

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI TUESDAY 23 FEBRUARY 2021



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Perception that Bollywood actresses have to be unmarried does not hold true anymore



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RNI No. 57290/94, Regd No: DL-SW-05/4189/15-17

Vol. 28 No. 8 | 16 PAGES | ₹5.00



Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe during the French L1 match between with AS Monaco FC at the Parc des Princes Stadium in Paris on Sunday.

— AFP

China backs India hosting this year's Brics summit

Beijing: China on Monday expressed its support for India in hosting this year's Brics summit and said it will work with New Delhi to strengthen the cooperation among the five-member grouping of emerging economies. India has assumed the Brics (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) chairmanship for 2021 and is set to hold this year's summit. On February 19, external affairs minister S Jaishankar launched India's Brics 2021 website at the Brics secretariat at Sushma Swaraj Bhavan in New Delhi. — *PTI*

Italian envoy killed in attack in Congo

Kinshasa, Congo: The Italian ambassador to Congo, an Italian carabinieri police officer and their Congolese driver were killed on Monday in an attack on a UN convoy in an area that is home to myriad rebel groups, the foreign ministry and local people said. — *AP*

Full report on Page 6

Gangrape accused held after 22 years

Bhubaneswar: In a major breakthrough in the 1999 sensational Anjana Mishra gangrape case that largely contributed to the end of the Congress rule in Odisha, key accused Vivekananda, who was absconding for 22 years, has been arrested. Full report on Page 3



He is promising an underground Metro in every village!

WEATHER

Max: 31°C
Min: 14°C
RH: 44%
Rain: NIL

Forecast: Sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Shuddha Ekadasi till 5.59 pm
Star: Arudra till 12.25 pm
Variyam: 12.48 am to 2.27 am
Durmuhurtam: 9.01 am to 9.47 am; 11.15 pm to 12.04 am
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.17 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.52 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 2.15 PM
MOONSET TODAY 3.49 AM

Puducherry's future unclear as Cong govt falls, CM quits

No vote held, but Speaker says govt defeated; L-G waits for word from Centre

Puducherry, Feb. 22: The Congress government in Puducherry fell on Monday after chief minister V. Narayanasamy resigned ahead of the confidence vote sought by him in the Assembly after his government was reduced to a minority following a spate of resignations of party MLAs and a DMK legislator in the past few days. Mr Narayanasamy met lieutenant-governor Tamilisai Soundararajan and submitted the resignation of his Cabinet, even as the ruling side's strength was reduced to 11, against 14 of the Opposition.

The Opposition, led by NR Congress chief and Leader of the Opposition N. Rangasamy, said it has no plans to form the gov-

Our view that only the elected members can vote in the House was not accepted by the Speaker. So we walked out of the Assembly and met the lieutenant-governor and gave the resignation letter of my Cabinet.

— V. Narayanasamy, Puducherry CM



ernment as of now and that discussions would be held. Ms Soundararajan had earlier summoned the one-day special session on Monday, mandating that its agenda be confined only to the trust vote, after the Opposition petitioned her last week saying the government had been reduced to a minority due to the resignations.

A fresh bout of resignations on Sunday took the tally in the last few days to three, and the cumulative number since last month to six and further reduced to: Congress nine (including Speaker), DMK two, All India NR Congress seven, AIADMK four, BJP three (nominated, but with voting rights) and one Independent who

supported the government.

After mounting an attack on the Narendra Modi-led Central government and former lieutenant-governor Kiran Bedi, with whom he had had frequent run-ins on administrative matters, Mr Narayanasamy led his colleagues out of the Assembly after a debate over the rights of nominated members to vote during the floor test. Subsequently, Speaker V.P. Sivakolundhu announced that the motion for a confidence vote moved by the chief minister in the morning was defeated, even as it was not taken up for either voice vote or a division.

“Our view that only the

■ Turn to Page 4



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi takes out a tractor rally from Thrikkaipatta to Muttill in Wayanad district on Monday. ■ Report on Page 3

— PTI

Toolkit: Disha sent to 1-day police custody

New Delhi, Feb. 22: A Delhi court on Monday sent 21-year-old climate activist Disha Ravi, arrested in connection with allegedly being involved in sharing a "toolkit" on social media related to the farmers' protest, to one-day police custody to be confronted with co-accused in the case.

Chief metropolitan magistrate Pankaj Sharma sent Ms Ravi for custodial interrogation after police said she was required to be confronted with co-accused in the case which has transnational ramifications.

However Ms Ravi, who was produced before the court on expiry of her three-day judicial remand, through her lawyer opposed the plea of the investigators, saying, “Why should I (Ravi)



be in police custody while those I have to be confronted with are on bail?”

Police only got one day custody of Ms Ravi, though it had sought five days of custodial interrogation contending that during her interrogation, she shifted the entire burden on two co-accused — Nikita Jacob and Shantanu Muluk — who cannot be arrested because they are currently on transit bail. They need to be confronted with Ms Ravi.

— PTI

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Dadra and Nagar Haveli MP found dead in hotel

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, FEB. 22

Mohan Sanjibhai Delkar, Lok Sabha MP representing Dadra and Nagar Haveli, was on Monday found dead at a hotel in south Mumbai. It is suspected that he may have committed suicide.

Delkar's body was found at around 2pm on Monday. A suicide note in Gujarati was also found along with the body.

An accidental death report is being registered based on preliminary information, the police said.

“The body of Lok Sabha MP Mohan Delkar was found in a hotel in Marine Drive Police Station area today. A suicide note was found at the spot. ASP, Colaba, is investigating



the matter.” Mumbai Police spokesperson Chaitanya S. said.

According to sources, Delkar had checked into the hotel last night. When his driver, staying in the adjacent room, didn't get any response from him till the afternoon, he informed the hotel staff about it.

Subsequently, the driver entered Delkar's room from the other side and found Delkar hanging.

Delkar won six consecutive elections from the

► It is suspected that the Mohan Sanjibhai Delkar may have committed suicide. He won the 1989, 1991 and 1996 elections as a Congress candidate and the 1998 poll as a BJP candidate.

constituency during 1989-2009, but failed to retain the seat in the Lok Sabha elections in 2009 and 2014. However, he successfully contested elections to the 17th Lok Sabha as an Independent candidate.

He won the 1989, 1991 and 1996 elections as a Congress candidate and the 1998 election as a BJP candidate.

He rejoined the Congress and unsuccessfully contested in 2009 and 2014. He is survived by his wife and two children.

Shah, Vardhan review Covid surge; focus still on 5 states

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, FEB. 22

Union home minister Amit Shah held a meeting on Monday with senior officials of the home and health ministries, along with health minister Harsh Vardhan, to review the Covid-19 situation across India in the wake of a sudden spike in cases in some states. India reported its steepest one-day hike in active Covid-19 cases since end-November on Monday. This rise is due to a high number of daily cases in five states — Maharashtra, Kerala,

Punjab, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh.

Maharashtra continues to report the highest daily new cases at 6,971, followed by Kerala (4,070), while Tamil Nadu reported 452 new cases. In fact, 86.3 per cent of new cases are from these five states. On Monday, 14,199 new cases and 83 deaths were reported nationwide. The active cases have increased by 4,421 in the last 24 hours.

During the meeting, the ongoing vaccination drive and the steps needed to check the further spread of the virus were discussed.

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses an election rally at Bandel in Hooghly district of West Bengal on Monday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

CBI to quiz Abhishek wife today, grills her sis 3 hrs

AGE CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, FEB. 22

A day after being summoned for questioning in the coal smuggling case, Ms Rujira Banerjee Narula, wife of West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee's MP nephew Abhishek Banerjee, gave the CBI a four-hour window on Tuesday to question her at her South Kolkata residence.

Ms Narula said she was in the dark on why

the CBI wanted to question her, but in a letter to CBI additional SP Umesh Kumar, said its officers could visit her residence between 11 am and 3 pm on Tuesday.

On Monday afternoon, Ms Narula's sister Menaka Gambhir faced marathon CBI questioning for three hours at her Anandapur residence for her suspected link to the financial transactions.

■ More on Page 3

lages with a pipeline for smooth water supply. It is more important for Bengal because it has over 1.45 crore rural households. You will be shocked to know about the situation they have pushed Bengal into. Out of 1.45 crores, only two lakh rural households

have tap water supply. So far 3.60 crore such households have been connected with water supply nationwide. After the Central government put pressure on the state government here, the figure of two lakhs grew to nine lakhs under the scheme.

■ Turn to Page 4

RS byelections: BJP wins both seats, 1 was held by Ahmed

Ahmedabad, Feb. 22: BJP nominees Dineshchandra Anavadiya and Rambhai Mokariya were on Monday declared elected unopposed to the Rajya Sabha from Gujarat as the Opposition Congress did not field candidates for the two vacant seats, one of which was held by its veteran leader Ahmed Patel.

The two seats had fallen vacant following the demise of the sitting MPs belonging to the Congress and the BJP.

One of the seats was held by veteran Congressman Ahmed Patel since 1993 till his death on November 25 last year due to complications related to Covid-19.

The other seat fell vacant as BJP's Abhay Bharadwaj, a first time MP elected to the RS in 2019, too, died on December 1 due to the coronavirus infection.

Mr Anavadiya and Mr Mokariya were declared as elected uncontested from the two seats on Monday, which was the last date of withdrawal of forms.

Two dummy candidates of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Rajnikant Patel and Kirit Solanki, withdrew their nominations on Saturday.

With the byelection to the two seats scheduled to be held separately, the Congress, with 65 MLAs in the 182-member Assembly, decided not to field any candidate due to negligible chances of winning against the BJP which has 111 legislators.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

Wanted man held after gunfight

Noida: A man, who was allegedly involved in kidnapping a 13-year-old boy recently, was held in Greater Noida after a gunfight with the police, officials said on Monday. The accused, who was on a motorcycle with an associate, suffered a gunshot injury on his leg. The incident took place late Sunday night in Dankaur area, officials said. "Accused Intezaar and his associate were on a motorcycle when they were intercepted by the Dankaur police for checking. The duo instead sped away and was chased by a police party, leading to a gunfight between them," Greater Noida Additional deputy commissioner of police Vishal Pandey said. "Intezaar got injured in the counter firing by the police while his associate managed to escape in the darkness. Intezaar has been hospitalised," Mr Pandey said. He said the arrested person was wanted by the police for his involvement in the kidnapping of a 13-year-old boy recently. — PTI

AAP alleges BJP distributing liquor

New Delhi: AAP MLA Bandana Kumari on Monday accused the BJP of distributing liquor and other items in Shalimar Bagh ward where the municipal bypoll is due on February 28. The BJP hit back at AAP saying Kumari who is a local MLA from Shalimar Bagh has sensed defeat of her party and is therefore levelling a baseless allegation. "The BJP workers were caught red handed distributing liquor, sarees and money. We made complaint to the police and now also complain to the Election Commission against this black politics by the BJP," Kumari claimed. Delhi BJP general secretary Harsh Malhotra said there has been no case of distribution of liquor and other items by any BJP worker. "AAP MLA Bandana Kumari is frustrated after watching the mood of the people of Shalimar Bagh North ward which is openly favouring BJP and in this frustration she is levelling baseless charges," Mr Malhotra claimed. — PTI

Air 'poor' in Noida, Gurgaon, Faridabad

Noida: The average air quality was recorded in the "very poor" category in Ghaziabad while it was "poor" in Noida, Greater Noida, Faridabad and Gurgaon, according to data issued by a government agency on Monday. Levels of PM2.5 and PM10 also remained high in the air of the five cities neighbouring Delhi, according to the air quality index (AQI) maintained by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). According to the index, an AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good", 51 and 100 "satisfactory", 101 and 200 "moderate", 201 and 300 "poor", 301 and 400 "very poor", and 401 and 500 "severe". The average AQI at 4 pm was 318 in Ghaziabad, 294 in Greater Noida, 290 in Noida, 265 in Faridabad and 296 in Gurgaon, according to CPCB's Sameer app. — PTI

NAVEEN JINDAL GIVES ₹1,000CR TO EXPAND JGU

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 22

Industrialist Naveen Jindal has announced an elaborate investment plan of ₹1,000 crores for the sustained futuristic expansion of the O.P. Jindal Global University, of which he is the founding chancellor, for the next decade. The Sonapat-based JGU was recognised as an "institution of eminence" by the education ministry in 2019. The focus of the investment plan will be on academic, infrastructure development, creation of new world-class student facilities, hostels, schools, faculty offices and teaching facilities. Within 11 years of its founding, JGU has been ranked in the top 651-700 universities in the world and has become India's top-ranked private university. JGU is also India's top-ranking university with a focus solely on the social sciences, arts and humanities as per the influential QS World University Rankings 2021.

