by subscribers, said in a statement to stock

exchanges that it will use Qualcomm's Radio Access Network platforms, which runs services on the cloud, to roll out 5G networks in the country.

"This collaboration ... aims to allow a faster roll-out of broadband services ... across India for 'last mile' connectivity challenges that are becoming increasingly important in today's remote, mobile-

first society," Airtel said.

Although the need for high-speed internet has been highlighted in the pandemic-led work-from-home year, India's 5G ambitions have been buffeted by delays in auction of airwaves that support the technology.

Concerns have also been raised by telecoms around the relatively high pricing of spectrum in India.

While the country is set to auction some airwaves in March, bands that support 5G will only be auctioned in the next six months, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information Technology said in a report on India's 5G preparedness.

The technology ultimately promises internet speeds up to 20 times faster than existing networks.

Jio has previously said it built an in-house 5G solution and is ready to roll out services as soon as airwaves are made available. Parent Reliance last year raised about \$97 million from Qualcomm for its digital unit that houses Jio.

Still, Airtel has seen gains in market share faster than Jio over the last few months of 2020.

—Reuters

Thailand may set income criteria for crypto traders

ANUCHIT NGUYEN FEB. 23

Thailand plans to introduce new rules to curb individuals' cryptocurrency trading after a surge in inflows from young people sparked concern.

Retail investors will probably be required to show their income or assets before opening trading accounts with the nation's six licensed cryptocurrency exchanges, said Ruenvadee Suwanmongkol, the secretary general of the Securities & Exchange Commission. Anyone who isn't allowed to trade crypto via their

own accounts can invest through licensed fund managers or financial advisers, she said, declining to elaborate.

"It's a big concern as most crypto investors on domestic exchanges are very young, such as students and teenagers," Ruenvadee said. "We realise those people love innovations and technology, but investments in these assets have enormous risk."

Thai authorities are joining other countries' regulators in warning about cryptocurrencies, even as price rallies draw retail investors searching

for higher returns amid record low interest rates. Bitcoin, the largest token, has added more than \$450 billion of value in 2021 and reached \$1 trillion in market capitalisation for the first time last week.

The new rules may require individual investors to possess some knowledge of crypto markets before being allowed to open accounts to trade them, said Ruenvadee.

Trading of cryptocurrencies on the nation's licensed bourses more than tripled in January from December to 65 billion baht (\$2.17 billion).

—Bloomberg

GOING GREEN Warming potential of underlying assets a concern Funds vex over 'portfolio warming'

ALASTAIR MARSH FEB. 23

All good money managers expect to outperform their benchmark, and by one such metric the French insurer and investor Axa SA recently scored a market-beating success. Not by delivering higher returns, but by generating a lower level of global warming.

If human activity is driving carbon emissions and temperatures to dangerous highs, then a giant asset owner like Axa with a 650 billion-euro (\$790 billion) horde of stocks, corporate bonds and sovereign debt is one of the principal proprietors of



climate change. In theory, that means every investment portfolio can be evaluated for the "warming potential" of its underlying assets.

After a painstaking process of self-evaluation that took two years, including a significant shift away from heavy polluters, Axa concluded

its assets would warm the planet by 0.8 degrees Celsius less than if it held all the companies in major global stock and bond indexes. That was good news for an early adopter of portfolio-warming metrics.

The bad news: Axa's portfolio implied a temperature increase of almost 3°C above pre-industrial levels by 2100. At that level, scientists warn of mass extinctions of animal species, large parts of the planet becoming uninhabitable due to extreme heat, rising sea levels swallowing up coastal cities, and lush rainforests turning into savannas. It also would

put Axa, despite its climate-conscious efforts, on the wrong side of the 2015 Paris Agreement in which every nation agreed to limit warming to 2°C.

And it's not only Axa that's taking the temperature of its assets. UK insurer Aviva Plc and Japan's \$1.7 trillion Pension Investment Fund have published data on warming potential. New York-based BlackRock Inc, with \$8.7 trillion of assets, plans to do the same for some of its funds. The practice is likely to spread in the years ahead.