Police: She shifted entire burden on other 2 co-accused Toolkit case: Court sends Disha Ravi to 1-day custody

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA NEW DELHI, FEB. 22

A Delhi court on Monday sent 21-year-old climate activist Disha Ravi, arrested in connection with allegedly being involved in sharing a "toolkit" on social media related to the farmers' protest, to one-day police custody (PC) to be confronted with co-accused in the case.

Chief metropolitan magistrate Pankaj Sharma sent Ravi for custodial interrogation after police said she was required to be confronted with co-accused in the case which has transnational ramifications.

However Ms Ravi, who was produced before the court on expiry of her three-day judicial remand, through her lawyer opposed the plea of the investigators, saying "why should I (Ravi) be in police custody while those I have to be confronted with are on bail?"

Police only got one day custody of Ms Ravi, though it had sought five days of custodial interrogation contending that during her interrogation, she shifted entire burden on two co-accused — Nikita Jacob and Shantanu Muluk — who "cannot be arrested



Members of IYC hold placards during a protest against the hike in fuel prices and condemn the arrest of climate activist Disha Ravi in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

because they are currently on transit bail.

"They need to be confronted with Ms Ravi. Nikita was served with a notice to join the probe but she did not join the interrogation.

"It is a case which has transnational ramifications, with involvement of those who has expressed their disaffection for this country," prosecution told the court.

The probe agency told the court that they may arrest Nikita and Shantanu as well in future if there is a requirement.

"There was involvement of all three accused persons. We have to confront all three. We only have seven days more to seek

custodial interrogation," the prosecution told the court referring to the provisions of the law under which the case has been lodged that mandates custodial interrogation only upto 15 days post his/her arrest.

Ms Ravi's counsel opposed the police plea saying that other two accused are on bail and "why should I be in police custody for the purpose of confrontation?" Defence counsel also questioned as to why police did not summon the co-accused persons earlier.

"I (Ravi) was already in their custody for five days. Prosecution is talking in a manner as if they got to know all the infor-

mation about the case today itself. What is new there to seek fresh PC.

"If investigating officer wants to meet Ravi beyond 15 days, what he will do? Two people already on transit bail, why should I be in police custody," the counsel questioned.

He added, "Those two people are not in police custody. Why my police custody required for same purpose is a million dollar question."

"I can be in judicial custody and still be confronted with them. After filing FIR, you were in hurry to arrest me. Did you ask me to join probe and I did not join? Even when I was arrested on February 13, you called them for February 22. Were you taking this court for granted that you will get police custody till then?"

"What was I doing in last five days custody? They did not take me to my hometown for probe. They have a valid requirement to confront, but that may be met while I am in judicial custody. Two accused are already on bail," he said. The defence counsel also informed the court that a sessions court, a superior court than that of a magistrate's, has reserved order on Ravi's bail plea for Tuesday.

R-Day clash: 29-year-old who climbed Red Fort held

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 22

A 29-year-old man who allegedly climbed one of the tombs of the Red Fort during the violence in Delhi on Republic day has been arrested, police said on Monday.

Jaspreet Singh is one of the associates of Maninder Singh, who was arrested last Tuesday for allegedly swinging swords with the intent of "motivating" and "energising" the protesters at the historic monument.

Jaspreet Singh, a resident of Swaroop Nagar in northwest Delhi, was arrested by a Crime Branch team on Saturday.

Thousands of protesters had clashed with the police during the tractor parade called by farmer unions on January 26 demanding repeal of the Centre's contentious farm laws. Many of the protesters reached the Red Fort driving tractors and entered the monument, and some of them even hoisted religious flags on its domes and a flagstaff at the ramparts.

"Jaspreet Singh is the person who was standing behind accused Maninder Singh and also climbed up one of the tombs located on both the sides of rampart at Red Fort," an officer said. "In one of the pictures, he is also seen in offensive gesture holding steel tensile installed at Red Fort."



Underprivileged children watch the special screening of a film at PVR organised by Delhi Police in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

Will do it again if roads are blocked, says Kapil Mishra

'No regrets about speech targeting anti-CAA protesters'

New Delhi, Feb. 22: BJP

leader Kapil Mishra on Monday said he had no regrets about the speech targeting the anti-CAA protesters made by him a day before the Northeast Delhi riots broke out last year, and stressed that if required, he would do it again.

"Whenever roads will be blocked, and people would be prevented from going to work, or children to school, there will always be a Kapil Mishra to stop that," the former Delhi MLA said. "I will do what I did again. I don't have any regrets, except that I couldn't save the lives of Dinesh Khatik, Ankit Sharma (riot victims) and many others," he said at the launch of the book "Delhi Riots 2020: The Untold Story". Referring to the violence during protests against the farm bills on Republic Day, Mr Mishra said the same "pradarshan se danga tak" (from demonstration to riots) model is very much evident."

On February 23, 2020, Mishra in his controversial speech had given an ultimatum threatening to remove those protesting on road against the



Kapil Mishra

Citizenship Amendment Act in Delhi's Jaffrabad.

The speech was blamed by a section as among the triggers for the communal violence that ensued following clashes between supporters and opponents of the CAA. At least 53 people were killed and scores of others injured in the riots. "What other way is there to give an ultimatum in a democracy? I did that in front of a police official. Do people who want to start a riot give ultimatums in front of the police?" Mr Mishra said.

While the police refuted the role of Mishra's speech in inciting the riots, a Delhi Minority Commission report in July last year noted that violence erupted soon after his speech.

Reacting sharply to

Mishra's remarks, CPM leader Brinda Karat alleged that he was a "serial offender" and should have been in jail.

"Kapil Mishra has been granted impunity by the Delhi police directly under the home ministry, who have gone out of their way to protect him "He is a serial offender as far as communally offensive speeches and incitements are concerned and he would have been arrested and in jail if there was any justice," she said. Talking about the book authored by lawyer Monika Arora, and Delhi University teachers Sonali Chitalkar and Prerna Malhotra, Mishra said it was an "ummeed ka diya" (a ray of hope) against the "dangerous propaganda against him" that has been blaming him for the riots.

"It's been a year since Jihadi forces engineered the riots in Delhi, last year. Exactly the same pattern is being seen even now, like what happened on Republic Day. The so-called fringe elements are trying to sabotage the peace in the Capital, aided and funded by anti-India forces, both within and outside the country. — PTI

Man kills minor for refusing marriage proposal, arrested

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 22

A 25-year-old man was arrested in connection with the killing of a minor girl in Rohini's Begumpur area, police said on Monday.

Laik Khan had allegedly killed Neetu due to her refusal to marry him, police had said.

Khan was absconding since Friday when the 17-year-old victim's body was found at her house in Begum Vihar.

Friday also and had a plan for dinner, police said. The parents of the victim work at a car floor mats making factory. They were not present there at the time of the incident. Laik also work in a factory, they said.

Police had said that the victim's brother and cousin went outside to buy some grocery items. When they returned, they saw that Laik was locking the house and rushed out of the area. They thought that Neetu also went with him.

► LAIK KHAN had allegedly killed Neetu due to her refusal to marry him, police had said. Khan was absconding since Friday when the 17-year-old victim's body was found at her house in Begum Vihar.

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35-year-old arrested for killing her husband

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 22

A 35-year-old woman has been arrested for allegedly killing her husband who used to thrash and abuse her in front of their children, police said on Monday.

The incident took place at Fatehpur Beri area.

Sarita Devi strangled her 38-year-old husband Sikandar Sahni to death with a saree and later took him to a hospital where he was declared brought dead on Sunday, they said.

The woman told the police that her husband was an alcoholic despite being a chronic tuberculosis patient. He did not work and used to beat her in front of her children daily, police said.

During enquiry, police found that the man was brought to Safdarjung hospital by his wife and was declared brought dead.

During post-mortem, doctors observed multiple ligature marks on his neck and came to the conclusion that Sahni was murdered, a senior police officer said.

The crime team and officials of Forensic Science Laboratory also visited the spot and collected evidence, he said.

A case of murder was registered and the woman was arrested, said Atul Kumar Thakur, deputy commissioner of police (South).

"During interrogation, she disclosed that her husband was an alcoholic despite being a chronic tuberculosis patient and did not work anywhere. He used to beat and abuse her daily in front of her children. So, she strangled him with a saree," deputy commissioner of police said.

Delhi reports 128 new corona cases, 1 death

New Delhi, Feb. 22: Delhi recorded 128 coronavirus cases and one fatality on Monday, even as the positivity rate stood at 0.30 per cent, authorities said.

With the latest update in figures, authorities said, while the overall toll rose to 10,901, the number of cases went up to 6,38,028.

The new 128 cases came out of the 42,242 tests — including 31,234 RT-PCR tests and 11,008 rapid antigen tests — conducted the previous day, the bulletin said.

The number of active cases Monday stood at 1,041, according to the bulletin.

The number of people under home isolation as on Monday was 471, it said.

On Sunday, 145 cases and two deaths were reg-

► THE NEW 128 cases came out of the 42,242 tests — including 31,234 RT-PCR tests and 11,008 rapid antigen tests — conducted the previous day

istered. No death due to Covid-19 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 from coronavirus infection was registered in the national capital, first time this month, and after a gap of nearly nine months.

No death from Covid-19 was recorded on February 13 as well, the second time in February when the single-day fatality count was nil. — PTI

Covid: Metro, buses in city to run at current limited capacities for at least 2 more weeks

New Delhi, Feb. 22: Public buses and metro trains in the national capital will run at their current limited capacities for at least two more weeks with the Delhi Disaster Management Authority on Monday deciding to maintain status quo on the number of passengers, sources said.

The decision was taken as states like Maharashtra, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Punjab are witnessing a surge in new coronavirus, according to sources. "Delhi Metro trains and public buses will run at previously fixed limited capacities for now. It is vigilant wait and watch for another two weeks," they said.

Last week, the Delhi transport department had



A frontline worker receives the dose of Covaxin vaccine at Daryaganj in New Delhi. — PTI

sent a proposal to the DDMA to allow people to travel standing up in public buses.

On Monday, It-governor Anil Bajjal chaired a meeting of the DDMA,

which was attended by chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, his deputy Manish Sisodia, chief secretary Vijay Dev and other officers. DTC and cluster buses

are currently plying with full seating capacity in the national capital even as standing of passengers during travel is not allowed at present.