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Bedi undergoes bypass surgery

New Delhi: Legendary spinner Bishan Singh Bedi has undergone a bypass surgery at a city hospital a few days back after he complained of heart problems and he is recovering well. The 74-year-old Bedi underwent the procedure 2-3 days back and he is expected to be discharged from the hospital soon, according to a close confidant of the former India captain. "As far as I know, he is having some heart issues and he underwent a bypass surgery 2-3 days back on the advice of the doctors," he said. "He is currently doing fine and recovering from the surgery and is expected to be discharged from the hospital soon," he added. Bedi, a premier left-arm orthodox spinner in his playing days, represented India in 67 Tests and 10 ODIs between 1967 and 1979, scalping 266 and seven wickets respectively. — PTI

Deepak in last 8 of Strandja meet

New Delhi: Asian silver-medalist Deepak Kumar (52kg) advanced to the quarterfinals with a facile win as Indian boxers got off to a mixed start at the 72nd Strandja Memorial Tournament in Sofia, Bulgaria. Deepak, also a 2019 India Open gold-medallist, defeated Kazakhstan's Olzhas Bainiyazov 5-0 in his opening bout to make the last-eight stage. Other winners on Monday included Naveen Kumar (91kg) among men and Jyoti (51kg) in the women's draw. While Naveen defeated American Darius Fulghum in a close fight that ended 3-2 in his favour, Jyoti got the better of Ukraine's Tetiana Kob 4-1. India has sent a 12-member team for the prestigious event — seven men and five women.

Shooters look to shine in Cairo WC

Cairo: A 13-member Indian squad will seek medals in the Shotgun World Cup starting here on Wednesday as the International Shooting Sport Federation's marquee events return after a break of almost a year due to pandemic. The eight-day competition is the year's first Shotgun World Cup stage, beginning with men's and women's skeet competitions on the opening day. There will be 10 events in the competition. As many as 191 athletes from 33 countries have entered the fray and for the first time, the men's and women's team competitions will be held based on the new team event formats declared last year by the ISSF. The Cairo event assumes additional significance given that this will be the final chance for the shooters to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics on the basis of world ranking points. — PTI

Jazz hammer Hornets in NBA

Los Angeles: Donovan Mitchell had 23 points and eight assists as the NBA-leading Utah Jazz gained a franchise-record 28 three-pointers in a 132-110 rout of the Charlotte Hornets on Monday. Joe Ingles and Georges Niang scored 21 points apiece as the Jazz got a superb offensive performance from their bench to win for the 21st time in their last 23 games and improve to 25-6 overall. — AFP

Live on TV

CRICKET

India vs England: Third Test, Day 1 from 2.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

South Africa T20 Challenge: Titans vs Warriors from 1.35 pm; Lions vs Dolphins from 5.55 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Odisha vs Mumbai City from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

Europa League: Tottenham Hotspur vs Wolfsburg from 10.30 pm; Atalanta vs Real Madrid from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 2; Monchengladbach vs Manchester City from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 1

WWE

NXT: Bouts from 6.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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MOTERAW

India, England look to exploit 'unexplored' strip in pink ball conundrum

Ahmedabad, Feb. 23: A virgin Motera strip has become the big talking point as India captain Virat Kohli prepares the right pink ball questionaire to trouble a spoilt-for-choice England in the day-night third Test starting here on Wednesday. Ahmedabad as a cricketing venue has been witness to a lot of cricketing feats in Indian cricket — from Sunil Gavaskar's famous late cut to complete 10,000 runs in Tests to Kapil Dev's best bowling figures of 9 for 83 and also him eclipsing Richard Hadlee's then world record of highest wickets.

On Wednesday, Ishant Sharma joining Kapil as the second Indian pacer to play 100 Tests would add to the momentous occasion and Kohli scoring a hundred is just what the 55,000 odd spectators, who would be allowed in, might crave for.

The refurbished Sardar Patel Stadium looks colossal under lights but the first Test match in many years would mean that even the home team wouldn't expect a lot of advantage.

It would prefer a square turner to go 2-1 up in a high-stakes game but whether it actually gets one remains to be seen.

As senior opener Rohit Sharma was clear in team's choice of surface — a turner that helps Ravichandran Ashwin and Axar Patel just like Joe Root would have opted for a green top at the Headingley or the Old Trafford.

There are a few more questions that would demand answers.

How would the twilight period be for the batsmen as James Anderson feels that the ball swings more in that phase?

Will the extra lacquer on the 'SG Test Pink' make it difficult for the Ashwin-Axar combo which wreaked havoc on the Chepauk snake pit?

And with a 2:30 pm start, how much will the dew have a bearing during the final session? The ball would be difficult to grip at that point for slow bowlers and the pitch, despite grass being shaved off, might ease out with ball skidding off the surface.

His opposite number James Anderson however has no doubts whatsoever that by the time clock ticks 2:30 pm on Wednesday, the track will bear a bald look, similar to Chepauk.

Umesh Yadav passing the fitness test was good news for the Indian camp as Kuldeep Yadav is likely to be dropped from the playing XI. — PTI

Root yet to sort bowling attack

Ahmedabad, Feb. 23: England skipper Joe Root on Tuesday said he is yet to have "real clarity" on what should be his bowling combination for the day-night third Test against India starting Wednesday and will wait some more before finalising it.

India crushed England by 317 runs on a turner in Chennai to level the four-match series 1-1. All eyes are now on the refurbished Motera pitch which will make its debut with the pink ball Test.

"We're going to take our time with the limited information we have on this ground and pink ball cricket. You know, we are going to make sure, we give ourselves as much (time) as possible heading into the game before we make a decision," Root said on the eve of the match.

The England think tank has a selection headache both in bowling and batting departments.

In bowling they have Jofra Archer fit and available along with veteran pace spearhead James Anderson, who is back in fray after workload management kept him out of the second Test. Stuart Broad is also in contention for a spot.



Rishabh Pant practices during a net session at Motera in Ahmedabad on Tuesday. — BCCI

Spinners, pacers both in game: Virat

Ahmedabad, Feb. 23: A rank turner is being anticipated at Motera but India captain Virat Kohli expects pacers to have as big a role as spinners in the day-night third Test against England, a side riddled with "many weaknesses" according to him.

Both teams have won a game each in the four-match series and ahead of third Test here starting Wednesday, the talk has been incessantly focussed on the nature of the virgin track at the refurbished stadium.

Asked if the ball is unlikely to swing much in the third Test, Kohli said he expects the pacers to be in the game till the ball is "nice and shiny".

"I don't think that is an accurate assessment (that bowl will not swing). The pink ball does tend to



Virat Kohli trains at Motera on Tuesday. — BCCI

swing a lot more than the red ball. We experienced that when we played for the first time in 2019 (against Bangladesh)," Kohli said.

Kohli also rejected the assessment that England would have an edge if the pitch favours pacers.

"...Not really bothered about what the strengths and weaknesses of the English team are. We

have beaten them in their home as well, where the ball does way more and hold them out every time so we're not really bothered with that. It's just about playing well as a team," he said.

"And yeah, there are many, many weaknesses in the opposition side as well, if you are keen to exploit them. If it's a seamer friendly track for

them it's for us as well.

"And we probably have, you know, among other teams, the best bowling attack in the world so we're not really bothered by what the ball might bring differently to the table. We're ready for anything that comes our way," he asserted.