In metro trains, commuters can sit on alternate seats, leaving a seat between them vacant. Also, standing riders have to maintain a stipulated distance between them, thus further reducing the carrying capacity of a coach. Delhi on Sunday recorded 145 fresh Covid-19 cases and two new fatalities, as the positivity rate dipped marginally to 0.23 per cent. The new fatalities pushed the death toll from the pandemic to 10,900 in the national capital.

The Covid-19 positivity rate in Delhi on Saturday was 0.24 per cent. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Ayodhya airport to be named after Lord Ram

Lucknow Feb. 22: The under construction airport in Ayodhya will be named Maryada Purushottam Sriram Airport, Ayodhya after Lord Ram and a provision of ₹101 crore has been made for it in the budget presented in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly on Monday. Besides the provision for the Ayodhya airport which will subsequently be made an international airport, the budget also provides for ₹2,000 crore for increasing the number of airstrips at Jewar Airport from 2 to 6.

Cities like Aligarh, Moradabad, Meerut will also be linked through air service soon, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath told reporters after the presentation of the budget by finance minister Suresh Khanna.

Under the Special Area Programme, a budget of ₹300 crore is proposed for special schemes of Purvanchal and a budget of ₹210 crore has been proposed for special schemes of Bundelkhand region.

Stressing on industrial and infrastructure development, a budgetary provision of ₹1,107 crore has been made for the Purvanchal Expressway Project, ₹1,492 crore for Bundelkhand Expressway Project and ₹860 crore for Gorakhpur Link Expressway Project. — *PTI*

Wedding shoot of couple in MP govt copter sparks row

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, FEB. 22

A couple did a 'wedding' photoshoot in a government copter in Raipur triggering a security scare, officials said on Monday.

A video of the couple posing for a photoshoot in the helicopter on Monday went viral, causing flutter in the security establishment in Raipur.

Director of aviation department of Chhattisgarh government Nilam Namdev has constituted a 3-member committee headed by chief pilot Pankaj Jaiswal to probe the incident.

The committee has been asked to submit its report within a week.

"A 3-member committee has been constituted to probe the incident. Information available till now suggests that a driver in the state aviation department had opened the state hangar for the couple to do the photoshoot. He has been placed under suspension. Accountability will be fixed on the officers found responsible for the security lapse leading to the incident after the probe", Namdev said.

One Sanket Sai and his wife, the newly married couple, had done photoshoots in wedding attire in the helicopter on Sunday. The couple posed for the photoshoot inside and outside the helicopter.

Sanket is sarpanch of Dhandi Bahar village in Jashpur district in Chhattisgarh and is said to be a relative of the driver in the state aviation department Yogeswar Sai who allegedly led the couple to the hangar.

Eye on Bengal polls, Centre announces 'Satyajit Ray Award'

Kolkata, Feb. 22: Information and broadcasting minister Prakash Javadekar on Monday announced a national level film award after legendary filmmaker Satyajit Ray.

Mr Javadekar made this announcement at a programme organised by the National Film Development Corporation in Kolkata, according to an actor who was present at the event.

At the programme in which the media was not allowed, the Union minister interacted with leading actors and directors of West Bengal where the Assembly election is due in April-May. No detail is available on the "Satyajit Ray Award".

BJP leader Roopa Ganguly, who was present at the function, said that it is great that an award is being instituted after Ray. "It has been under planning stage for quite some time," she told a news channel.

Director Arindam Sil said that discussions were held with the Union minister on how to develop the Bengali film industry. Actors Paoli Dam, Abir Chattopadhyay, Rituparna Sengupta, director Gautam Ghosh, classical singer Rashid Khan, singer-turned-Union minister Babul Supriyo and others were present at the programme. — *PTI*

Bomb diffused



Bomb disposal squad prepares to defuse an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) in Srinagar on Monday, which was detected at a bridge, near the Srinagar-Jammu National Highway near Pantha Chowk. Central Reserve Police Force personnel, patrolling the highway, found a tin can by the busy roadside at Nowgam, a police official said.

— *PTI*

Mamata kin gives CBI 4 hours to grill her at residence today

Narula claims to be in dark about purpose of summons, her link to the probe

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, FEB. 22

A day after getting summons to face grilling in the coal smuggling case, wife of West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee's MP nephew Abhishek Banerjee Rujira Banerjee Narula gave the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) a window of four hours on Tuesday to question her at her South Kolkata residence.

Narula, suspected by the CBI for her role in overseas financial transactions relating to the illegal trade, however, claimed herself to be in dark about the purpose of the summons to her and her link to the probe while replying to the CBI on a day her sister Menaka Gambhir faced its marathon questioning for her suspected link to the financial transactions.

On Monday morning Narula informed CBI additional superintendent of police (anti corruption

ED issues summons to TMC minister's daughter

AGE CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, FEB. 22

After the Central Bureau of Investigation's heat on West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's family in the coal smuggling case, another Trinamul Congress heavyweight's kin has come under the scanner of a different central agency and also got its summons to face questioning over a suspected link to overseas financial transactions.

The top leader is state urban development and

municipal affairs minister and outgoing Kolkata Mayor Firhad Hakim who is also a trusted lieutenant of the Trinamul Congress supremo. His daughter Priyadarshini Hakim has reportedly been called by the Enforcement Directorate to face grilling this week at its office in CGO Complex in Salt Lake on the overseas financial transactions.

ED sources claimed that a huge amount of money was sent abroad to a bank account during multiple foreign tours by Priya-

darshini's husband Yasir Haider in the last couple of years.

The Union finance ministry's agency has also come across a link of a foreign actress' name with Yasir's overseas visits, sources added.

Priyadarshini works at corporate communication department of the CESC. She was not available for comments. It is also not clear whether she would face the ED or not. Hakim, however, claimed, "I have neither heard nor do know anything about it."

and 3 pm tomorrow, i.e. 23 February 2021. You are requested to kindly inform me your schedule."

In the afternoon a drama, however, unfolded when Kumar and his team went to grill Gambhir at her flat in an upscale housing complex at Anandapur off EM Bypass in the city but were denied entry by the security guards keeping the giant gate closed.

The CBI officers were seen waiting in their cars outside for almost an hour before they were allowed to go inside only by walking after parking their cars outside the residential complex.

Later, the CBI team questioned Gambhir for three hours and recorded her statement on ₹36 lakhs which used to be deposited by Anup Majhi alias Lala, the absconding kingpin of the coal smuggling case, monthly to the Kasikorn Bank account at Bangkok in Thailand and another bank in London.

questioning or the subject matter of the investigation, you may visit my residence, as per your convenience between 11 am

Gangrape accused held after 22yrs

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 22

In a breakthrough in the 1999 Anjana Mishra gangrape case that largely contributed to the end of the Congress rule in Odisha, the state police with the help of its Maharashtra counterparts has apprehended prime accused Vivekananda alias Biban Biswal, who was absconding for 22 years.

The accused was held on Sunday from Lonavala where he was working as a plumber, the Odisha police said on Monday.

Briefing media persons here, Bhubaneswar-Cuttack Twin City Commissioner of Police

Dr Sudhanshu Sarangi on Monday said the accused had changed his name to Jalandar Swain and was staying in Aamby Valley in Lonavala near Mumbai.

"Biban had mentioned Naranpur (Cuttack) in his permanent address. When we initiated an inquiry, we found out that no such person belongs to Naranpur. He had a permanent job, Aadhaar card and bank account there. He was in contact with his family members and had asked his family to get a death certificate in his name to avoid police detention in future," the CP informed.

Dr Sarangi said that a special mission under the title of 'Operation Silent Viper' was launched three

months ago with a team of three police personnel, including Cuttack deputy commissioner of police (DCP) Prateek Singh. On February 19, a special team led by Badambadi police station inspector Rashmi Ranjan Mohapatra left for Mumbai to arrest the accused.

"Odisha police with the help of Maharashtra counterparts launched operation 'Aamby Valley.' The cops got to know that a person named Swain works in Aamby Valley as a mechanic and stays in a staff quarters two and a half km away. Seeing the police, the accused tried to escape. However, the cops managed to arrest him

and brought him here," Dr Sarangi said.

After the witnesses recognised the accused Biban Biswal, he was produced before the Special CBI Court here which sent him to judicial custody.

"The accused has been handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation which investigated the case. The next course of action will be taken by the investigating agency," the senior cop added.

On the intervening night of January 9-10, 1999 Anjana was gang-raped by three persons near Baranga while she was going to Cuttack from Bhubaneswar along with a journalist-friend in a car.

4G services may be suspended in J&K in Mar-Apr

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 22

Security agencies are once again likely to recommend suspension of 4G services in J&K during March-April in view of specific Intelligence inputs that Pakistan-based terror outfits were planning "major infiltration and terror attacks" in the Valley and along the Indo-Pak border areas.

The Centre had decided to restore 4G services in J&K last month after a gap of nearly a year. These 4G services were restricted by the Centre, on recommendation of security agencies, after Article 370 was revoked in J&K in August 2019. Anticipating that the decision to scrap Article 370 could trigger large-scale unrest in the Valley it was decided to restrict usage of 4G services.

So though these services have now been restored security and Intelligence agencies are closely monitoring the situation in the Valley. Intelligence agencies said that though the situation as of now was under control but could deteriorate during the coming season.

Intelligence agencies have received specific inputs that a large number of militants, close to 500, were waiting at launch

● **THE CENTRE** had decided to restore 4G services in J&K last month after a gap of nearly a year.

pads along the Indo-Pak to infiltrate into India with onset of summer. Cell phone serves, particular messaging plays a crucial role in terror activities hence security forces are skeptical that 4G services may once again have to be suspended in case violence in the Valley escalates in the coming days.

"There is concrete information with us that major infiltration and terror attacks are being planned during March-April. Cell phones play a major role in terror operations so if security situation deteriorates in the coming days then we will have suspend these 4G services again," a senior Intelligence official said.

Kashmir Valley witnessed a relatively peaceful winter this year with a sharp drop in number of terror incidents. But things, security official feel, could change with the onset of summers for which adequate preventive measures like strengthening anti-infiltration grid along the border areas and increasing deployment with the Valley were being done.

Rahul: Centre will not roll back farm laws unless forced

GILVESTER ASSARY THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
FEB. 22

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday called for intensifying the farmers' agitation saying that the Narendra Modi led-BJP government at the Centre was not going to roll back the three farm laws unless it is forced.

The Congress leader who was addressing a public meeting held as part of Tractor Rally held in his constituency Wayanad, said there was a reason why Modi was not withdrawing the three laws. "The reason is clear. These three laws are designed to destroy the agricultural system in India and give the entire business to two or three of Narendra Modi's friends," he said.

Gandhi said the world is watching the farmers struggle very closely. Even international pop stars have commented on the farmers' stir. But the government in Delhi is

unable to feel the pain of the farmers.

"Agriculture is the only business that belongs to Bharat Mata and the government wants to snatch this from the farmers," he said.

Earlier, Rahul Gandhi led a tractor rally from Thrikaiipetta to Muttill in Wayanad to protest against the farm laws.

At a separate meeting of Kudumbasree women self help groups, Rahul Gandhi took a dig at Prime Minister for ridiculing MGNREGA.

When he took office in 2014 he ridiculed MGNREGA. But later he was forced to accept that the rural job guarantee scheme held the poor in good stead during Covid pandemic.

Gandhi who was addressing the meeting of the self help groups Poothadi grama panchayat, said the self help groups and MGNREGA were brought by the UPA government to empower the people of the country.



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi with a 93-year-old woman en route to Meppadi in Kerala. — *PTI*

Pregnant Maha woman subjected to rituals dies

Pune: A man has been booked along with four others, including his parents, after his 23-year-old pregnant wife died as they refused to take her to a hospital and preferred to carry out exorcism rituals, police in Pune said on Monday. The incident took place in Shilim in Lonavala on February 10. — *PTI*

<p>POSTGRADUATE INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL EDUCATION & RESEARCH, CHANDIGARH</p> <p>CORRIGENDUM</p> <p>Ref: Open E-Tender Notice No. PI(E/P) 20-21/10</p> <p>Following change is made:-</p> <p>1. The tender item is at Sr. No. 06 (Paediatric Rigid Bronchoscopy Set) the bid submission dates and bid opening dates have been amended from to Bid Submission date 25.02.2021 and Bid Opening date 26.02.2021.</p> <p>All other details will remain the same.</p> <p>PROFESSOR IN-CHARGE (EP)</p>
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SHORT TAKES

MANTRI, 35 STAFF
COVID +VE AHEAD
OF MAHA BUDGETBHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, FEB. 22

With Maharashtra seeing a growing number of coronavirus cases, as many as 35 employees of Mantralaya, the state secretariat, were found Covid positive on Monday. The incident has raised a question mark over the State Legislature's budget session beginning from March 1.

According to state officials, 23 and 12 employees of the revenue and education department respectively have tested positive for coronavirus. Of them, one has been shifted to the ICU for further treatment.

Officials said it was the first time so many coronavirus positive cases have been found at Mantralaya. The affected people started facing health problems since Friday. Following the tests, the reports have started coming, while some of them are yet to come, they said.

The incident has raised a question mark over the budget session of the State Legislature starting from March 1. As coronavirus cases are rising in the state, there are talks that the session will be curtailed by the State Government.

However, BJP's Pravin Darekar, the leader of opposition in the Vidhan Parishad, has alleged that the MVA Government has been trying to escape from the session with the fear of getting exposed on important issues in the state.

Meanwhile, Food and Civil Supplies Minister Chhagan Bhujbal said he has tested positive for coronavirus. He is the seventh minister to be infected by the novel coronavirus this month.

In a post on Twitter, Bhujbal said his health is fine. "I have tested positive for Covid. All those who came in my contact over the past two-three days should get themselves tested," he tweeted.

MASKS MADE
COMPULSORY IN
BHOPAL, INDOREAGE CORRESPONDENT
BHOPAL, FEB. 22

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Monday ordered coronavirus tests for people entering into MP from Maharashtra in the wake of sudden surge in Covid-19 cases in the neighbouring state.

Mr Chouhan who held a meeting to review situation in the state directed the collectors in the districts bordering Maharashtra to strictly implement guidelines issued for the pandemic and conduct thermal screening and RT-PCR tests on the people coming from the neighbouring state.

He asked them to be vigilant while granting permission to organise big fairs and religious festivals in the areas bordering Maharashtra.

Mr Chouhan also ordered the collectors in all the 52 districts to constitute crisis management committees to deal with the situation.

Wearing masks in Bhopal and Indore has been made mandatory in the wake of sudden surge in cases of coronavirus in these two cities in the past couple of days.

Indore and Bhopal have reported 104 positive cases and 76 positive cases respectively in the last 24 hours.

Total 294 positive cases have been reported in the state in the last 24 hours. However, no death was reported.



A train approaches Srinagar Railway Station, after services resumed since its closure from March 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic, in Srinagar on Monday. — PTI

India reserves ₹70,000 crore for
local defence procurements

Plans to spend \$130bn on military modernisation in next 5 yrs

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, FEB. 22

Defence minister Rajnath Singh said on Monday that around ₹70,000 crore of the capital allocation in the defence budget would be reserved for domestic procurements to push "self-reliance" in the defence sector.

Mr Singh said that the defence ministry is also working on bringing down the delays in time-lines of capital acquisition.

"We will make efforts to complete the defence acquisition within two years, instead of the existing 3-4 years being taken on the average," said the defence minister at a 'Webinar on Budget Announcements 2021-22: Galvanising Efforts for Atmanirbhar Bharat'.

Mr Singh said that one of the important steps has been the bifurcation of capital procurement budget into domestic and foreign capital procurement routes, to ensure procurement from domestic industries.

"My Ministry has planned to invest, about 63 per cent of the outlay for 2021-22 on domestic procurement that's about ₹70,221 crore for domestic defence procurement during 2021-22," he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his address said that the approach of the government will be not to import defence items that can be designed and manufactured in India either by defence PSUs or a private company. He said that today India is the world's largest defence importer and it is not something to be proud of.

The defence minister said that India plans to spend \$130 billion on military modernisation in the next 5 years.



External affairs minister S. Jaishankar watches as a medic administers made-in-India vaccine to a Mauritius resident in Port Louis. — PTI

India extends \$100m credit line
for defence assets to MauritiusAGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, FEB. 22

India has granted a whopping \$100 million defence line of credit to Mauritius to facilitate procurement of defence assets during the ongoing two-day visit of external affairs minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar to the African island nation that began on Monday.

The two countries also signed a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Partnership Agreement (CECPA) that will "provide preferential access to Mauritius for the bulk of the trade and also for many aspirational items for the future into the Indian market".

Besides CECPA the two countries signed six other pacts, including two for leasing a Dornier

aircraft and a Dhruv advanced light helicopter for monitoring the exclusive economic zone of Mauritius.

The agreements were announced following visiting external affairs minister S. Jaishankar's meetings with Prime Minister Pravin Jugnauth and foreign minister Alan Ganoo.

India also handed over another one lakh doses of India-manufactured Covid vaccine, taking the overall dosages handed over to Mauritius to two lakh. An initial one lakh doses were handed over recently to the small Indian Ocean country.

Mr Jaishankar on Monday said, "A special \$100 million defence line of credit has also been signed today which will enable the procurement of defence assets from India as per the needs of

your government. These initiatives underline once again that the security of Mauritius is the security of India; in the prosperity of Mauritius is our prosperity."

He further said, "India is privileged to have entered into a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) with Mauritius. This Agreement is India's first such Agreement with an African country as noted by the Prime Minister. It will provide a timely boost for the revival of our post-covid economies and also enable Indian investors to use Mauritius as a launch-pad for business expansion into continental Africa helping the prospect of Mauritius emerging as a 'hub of Africa'."

There was no word on the future course of action from the L-G who will obviously await word from the Central government on the next step in the Union territory. — PTI

Shringla: India
committed to
nuke doctrine
of no-first useAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 22

India remains committed to its nuclear doctrine of "maintaining credible minimum deterrence with the posture of no-first use and non-use against non-nuclear weapon states", foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla said Monday while addressing the "High-Level Segment of the Conference on Disarmament".

The foreign secretary also said that "Prime Minister Narendra Modi by delivering on his promise at the UN General Assembly to make Indian manufactured vaccines affordable and accessible to all of humanity, has once again shown that India is a force for global good".

The FS said, "India, as a responsible nuclear weapon State, is committed as per its nuclear doctrine, to maintain credible minimum deterrence with the posture of no-first use and non-use against non-nuclear weapon States. ... India is committed to the goal of universal, non-discriminatory and verifiable nuclear disarmament. Our call for complete elimination of nuclear weapons through a step-by-step process... India has supported the immediate commencement of negotiations in the CD on a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty."

"PM Modi, by delivering on his promise at the UNGA to make Indian manufactured vaccines accessible to all of humanity, has once again shown that India is a force for global good," he added.

PM slams previous
govts for 'sautela'
treatment to AssamMANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, FEB. 22

Prime Minister Narendra Modi here on Monday accused previous governments of neglecting the state by giving step-motherly treatment towards the region which has great potential to become the growth engine of the country.

Taking a jibe at opposition Congress which ruled the state for the longest period Modi said, "Those who ruled for decades since Independence believed Delhi was too far from Dispur but Delhi is not far now, it stands at your doorstep."

Asserting that he will visit Assam and other poll-bound states as many times as possible before the Assembly election dates are announced, Modi while addressing a public meeting at Silapathar in Assam's Dhemaji district said that the Centre and the Assam government are working for balanced development of the state and the North-East.

Reiterating his commitment for the development of the state, Modi said, "I will visit Assam, other poll-bound states as many times as possible before elections are announced, likely in the first week of March. If we assume March 7 as the day of election dates announcement, then I will try to come to you whenever I get the time."

He said, "Centre and the Assam government are working collaboratively to develop state infrastructure. Despite the state having great potential, previous governments gave it 'sautela' treatment by overlooking development in various sectors."

He also highlighted the steps taken by the Sarbananda Sonowal-led state government, and the Centre over the past few years, saying that they were working together for the balanced growth of the region.

Pointing out that his government is working on the policy of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikash and Sabka Biswas', he said that they are taking the state towards

● WHILE INAUGURATING the expansion project of Bongaigaon refinery, the Prime Minister said that with the help of the Ujjwala Scheme, liquefied petroleum gas, or LPG, coverage in Assam stood at nearly 100 per cent.

self-sufficiency. "Assam's tea, tourism, handloom and handicraft will strengthen the state's self-reliance. Earlier I had said that Assam will become the growth engine of North East, now we have seen the reality," he said.

The Prime Minister who inaugurated a number of projects worth over ₹3,300 crore said, "Today, the whole world is recognising India's engineers. The youths of Assam have amazing potential. The state government is working hard to increase this capacity. Due to the efforts of the Assam government, today there are more than 20 engineering colleges here."

"It is necessary for India to continuously become self-sufficient, to increase its strength and also its capabilities. Over the years, we have greatly increased the oil storage capacity for refining and emergency in India itself. Refining capacity has also been increased at Bongaigaon Refinery," Modi said.

"If the policy is right, if the intention is clear then the destiny also changes," said Modi, adding, "We are planning to implement a new education policy in Assam."

While inaugurating the expansion project of Bongaigaon refinery he said that with the help of the Ujjwala Scheme, liquefied petroleum gas, or LPG, coverage in Assam stood at nearly 100 per cent. "Till 2014, out of every 100 families, only 55 families had LPG gas connections," he said.

"In Assam, this number stood at 40 even after a refinery was present in the state. With the help of Ujjwala Yojana, LPG coverage in Assam stands at nearly 100 per cent today," he added.

BJP, RLD supporters clash
in UP's Muzaffarnagar

Meerut (UP), Feb. 22: A clash broke out between supporters of BJP and the Rashtriya Lok Dal in Muzaffarnagar's Soram village on Monday when Union minister Sanjeev Balyan turned up there for a programme. Local police station incharge Sanjeev Kumar told PTI that three people were injured in the clash.

A war of words also broke out between BJP leader and Union minister Sanjeev Balyan and RLD vice-president Jayant Chaudhary over the clash. The clash took place when Union minister Balyan was in Soram to pay homage to a deceased local but supporters of his party and the RLD had an argument over the ongoing farmers' protest against new central farm laws.

"Clash between BJP politicians and farmers in Soram village, several injured. If

there's no talk in favour of farmers, at least have a good attitude towards them. Respect the farmers! Now farmers will have to tolerate hooliganism of government's representatives who are telling pros of the new laws," Chaudhary tweeted.

Responding to the charges, Balyan said he was in the village to pay homage to a deceased local. "Some five to six Lok Dal politicians started misbehaving and hurling abuses. Some locals intervened and sent these people away," he tweeted in Hindi.