Senior batsman Rohit Sharma has already said that it will be another turning pitch. Kohli said facing the pink ball is more challenging than the red ball irrespective of the nature of the surface. "It is much more challenging to play with pink ball regardless of the pitch you play on. Especially in the evening, if as a batting team, you are starting your innings under lights then that one and a half hour is very challenging." — PTI

ENGLAND SKIPPER WARY OF 'TRICKY' NEMESIS ASHWIN

Ahmedabad, Feb. 23: Ravichandran Ashwin has proved to be England's nemesis in the first two Tests and, well aware of his abilities now, visiting skipper Joe Root on Tuesday described the India off-spinner as a "world-class performer" in all conditions.

Ashwin has already taken 17 wickets in the series so far and is expected to add some more to his kitty in the third Test beginning here on Wednesday.

"Yeah, he (Ashwin) is a world-class performer. I think it's been quite tricky for everyone but as you mentioned, in particular, the left-handers is against him... Because you know how skilful he is, how good his record is against left-handers in world cricket," Root said.

The 34-year-old Ashwin has been Virat Kohli's go-to man in this series. Besides his nine wickets in the first Test and eight in second, Ashwin has also scored a century on a Chepuak track.

"So, he is a fine performer at home and guys just have to keep working hard to try and figure out how they're going to score every run." — PTI

Iyer hits century in Mumbai win

Jaipur, Feb. 23: Mumbai rode on skipper Shreyas Iyer's unbeaten 103 to beat Maharashtra by six wickets in their Elite Group D game of the Vijay Hazare Trophy here on Tuesday.

This was Mumbai's second successive win after they had beaten Delhi in the lung-opener.

Opting to bat first, Maharashtra posted 279/9, with centuries from Yash Nahar (119) and Azim Kazi (104) despite experienced Mumbai pacer Dhawal Kulkarni (5/44) running through their top-order.

But it was Iyer, who anchored the Mumbai chase and saw them home in 47.2 overs.

Chasing 280, Mumbai openers Yashasvi Jaiswal (40) and Prithvi Shaw (34) conjured 67 for the first wicket.

Iyer, who walked in at three, was in his elements and hammered nine boundaries and one six, in his uneaten knock and after Jaiswal perished, he found able partners in Suryakumar Yadav (29), Shivam Dube (47) as they played their roles to perfection. Dube took the game away from Maharashtra, with his hitting, smashing five fours and a six, and

took Mumbai on the cusp of a win.

CHANDIGARH CLIMB TO TOP OF TABLE

Chandigarh continued their giant-killing run in their Elite debut, stunning hosts Bengal by five wickets in a Group E clash at the Eden Gardens.

Fresh from their win over neighbours Haryana, Chandigarh who were playing their second domestic season chased down Bengal's 253/9 with seven balls to spare to climb up to the top of the group table, ahead of Saurashtra on net-run rate.

BIHAR PLAYER TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID-19

The event has seen its first case of Covid-19 with a Bihar player returning positive for the virus, following which all the other cricketers are being tested.

"It is confirmed and the concerned player has been isolated from other players. He is currently in Bangalore as he cannot travel," a senior official of the state's cricket body said.

A Bihar Cricket Association official believed that the game would go on as scheduled. — PTI