"The way Lok Dal party is trying to disrupt harmony by hiding behind farmers is condemnable," he added.

Soram in Muzaffarnagar is the epicentre of the influential Balyan Khap, which is headed by Bharatiya Kisan Union president Naresh Tikait. — PTI

Varavara Rao
given 6 mths bail

■ Continued from Page 1
conditions as would be necessary for ensuring that the undertrial on his own or those allegedly associated with him do not take undue advantage of the situation, which would ultimately adversely affect the trial."

Accordingly, the court has directed Mr Rao to reside in the jurisdiction of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) court in Mumbai for six months.

While granting bail the court also took into consideration details provided in an affidavit which stated that the Talaja Central Prison hospital did not have any facility to deal with Mr Rao's health issues regularly. There were no doctors at the Talaja Central Prison hospital except three Ayurvedic practitioners. It

was specifically stated that mandatory requirements under the Maharashtra Prison Hospital (Amendment) Rules 2015, framed under the Prisons Act, 1894, were not followed in the Talaja Central Prison hospital.

Furthermore, there were no staff nurses, no pharmacists, no compounders, no nursing assistance, no lab technicians and no medical specialists at all to attend to the inmates at the Talaja Central Prison hospital.

The NIA had contended that Mr Rao's request for bail on humanitarian ground should not be considered as his acts were against human and state interest. But the bench dismissed this contention and considered his bail plea on humanitarian grounds.

Shah, Vardhan review
coronavirus surge

■ Continued from Page 1

The possible assistance to be given to the affected states also came up at the meeting, senior officials said.

Haryana has announced the reopening of schools for Classes 3-5 from Wednesday while students in Classes 6-8 will start going to school from March 1. Uttar Pradesh too announced schools will reopen from March 1, but parents are still uncomfortable with letting children attend physical classes.

Around 1,100 people travelled between Banihal and Baramulla railway stations as train services resumed in Kashmir after being suspended for around 11 months due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Two trains chugged on the rail tracks in Kashmir as the railway authorities resumed the services partially. The Indian Railways is increasing the number of train services in a graded manner. Already, over 65 per

cent trains are running. Over 250-plus trains were added in January and more will be added gradually, a railway ministry spokesman said.

In Delhi, public buses and Metro trains will run at their current limited capacities for at least two more weeks. The Delhi Disaster Management Authority on Monday decided to maintain the status quo on the number of passengers, sources said. Last week, the Delhi transport department sent a proposal to the DDMA to allow people to travel standing in buses.

DTC and cluster buses are now plying with full seating capacity, but at present passengers are not allowed to travel standing. In Metro trains, commuters can sit on alternate seats, leaving a seat in between vacant. Also, standing riders must maintain a stipulated distance between them, thus further reducing the carrying capacity of such coaches.

Puducherry
future unclear

■ Continued from Page 1
elected members can vote in the House was not accepted by the Speaker. So we walked out of the Assembly and met the lieutenant-governor and gave the resignation letter of my Cabinet," Mr Narayanasamy told reporters later in the day.

Mr Narayanasamy said he was accompanied by his ministers, Congress and DMK MLAs, besides the Independent legislator who earlier backed the government. It was up to the lieutenant-governor to decide on their resignations, he added.

There was no word on the future course of action from the L-G who will obviously await word from the Central government on the next step in the Union territory. — PTI

Modi slams Didi

■ Continued from Page 1

It is not known how many more years will pass in view of the pace at which the state government is working."

Complaining of corruption by the ruling TMC in the project, Mr Modi claimed: "Shouldn't the people of Bengal, the poorest of the poor, get to drink pure water? The Central government in Delhi gave more than ₹1,700 crores to the TMC for water supply to all the households. Out of the amount, the state government spent only ₹609 crores, hushing up the rest ₹1,100 crores."

"It shows," the PM observed, with the TMC's latest campaign — Bangla Nijer Meyekei Chay (Bengal Wants Its Own Daughter), about Ms Banerjee as the CM again — on his mind, "the TMC government have no care for the people, especially the sisters and daughters of Bengal. Aren't those who feels thirsty for water the daughters of Bengal? Shouldn't the daughters of Bengal get water? Should those meting out injustice to the daughters of



A BJP activist cheers for Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a public meeting at Chuchura Dunlop Ground in Hooghly district on Monday. — PTI

Bengal be pardoned?"

Mr Modi later launched a slew of railway projects at another event in Chinsurah, where chief minister Mamata Banerjee was absent, though she was invited. This was the second time in a row when the Trinamul Congress supremo, despite being invited, skipped Mr Modi's event.

THE ASIAN AGE

23 FEBRUARY 2021

Withdraw restrictions on academic webinars

In the pre-Covid-19 era, governments used the visa as a tool to prevent individuals from certain countries from taking part in educational, cultural or sporting engagements. India cut a sorry figure when it showed the world that it was ready to demonise an entire nation for political reasons. At other times, it was particular individuals who were targeted for the views they held, regardless of their country.

But what we have just seen is a whole new ballgame. A January 15 order by the education ministry that recently came to light asked all government entities, including publicly funded educational institutions and universities, to “seek approval” of the “administrative secretary” of the concerned department/ministry for organising any “online/virtual international conferences/seminar/training etc”.

On the other hand, those meant to confer approval were required to ensure that the subject matter of an event did not relate to the “security of the State, border, the Northeast states, UT (Union territory) of J&K, or any other issues which are clearly/purely related to India’s internal matters”.

Has the government gone totally insane? Or is this just a way of imposing thought control through the backdoor because we are not — last heard — a country with a totalitarian constitution in which the single ruling party or dictatorial agency (the military, for instance) must decide and control everything, including who hears what and who says what?

In the Covid era, webinars became the lifeblood of intellectual and scientific interactions and exchange of ideas among peers internationally, and it is this which is being sought to be curbed, forcing Indian scholars and students in all fields to be shut in without being able to take recourse to the latest findings and thinking in the various domains around the world. In short, the very idea of discussion is being pushed into a room and the door banged shut in order to please Big Brother.

It is no surprise that the scientific community is not pleased. In a letter to education minister Ramesh Pokhriyal (and others), the president of the Indian Academy of Sciences, Partha Majumder, had called the order “too constraining” for the advancement of science in the country. He has also raised the valid point that frequently, even for domestic webinars, foreign scholars of repute, including Nobel laureates, are invited as interlocutors and discussants as exchanges with them are of extraordinary benefit to our own scholars and students. Are such forums to be classified as foreign?

Besides, even if we shut the doors on international experts, will Indians, when they are discussing crucial issues of science and other fields of scholarship, be wholly free to talk about issues for which the sanction-giving authority must specially look out? The answer seems fairly clear. Indeed, it is likely that it won’t be before long that private institutions of knowledge too will be brought under the mischief of the order.

The instruction must be withdrawn lock, stock and barrel. Seeing that the heads of scientific institutions representing over 1,500 top scientists of the country reacted publicly, principal scientific adviser K. Vijayaraghavan and secretary (technology) Ashutosh Sharma have hinted at a modification of the order. That isn’t enough, the whole thing must be scrapped. It is odd that that the PSA, a man of science, is not repelled by the tone and the meaning of the entire directive.

Cyborgs of tennis

Novak Djokovic, one of the three knights of modern tennis, turned on his best game on the hard court at the Rod Laver arena he can call his own backyard for having won nine times and never having been beaten in an Australian Open final. His opponent Daniil Medvedev was so much in awe of the champion that he calls him a “cyborg of tennis” alongside Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, who between them have won 58 Grand Slams and 15 of the last 16. And is there a more accurate yardstick than Grand Slam titles to measure who among the three is going to be judged as the greatest tennis player of the professional era?

The Serbian’s spotless returns of serve on a cool Melbourne night could be rated as his greatest weapon in the dismantling of a young challenger even as he played every ground stroke as if he were indeed armed with superhuman qualities. If tennis is all about eliminating errors, then Djokovic is just that champion. Not a crowd favourite because of the stand he has taken on various issues and because he called for leniency from the hard quarantine imposed on all visiting players before the Australian Open, Djokovic also had to battle many who were not chanting “Ole, ole, ole” in his support.

Naomi Osaka is the emerging great of the women’s game who won her fourth Grand Slam in a manner reminiscent of the dominating tennis of Serena Williams, who she beat in the semis before demolishing Jennifer Brady in the final. The youngster may have victories that favour the hard courts of the Australian and US Opens but, on the evidence of her Melbourne showing, she may need only an attitudinal change to win on grass and clay. Having once said that to become a tennis legend was her life goal, the 23-year-old is well on her way now with a polished game and a record of Grand Slams to lend greater weight to the voice to speak up on sensitive social subjects that she has never been afraid of.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Editor in Chief

Printer & Publisher: K. SUDHAKAR

THE ASIAN AGE office is located at:

New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 23211124.

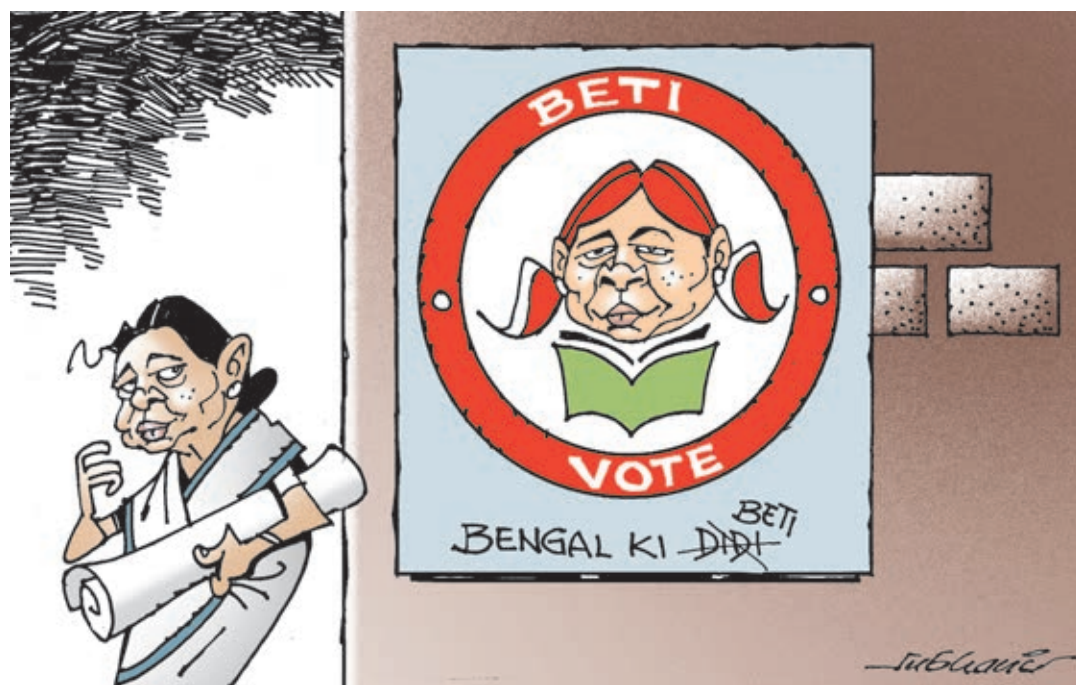
Published and Printed on behalf of and for

Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301.

London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.

RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Subhani



Hashtag power: Twitter, govt in fight for survival



Shashidhar Nanjundaiah

An Editors Guild of India webinar on February 12 on reporting from the Naxalite badlands featured song videos, pornography and abusive language. Now, why would an organised group of “unknown persons” like to cyber-bomb a seminar? Perhaps the theme was inconvenient? As the guild pointed out later, the seminar would talk about the excesses of the government and the struggles of the tribals — or Adivasis — at the hands of the left-wing extremists. Open webinars are vulnerable to mischief anyway, and this writer has himself faced tough, disruptive questions during them. But such is the nature of free speech. Where does free speech end? Would we consider the disruption of the guild’s webinar also free speech, or would we find it unreasonable enough to be restricted? Should the guild be held responsible for those who misused the platform?

Gatherings, virtual or physical, promote mobilisation of thought, and that can be problematic. That is why the recent spat between the Centre and Twitter has rich meanings for a researcher. The Twitter-government conflict is a fight for survival. In Twitter’s constitutional framework, economic survival is founded on a business model of big numbers and a systematic process of ensuring openness and diversity of voices. Let us remember, to be fair, that Twitter’s understanding of freedom of speech is rather American. The courts there allow restrictions posed only from a clear and explicit call to violence or breach of national security.

A landmark judgment in the 2014 Elonis vs US case stated that an explicit

threat includes one where “reasonable people hearing it will perceive it to be a threat”. No amendments were made, however, in what free speech meant on the social media. Of course, national security is a reasonable restriction in American law too. But the courts relentlessly uphold the free speech rights of an individual. Most courts also rule in favour of protecting the voices of minority groups, unless there is an explicit threat, but Twitter usually watch groups with historical problems more carefully.

Twitter’s country-specific censorship has disabled accounts that were clearly neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic. The site does not usually block accounts that are critical of regimes, whether or not a country is authoritarian. Governments then tend to take action against individuals who may use disagreeable or inconvenient language against a regime about its majority religion. Instances are replete from Turkey, Bahrain, Thailand, and several other countries — not exactly stellar examples of individual freedom-granters.

The social media has two broad roles — the organisational and the dialogic, and it is the former that is spooking nervous governments. By threatening Twitter officials with jail and publicly contemplating the application of media laws to the social media, the government is putting on public display how spooked, rather than concerned, it is. For the Indian government, in particular, irrespective of party, there are several historical precedents — most glaringly so over the last six years. To cry conspiracy on groups of like-minded people who use a convenient technological tool — the hashtag — to

galvanise support and make claims is extremely thin-skinned.

People and political parties — many on Twitter, such is the delicious irony of the social media — have raised doubts about whether the Delhi police wittingly or unwittingly facilitated the Republic Day drama. Should we therefore assume that our government liberally allowed the virtual mobilisation to brew on Twitter, and then failed to protect a public monument where the real action was?

Certainly, history has shown us that mobilisation topples governments even through rhetorical intent. Organisational power can often translate into transactional power — and from Indira Gandhi to Narendra Modi, it poses a human challenge to professed development goals. The social media is just the latest galvanising force that transcends geography.

But can the social media enable a coup in India? But is it possible to argue that it can? Similarly, can a group of people hoist a private flag atop a public building as the police watch? But can the Centre argue that the breach was a security problem? That’s what matters. And the public display of anger is a warning to the rest of us not to rub the government the wrong way. Consider the potent words of BJP leader Anil Vij in Disha Ravi’s context: “Those who even think in anti-national terms must be eradicated”.

Let’s flip a question: Would the flag be hoisted atop Red Fort on Republic Day if the social media had not existed? This sounds like a rhetorical question. Like during the Arab Spring, “hashtag mobilisation” can indeed take on unimaginable, real proportions. But which political leader has not used it to campaign and

The social media has two broad roles — the organisational and the dialogic, and it is the former that is spooking nervous governments.

discredit, proclaim and decry, often using clever but false equivalence?

But false narratives cannot be confused with fake news. It should worry us that instead of seeking to protect its citizens’ privacy (it took the Supreme Court to state recently that privacy is paramount), or protect conventional media businesses like Australia, Spain and several other countries are now doing, the Indian government and its agencies are seeking to use the social media to identify inconvenient people to fit into its narratives that can fuel pseudo-nationalistic frenzy. Disha Ravi’s arrest is only the latest example. As a former SC judge noted on a prominent news channel, it seems the new tendency is to arrest in a hurry, ask questions later — no wonder a judge has questioned the police on its “conjectures”.

Any government should be responsible for creating an ecosystem that enables its citizens to feel involved but secure, responsible but free. Knee-jerk reactions from the State and highly publicised arrests of people who are merely practising their rights tend to inhibit citizens from speaking up. As a medium, the social media does not represent — it merely amplifies.

Meanwhile, the home-grown Twitter, Koo (I understand the onomatopoeic word is a call that people in coastal Karnataka use to catch someone’s attention) has deftly built a base of political support and is a perfect platform for mobilisation. And as expected, the BJP government has taken the lead. Sure, Koo is no less dialogic, but fair dialogue depends on whether the government indeed ends up painting social media in the same brush as the editorial media — and if Koo can adopt editorial interventions that are fair and just to all.

The writer has led reputed institutes of media and communications, and is the founder of “Being Responsible”, which promotes media literacy. The views expressed here are personal.

LETTERS

NO COMPLACENCY

Complacency is a more dreaded disease than the coronavirus itself. It is very disturbing to hear that all the three virus mutants from the United Kingdom, South Africa and Brazil are present in India. But the surges in Maharashtra and Kerala can be attributed to the running of local trains and the reopening of schools respectively. Add to this the effect of people thronging cricket matches. We must not lower our guard at this crucial stage and subject people travelling from the states experiencing the surges to mandatory RC-PCR tests and quarantine.

V. Nagendra Kumar
Hyderabad

WALK THE TALK

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi’s call for cooperative federalism sounds sanctimonious and disingenuous. As the BJP rules a majority of states, who is stopping them from being trailblazers and role models? The finance minister washing her hands off the fuel price hikes is befuddling too. During the run-up to the elections, how is the government capable of reining in fuel prices despite the rising crude oil prices? Undoubtedly, oil is the cash cow for the government. Last, but not the least, agriculture being a state subject, why has the Centre mired itself in an intractable controversy over the three farm laws? When will BJP walk the talk?

Deepak Singhal
Noida

INVINCIBLE NOVAK

CONGRATULATIONS TO Novak Djokovic for his comfortable win over Daniil Medvedev in straight sets to lift his ninth Australian Open trophy. Despite Medvedev decimating Stefanos Tsitsipas in the semi-finals, the match proved to be one-sided. This is his 18th Grand Slam win, and he looks all set to extend his record. Who knows, he might soon surpass Roger Federer’s and Rafael Nadal’s record of 20 Grand Slams, even as Federer continues to be the king of Wimbledon for now.

N. Mahadevan
Chennai

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Deepak Singhal (Feb. 18). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Aakar Patel



Who’s to blame for ₹100 petrol: Nehru, Indira or Modi Sarkar?

The price of petrol has crossed ₹100 in some parts of India for the first time. A parallel development is that of the total revenue that the government receives — 33 per cent, or one-third, now comes from the tax on fuel. India’s consumers pay the highest rate of tax on the petrol and diesel that they consume. The nations that follow India on the list of those with high taxes are all European nations, plus the United States and Japan. These are of course places where consumers are much better off than us and the government can in fact extract money from them without significant hurt.

In India, the majority of consumers are poor. And a tax on fuel affects all of us equally and hurts the poor disproportionately. The autorickshaw owner and the Uber driver pay the same to fuel up their vehicle as the corporate executive and or business tycoon. This makes very little sense. Ideally, taxation should be focused on those who can afford to pay more, and this is through direct taxes like income-

tax. But this has not happened in India for a variety of reasons. The base of people who file their income-tax returns has gone up, but the actual money that comes in as direct taxes has not gone up proportionally.

The other reason that taxes from fuel have gone up as a proportion of all taxes is what has happened to the Goods and Services Tax. This was meant to replace a series of other taxes and create a single market where more trade and more commerce would happen, expanding the economy. But the GST was not able to produce as much revenue as the taxes it replaced. And the market has not grown. Indeed, in the last 36 months, the Indian economy has slowed significantly, falling from around eight per cent growth in the quarter starting January 2018 to around three per cent in the quarter starting January 2020. And in the period after that, the economy has actually contracted for the first time in decades. And so, the short-term prospects for growth are not good, and the government must look

around for immediate ways in which it can fund itself. The easiest way is through taxes on fuel.

Petrol and diesel had been deregulated before Prime Minister Narendra Modi took office. The logic of deregulation was that the Indian State kept subsidising the consumer even when the price of crude rose globally, putting the mostly state-run oil businesses here at a loss. The consumer was protected no matter what the price of crude was. But now the reverse has happened. The government is protected no matter what the price of crude is. If the price goes down it takes more profits and does not lower the retail rate of petrol and diesel. If the price goes up, it hikes up the rates further. This was not the purpose of deregulation.

The Prime Minister says that it is not his fault and previous governments are to blame for keeping India dependent on imported crude. But that is the case with all the world’s nations who do not have a reserve of oil that can be tapped. Alternative sources of energy are a

recent phenomenon and their ability to match fossil fuels in terms of price is something even more recent. We should know that in the area of petrol and diesel in automobile use, this parity has still not come.

Petrol and diesel are very energy dense. About 50 kg of fuel or a full tank can take the car for about 700 km. For an electric car to do that, it needs a lithium ion battery pack that must be at least 45 or so kilowatt hours. The price of this battery alone is around \$5,000, and so approximately ₹4 lakh. Add the rest of the car and the minimum cost of a vehicle that can do the same range as a petrol or a diesel-driven car can do today is around ₹10 lakh, which is out of the budget for three-fourths or more of India’s car buyers. This will change over time and the cost of battery packs will fall as more and more nations take to electric vehicles for environmental reasons. But it is wrong to assume that it could be done today and certainly wrong to assume it could have been done in the past.

The last aspect is that of infrastructure. Lithium ion batteries in cars take about 10 hours to charge at home, assuming all car buyers have a garage with access to electricity. America, Europe and China have tens of thousands of direct current fast chargers in networks that span their nations.

This enables cars to charge up in about half an hour or so. India does not have these networks because the government has not built them. Even if all cars today were to magically become electric and not dependent on fossil fuel, where would they be charged? That the Prime Minister did not say.

The reality is that no matter what Jawaharlal Nehru or Indira Gandhi or Atal Behari Vajpayee did, we would be dependent today on petrol and diesel. The question is whether the government should extract such a large share of tax from us. That is a question only Narendra Modi can answer and not Jawaharlal Nehru.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

SHORT TAKES

OFFICER SHOT AT
McDees, KIDNAP
SUSPECT DIES

Lonoke (US), Feb. 22: An Arkansas police officer was hospitalised in stable condition after being shot during a confrontation at a McDonald's restaurant with a man who was kidnapping a 14-year-old North Carolina girl.

The suspect died from an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound on Sunday after fleeing from authorities, according to the Arkansas State Police. The girl was found safe.

Two Lonoke, Arkansas, police officers confronted the driver of an SUV parked at the fast-food restaurant Saturday night after the vehicle was connected to a North Carolina child abduction case. Lonoke is located about 27 miles east of Little Rock.

EVACUATION
AMID FLOODS IN
INDONESIA

Bekasi (Indonesia), Feb. 22: Thousands of residents are being evacuated on the outskirts of Indonesia's capital amid flooding after the Citarum River embankment broke.

Bekasi district in Indonesia's West Java province have experienced flooding since Saturday because of heavy rain. "Some embankments are broken, not only from the river embankment but also from the irrigation embankments," Public Works and Housing Minister Basuki Hadimuljono said Monday. Raditya Jati, spokesperson for the National Disaster Mitigation Agency, said that more than 28,000 residents in four villages in Bekasi district and 34 villages in Karawang district are affected.

CHILD SEX ABUSE
TRIAL OF EX-U.S.
PRIEST PUT OFF

Oecusse (East Timor), Feb. 22: East Timor abruptly postponed the trial on Monday of a defrocked American priest facing allegations he sexually abused young girls at a children's shelter he ran in a remote enclave in East Timor—one of the most Catholic places on Earth. Soon after Richard Daschbach, a former missionary from Pennsylvania, arrived in the courtroom, judges said they needed more time to make revisions to documents and asked the 84-year-old defendant to return on Tuesday.

INMATE ATTACK
KILLS 1 GUARD
IN INDIANA

Michigan City, Feb. 22: One correction officer is dead and a second is seriously injured after an alleged attack Sunday by a prison inmate, Indiana State Police said.

The attack occurred at Indiana State Prison in Michigan City around 2:40 pm, the agency said in a news release. Tymetri Campbell, 38, faces several preliminary charges including murder, the state police said.

Officials said the officers were attacked in a common area.

The officers were transported to St. Anthony's Hospital in Michigan City, where one was pronounced dead and the second was listed in serious condition. They were not immediately identified.

NZ VOLUNTEERS
TRY TO RESCUE
40 WHALES

Wellington, Feb. 22: Volunteers in New Zealand were trying to save 40 stranded whales Monday evening by refloating them on the high tide. Nine more whales had already died.

The pod of 49 long-finned pilot whales beached themselves on Farewell Spit, a remote beach on the South Island, the Department of Conservation reported. The whales were first noticed by a tour operator on Monday morning, the department said. About 65 conservation rangers and volunteers worked throughout the day to help the whales by keeping them cool and wet until the water was deep enough to refloat them.

The nonprofit whale rescue group Project Jonah was helping coordinate efforts. Farewell Spit has been the site of previous mass strandings.

Angry youth rattle Spain in
support of jailed rap artist

Demand roll back of Public Security Law passed by the previous admin

Barcelona, Feb. 22: The imprisonment of a rap artist for his music praising terrorist violence and insulting the Spanish monarchy has set off a powder keg of pent-up rage this week in the southern European country. The arrest of Pablo Hasél has brought thousands to the streets for different reasons. Under the banner of freedom of expression, many Spaniards strongly object to putting an artist behind bars for his lyrics and tweets. They are clamoring for Spain's left-wing government to fulfil its promise and roll back the Public Security Law passed by the previous conservative administration that was used to prosecute Hasél and other artists.

Hasél's imprisonment to serve a nine-month sentence on Tuesday has also tapped into a well of frustration among Spain's youths, who have the highest unemployment rate in the European Union. Four in every 10 eligible workers under 25 years old are without a job. "I think that what we are experiencing now with the cases of Pablo Hasél (...) and other rappers politically detained by this regime is a brutal attack against the freedom of speech," 26-year-old student Pablo Castilla said during a protest in Barcelona. "The protests are being brutally repressed by the allegedly progressive national government and the Catalan government. "They are attacking us youngsters because we



A man throws a road sign against police officers protecting a national police station during clashes following a protest condemning the arrest of rap singer Pablo Hasél in Barcelona, on Sunday.

— AP

are showing our anger."

For many, Hasél's case also represents what they perceive as a heavy-handed reaction by a state whose very structure is in need of deep reform. Hasél's lyrics that strike at King Felipe VI and his father, King Emeritus Juan Carlos I, have connected with a growing public debate on the future of Spain's parliamentary monarchy. Unquestioned outside fr-

inge circles of the Left until the past decade, the royal house has been plagued by financial scandal that has reached Juan Carlos himself. Many Spaniards were aghast when the former monarch left Spain for the United Arab Emirates amid a court investigation into his alleged fiscal improprieties. As well as shouting its support for Hasél, a crowd that gathered in Madrid on Saturday

chanted "Where is the change? Where is the progress?" and "Juan Carlos de Borbón, womaniser and thief." The debate has caused tensions inside Spain's left-wing coalition government.

While Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and his Socialist Party back the parliamentary monarchy Spain has had since the end of Francisco Franco's dictatorship in the 1970s,

their minor partner, the upstart United We Can party, wants to get rid of the monarchy and has supported this week's protests for Hasél despite their violent turn.

The anti-monarchic streak in the protests cuts across Spain. But in Hasél's home region of Catalonia, an already tense political climate appears to be magnifying the uproar.

— AP

Italian envoy
killed in DR
Congo attack

Kinshasa, Feb. 22: The Italian ambassador to Congo, an Italian carabinieri police officer and their Congolese driver were killed Monday in an attack on a UN convoy in an area that is home to myriad rebel groups, the Foreign Ministry and local people said. The ambush occurred as the convoy was travelling from Goma, Congo's eastern regional capital, to visit a World Food Programme school feeding project in Rutshuru, the UN agency said in a statement. WFP said it was seeking information from local authorities, as the ambush occurred on a road that had previously been cleared for travel without security escorts.

Luca Attanasio, Italy's ambassador to the country since 2017, carabinieri officer Vittorio Iacovacci and their driver were killed. Other members of the convoy were injured, WFP said. The attack occurred in the territory of Nyiragongo, in North Kivu, the same area, known as the "three antennas," where two Britons were kidnapped by unidentified armed men in 2018, said Mambo Kaway, president of a local civil society group. "There were five people aboard the vehicle, including the Italian ambassador," Kaway said.

"The driver died after being shot with several bullets, and others were wounded," he said. "The situation is very tense," he added. The wounded were taken to a nearby UN hospital. The North Kivu governor, Carly Nzanzu Kasivita, said that the vehicles were taken hostage and escorted into the bush and that when local people saw them, they alerted the authorities. The Congolese army and park guards for Virunga National Park came to the rescue, he said.

"There was an exchange of fire. The attackers fired at the bodyguard and the ambassador," the governor said, adding that the ambassador later died from his wounds. Attanasio, a 43-year-old career diplomat, leaves a wife and three young children. The attack, a few kilometres north of the regional capital of Goma, was just next to the Virunga National Park. Last month gunmen shot and killed at least six rangers in the Rutshuru area of the park.

Marie Tumba Nzenza, Minister of Foreign Affairs, sent her condolences and promised the Italian government that the Congolese government would do all it could to investigate and find out who is behind the killings. — AP

Stop smearing CPC, halt support
to separatist forces: China tells US

Beijing, Feb. 22: China on Monday urged the US to stop "smearing" the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) 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."

In his annual speech at the Lanting Forum, focusing on China-US ties, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the Biden administration should adjust the hardline policy pursued by former President Donald Trump towards Beijing to check its growing influence.

We have no intention to challenge or replace the United States. We are ready to have peaceful coexistence and seek common development with the United States, Wang said.

Likewise, we hope the United States will respect

● **CHINA ON** Monday expressed its support for India in hosting this year's BRICS summit and said it will work with New Delhi to strengthen the cooperation among the five-member grouping of emerging economies.

● **India has assumed the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) Chairmanship for 2021 and is set to hold this year's summit.**

● **On February 19, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar launched India's BRICS 2021 website at the BRICS Secretariat at Sushma Swaraj Bhawan in New Delhi.**

China's core interests, national dignity, and rights to development. We urge the United States to stop smearing the CPC and China's political system, stop conning at or even supporting the erroneous words and actions of separatist forces for 'Taiwan independence', and stop undermining China's sovereignty and security on internal affairs concerning Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Tibet, he said.

We hope that the US side will adjust its policies as

soon as possible, among others, remove unreasonable tariffs on Chinese goods, lift its unilateral sanctions on Chinese companies and research and educational institutes, and abandon irrational suppression of China, he said.

The relations between China and the US are at an all time low. The two countries are currently engaged in a bitter confrontation over various issues, including trade, the origins of the novel Coronavirus pandemic, the communist

giant's aggressive military moves in the disputed South China Sea and human rights. US President Joe Biden who spoke to his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping for over two hours in his first phone call on February 11 later said there would be repercussions for China's human rights abuses and he made the message clear to his Chinese counterpart in his talks.

In a CNN town hall on February 17, Biden said he stressed to Xi during their long conversation that the US would continue to assert its role as a voice for human rights on the world stage, including at the United Nations and other international agencies.

We must speak up for human rights. It's who we are, the Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post* quoted Biden as saying.

— PTI

EU weighs troubled Russia ties

Brussels, Feb. 22: European Union foreign ministers on Monday will look at options for imposing fresh sanctions against Russia over the jailing of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, as the 27-nation bloc considers the future of its troubled ties with the

country. The ministers will discuss possible names of Russian officials and whether to target them individually or whether to use a new system of measures aimed at human rights abuses.

But they appear unlikely to impose restrictions on

oligarchs close to President Vladimir Putin, as Navalny has requested. "It's clear that Russia is on a confrontational course with the European Union," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said.

"In the case of Mr Navalny, there is a blunt refusal

to respect their engagements, including the refusal of taking into account the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights." Navalny, 44, an anti-corruption investigator and Putin's most prominent critic, was arrested in Moscow last month.

— AP

COSMIC | TRIP Hayley Arceneaux will launch later this year with a billionaire

Bone cancer survivor to go into orbit

Cape Canaveral, Feb. 22: After beating bone cancer, Hayley Arceneaux figures rocketing into orbit on SpaceX's first private flight should be a piece of cosmic cake.

St. Jude Children's Research Hospital announced Monday that the 29-year-old physician assistant—a former patient hired last spring—will launch later this year alongside a billionaire who's using his purchased spaceflight as a charitable fundraiser.

Arceneaux will become the youngest American in space—beating NASA record-holder Sally Ride by over two years—when she blasts off this fall with entrepreneur Jared Isaacman and two yet-to-be-chosen contest winners. She'll

also be the first to launch with a prosthesis. When she was 10, she had surgery at St. Jude to replace her knee and get a titanium rod in her left thigh bone. She still limps and suffers occasional leg pain, but has been cleared for flight by SpaceX. She'll serve as the crew's medical officer.

"My battle with cancer really prepared me for space travel," Arceneaux said in an interview with *The Associated Press*. "It made me tough, and then also I think it really taught me to expect the unexpected and go along for the ride." She wants to show her young patients and other cancer survivors that "the sky is not even the limit anymore."

"It's going to mean so much to these kids to see a survivor in space," she said. Isaacman announced his space mission February 1, pledging to raise \$200 million for St. Jude, half of that his own contribution. As the flight's self-appointed commander, he offered one of the four SpaceX Dragon capsule seats to St. Jude. Without alerting the staff, St. Jude chose Arceneaux from among the "scores" of hospital and fundraising employees who had once been patients and could represent the next generation, said Rick Shadyac, president of St. Jude's fundraising organisation. Arceneaux was at home in Memphis, Tennessee, when she got the "out of the blue" call in

January asking if she'd represent St. Jude in space.

Her immediate response: "Yes! Yes! Please!" But first she wanted to run it past her mother in St. Francisville, Louisiana. (Her father died of kidney cancer in 2018.) Next she reached out to her brother and sister-in-law, both of them aerospace engineers in Huntsville, Alabama, who "reassured me how safe space travel is."

A lifelong space fan who embraces adventure, Arceneaux insists those who know her won't be surprised. She's plunged on a bungee swing in New Zealand and ridden camels in Morocco. And she loves roller-coasters. Isaacman, who flies fighter jets for a hobby, considers her a per-

fect fit. "It's not all supposed to be about getting people excited to be astronauts someday, which is certainly cool," Isaacman, 38, said last week.