BRIEF SCORES

■ Maharashtra 279/9 in 50 overs (Yash Nahar 119, Azim Kazi 104; Dhawal Kulkarni 5/44) lost to Mumbai 280/4 in 47.2 overs (Shreyas Iyer 103 not out, Shivam Dube 47; Satyajeet Bachhav 3/59) by six wickets.
■ Delhi 354/4 in 50 overs (Nitish Rana 137, Dhruv Shorey 132; Sagar Trivedi 2/66) beat Pondicherry 175 in 39.3 overs (S. Suresh Kumar 42; Kulwant Khejroliya 4/32, Pradeep Sangwan 2/27) by 179 runs.
■ Rajasthan 199 in 47.5 overs (Mahipal Lomror 67, Arijit Gupta 45; Rishi Dhawan 6/27) lost to Himachal Pradesh 201/6 in 33.3 overs (Rishi Dhawan 73 not out; A Singh 2/46, Ravi Bishnoi 2/60) by four wickets.
■ Bengal 253/9 in 50 overs (Shabaz Ahmed 59) lost to Chandigarh 257/5 in 48.5 overs (Arslan Khan 88, Shivam Bhambrri 71 not out, Manan Vohra 45) by five wickets.
■ Services 274/7 in 50 overs (Ravi Chauhan 118, Pulkit Narang 48 not out, Divesh Pathania 42 not out) lost to Jammu & Kashmir 276/7 in 48 overs (Shubham Khajuria 84, Abdul Samad 63) by three wickets.
■ Haryana 264 in 50 overs (Chaitanya Bishnoi 84; Chetan Sakariya 3/63) lost to Saurashtra 265/9 in 49.1 overs (Snell Patel 79, Arpit Vasavada 46) by one wicket.
■ Manipur 148/9 in 50 overs (Jayanta Sagatpam 32, Mayank Mishra 2/18) lost to Uttarakhand 152/3 in 23.1 overs (Jay Bista 71, Kamal Singh 41) by seven wickets.
■ Meghalaya 319/7 in 50 overs (Punit Bist 116, R. Sanjay Yadav 73 not out) beat Sikkim 231/9 in 50 overs (Ashish Thapa 79, Robin Bist 59, Dippu Sangma 2/33) by 88 runs.
■ Arunachal Pradesh 222/7 in 50 overs (Rahul Dalal 123 not out) lost to Assam 226/5 in 38.4 overs (Sibsankar Roy 60 not out, Denish Das 59, Sashil Jain 48, Rakesh Kumar 4/58) by five wickets.
■ Nagaland 347/9 in 50 overs (Stuart Binny 80, R. Jonathan 62, Varte Kima 5/66) beat Mizoram 318/6 in 50 overs (Pratik Desai 141, Taruwar Kohli 108, KB Pawan 40, Nagah 2/30) by 29 runs.



Cristiano Ronaldo (centre) of Juventus scores against Crotone in their Italian league match at the Juventus stadium in Turin on Sunday. The hosts won 3-0. — AFP

Ronaldo brace floors Crotone

Turin (Italy), Feb. 23: Cristiano Ronaldo scored twice as Juventus got back to winning ways by beating bottom club Crotone 3-0 in Serie A.

Ronaldo could even have had a hat trick in the first half.

Weston Mckennie sealed the result after the break.

Juventus moved up to third on the table, eight points behind Serie A leaders Inter Milan, having played a match less.

It was Crotone's fifth successive defeat and left them eight points from safety.

Ronaldo hadn't scored for Juventus since the start of the month.

He came close on a couple of occasions before breaking the deadlock in the 38th minute when he headed in an Alex Sandro cross.

Ronaldo doubled his tally in first-half stoppage time with another impressive header, this time from an Aaron Ramsey cross.

SEVILLA MOVE TO 3RD PLACE IN LA LIGA

Sevilla comfortably defeated Osasuna 2-0 to extend their winning streak in the Spanish league to six matches and move into the top three in the standings

for the first time this season.

Defender Diego Carlos and striker Luuk de Jong scored in different halves to help Sevilla move a point in front of fourth-placed Barcelona on Monday. Sevilla trails second-placed Real Madrid by four points and are seven points behind league leaders Atlético Madrid.

PALACE STUN BRIGHTON

Crystal Palace manager Roy Hodgson defended his side's style after snatching a 2-1 derby win at Brighton in the EPL thanks to Christian Benteke's stunning 95th-minute volley.

The Eagles had just two touches in the Brighton box, but scored with both whereas the Seagulls saw 25 shots and nearly 75 per cent possession count for little. "We get so hung up on statistics these days. The game is decided by goals. Goals are a question of how well you take your chances and defend theirs," said Hodgson.

Victory takes Palace 10 points clear of the relegation zone, while Brighton remain just four clear of Fulham. — Agencies