"It's also supposed to be about an inspiring message of what we can accomplish here on Earth." He has two more crew members to select, and he plans to reveal them in March. One will be a sweepstakes winner; anyone donating to St. Jude this month is eligible. So far, more than \$9 million has come in, according to Shadyac. The other seat will go to a business owner who uses Shift4Payments, Isaacman's Allentown, Pennsylvania, credit card-processing company.

— AP



Jeremy Winningham cleans snow from the windshield as his daughter Courtney drives at Rice Lake, Wisconsin on Saturday.

— AFP

U.S. HOSPITALS
GRAPPLE WITH
WATER CRUNCH

Houston, Feb. 22: Hospitals across the South grappled with water shortages as the region carried on with recovery efforts in the wake of a devastating winter storm, and the weather offered a balmy respite—temperatures as high as the mid-60s.

At the height of the storm on Sunday, hospitals were left scrambling to care for patients amid record cold, snow and ice that battered parts of the country more accustomed to going through winter with light jackets and short sleeves.

The icy blast ruptured water mains, knocked out power to millions of utility customers and contributed to at least 76 deaths—half of which occurred in Texas.

At least seven people died in Tennessee and four in Portland, Oregon.

— AP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,744.32	-2.25
Nifty 50	14,675.70	-2.04
\$&P 500*	3,886.18	-0.53
Dollar (₹)	72.49	0.22
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.39	0.23
Euro (₹)	87.62	0.10
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,013.278	0.60
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	64.53	2.58
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.202	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.345	0.00

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Labour surveys to begin across India by April

The Labour Bureau would launch its five all-India surveys, including on migrant and domestic workers, by April 1, as two of the three mandated pre-testings of the studies yielded "encouraging and positive results". Labour Bureau director general D. P. S. Negi said, "We are hopeful to launch all five surveys across the country by April 1 and work on ground to release results in seven to eight month."

IndRa ups outlook on banking sector to stable



India Ratings & Research revised its outlook on the banking sector to stable for FY22 from negative even as it sees higher stress emerging in the retail loan segment. For PSBs the outlook has been revised to stable from negative and for private banks, the stable outlook is retained. Overall stressed assets (gross NPA+ restructured) could rise 30 per cent for the banking system, almost 1.7 times in the retail segment in H2FY21.

Smaller realtors hurt in K-shaped recovery: Icra

A 'K-shaped recovery' is under-way in the realty sector, where access to credit and demand consolidation has helped large players grow handsomely even as their smaller sized rivals struggle. Their struggle will weigh heavily on the sector as a whole, rating agency Icra said, adding such players hold an 80 per cent market share. Icra said the top-10 listed companies witnessed a 61 per cent growth in the December quarter.

Hyundai starts new maintenance scheme for users

Hyundai Motor India Ltd said it has launched a new maintenance programme under which customers would be able to replace parts like brakes and clutch across nine models. For the first five years of the purchase, a customer would be able to replace 14 parts such as wipers, bulbs, hose belts and much more across its nine models. Customers can buy the Hyundai Shield of Trust package before the first free service.

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

■ Covid fear, bond yields pull down stocks

Sensex sinks below 50000

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, FEB. 22

The Sensex tumbled below the 50000-mark on negative global cues, as bond yields and crude oil price rose globally. Besides, Covid concerns leading to localised shutdowns in parts of Maharashtra added to the market anxiety.

The Sensex fell 2.25 per cent, or 1145 points, to close at 49744 on sustained selling. Monday's fall is the biggest in the last two months.

The Nifty-50 Index also fell 2.04 per cent, or 306 points, closing at 14,675 points.

This is the fifth straight session the market has fallen over rising bond yields.

BSE's market capitalisation dropped below Rs 200 lakh crore as investors suffered notional loss of over Rs 4 lakh crore in the Monday sell-off.

"Global cues were weak as yields on the benchmark US 10-year Treasury notes rose to a one-year high, worrying investors that money might move away from emerging markets. Further, there were concerns over the risk of higher inflation due to sharp jump in commodity prices, which tempered optimism around a vaccine-led economic recovery," said Siddhartha Khemka, head-retail research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

Except Metals, all other sectoral indices closed in the red. The top losers included the Nifty Bank



SBI CALLS ON RBI TO MAKE SHORTING BONDS COSTLIER

SUBHADIP SIRCAR FEB. 22

The RBI should consider steps to disincentivise short selling, which may have triggered the recent sell-off in the sovereign bond markets, according to the chief economic adviser at SBI Research.

Banks and primary dealers resort to such short-selling when they expect bond prices to fall, and this becomes a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' sometimes with traders borrowing securities from the repo market and rolling them over till yields rise, Soumya Kanti Ghosh wrote in a note to clients on Monday.

"The only way to break such self-fulfilling expectations is for RBI to conduct large scale open market operations to provide necessary steam to the bond market to rally and with the increase in price many short-sold positions will trigger stop losses and market players will scramble to cover open positions," he said.

Yields on the benchmark 2030 debt rose 14 basis points last week amid fears about how the RBI plans to manage the huge government borrowing programme and a rise in global bond yields.

The 2030 yield was up 6 basis points to 6.20 per cent on Monday.

Short selling typically involves selling security borrowed from the repo market.

—Bloomberg

(-1.63 per cent), Nifty IT (-2.89 per cent) Auto (-2.28 per cent) and Nifty Realty (-2.80 per cent).

"The recent spike in the Covid cases combined with subdued global cues

is weighing on the sentiment," said Ajit Mishra, VP-research, Religare Broking.

FPIs were net sellers by Rs 893.25 crore and DIIs, by Rs 919.88 crore.

recovery forecast," bank analysts including

Kochi firm completes phase 2 trial of Covid drug

Kochi, Feb. 22: The city-based PNB Vesper Life Sciences has successfully completed phase 2 clinical trials of PNB-001 (GPP-Baladol), its proprietary drug to treat the coronavirus infection and said it will soon move the government for deploying the drug for emergency use.

The company, which has its labs in England, had in early September 2020 received the approval from the Drug Controller General (DCGI) to conduct the phase 2 clinical trial of GPP-Baladol in patients with moderate infection of the pandemic with oxygen support.

The company on Monday said the clinical trial was initiated in November at BJ Government Medical College and Sassoon General Hospital in Pune, and Victoria Medical College and Research Institute in Bengaluru on 40 patients.

"We will submit the clinical trial report to the DCGI on Monday itself," the company's promoter and chief executive P.N. Balam said, adding the trial protocol was designed in-line with the solidarity trial conducted by the WHO and other international clinical trials.

The Kochi-based was firm the first in the world to begin phase 2 trial for a new chemical entity.

—PTI

SC halts NCLT okay for Future-Reliance deal

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 22

The Supreme Court has on Monday halted regulatory approval by the National Company Law Tribunal for the Future-Reliance deal till further orders. While this comes as a relief to e-commerce giant Amazon, it is a setback for Future Retail, which has been maintaining that it will face liquidation if the deal collapses.

The Supreme Court ordered that the NCLT can continue reviewing the deal and overseeing the approval process, but cannot pass a final order till the court hears Amazon's concerns. The stock exchanges and the antitrust watchdog Competition Commission of India have already cleared the deal.

"In the meantime, the NCLT proceedings will be allowed to go on but will not culminate in any final order of sanction of scheme," the court said in its order. The court has given two weeks to file the counter-affidavit and another week for rejoinder affidavit, if,



any. The case will come up for further hearing after five weeks.

Amazon had filed a special leave petition in the Supreme Court against the Delhi High Court's division bench order of February 8. The division bench had stayed the status quo order passed by a Single Judge of the court on February 2, asking Future Group and concerned authorities to maintain status quo in the Reliance-Future deal till it pronounces the final order.

The division bench had said that statutory authorities like NCLT and Sebi should not be restrained from proceeding in accordance with law on Future-Reliance deal.

Future Retail also said the NCLT can issue directions to convene

meetings of shareholders and creditors of applicant companies, including Future Retail, to consider the deal.

Amazon had approached the Delhi High Court last month, seeking enforcement of the October 25 interim order of the emergency arbitrator (EA) at the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) that had restrained Future Retail from going ahead with the deal with Reliance. Amazon alleges that the deal violates an earlier contract between the company and the Future Group.

As part of the agreement entered while buying 49 per cent stake in Future Coupons in 2019, Amazon would have a call option to acquire all or part of the promoters' shareholding of 47.02 per cent in Future Retail between the third and tenth year of the transaction and this would be subject to law. Amazon also claims that the 2019 agreement had categorically prohibited Future Retail from selling a stake to Reliance Industries.

DHFL: AUDITOR UNEARTHS FRESH FRAUD WORTH ₹6,180 CR

New Delhi, Feb. 22: Dewan Housing Finance Corporation (DHFL) on Monday said its transaction auditor, Grant Thornton, has reported another fraudulent transaction of Rs 6,182 crore in the company.

The administrator of the company received an initial report from Grant

Thornton indicating that there are certain transactions which are "undervalued, fraudulent and preferential in nature", DHFL said in a regulatory filing.

"As per the transaction auditor report shared with the administrator, the monetary impact of the above transactions covered

under the application amounts to Rs 5,381.90 crore towards outstanding principal, Rs 589.36 crore towards accrued interest and Rs 210.85 crore towards notional loss of interest on account of charging lower rate of interest," said the filing about the impact on the company.

—PTI

Goldman sees Brent oil at \$75 as supply response trails demand

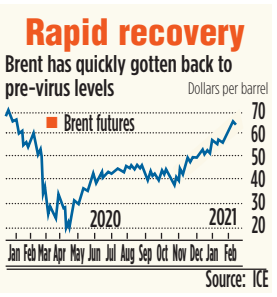
SHARON CHO FEB. 22

Oil prices will rally sooner and higher than previously thought as the global energy demand recovery outpaces the supply response from the Opec+ alliance, shale and Iran, according to Goldman Sachs Group Inc.

Consumption will get back to pre-virus levels by late July, while output from major producers is

likely to remain "highly inelastic" to the rising prices, the bank said in a note. Goldman raised its Brent forecasts by \$10 a barrel, to \$70 next quarter and \$75 in the following three months.

"This faster re-balancing during what was expected to be the dark days of winter will be followed by a widening deficit this spring as the ramp-up in Opec+ production lags our above-consensus demand



recovery forecast," bank analysts including

COMMODITIES FLARING UP

Damien Courvalin said in the note.

Oil's rebound to levels last seen before Covid-19 wreaked havoc on the global economy has been driven by Saudi Arabia's unilateral output cuts together with the improving demand outlook. The rally has also been supported by investors using crude to position for a

reflationary environment, Goldman said. Brent oil traded above \$63 a barrel on Monday and is up around 22 per cent this year.

Supply will keep lagging behind demand for several reasons, the bank said.

Opec+ will fall behind the market rebalancing, especially as the pace of global drawdowns of

stockpiles has accelerated;

There are no signs of more activity from most non-Opec+ producers outside of North America, creating a risk supply will fall 900,000 barrels a day short of the bank's estimates in the coming year; The US earnings season confirms that big explorers and producers, the key drivers of US shale output, remain focused on returning cash to shareholders.

—Bloomberg

TATA MOTORS SEES DOUBLE-DIGIT GROWTH FOR CAR INDUSTRY THIS YR



MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, FEB. 22

Tata Motors, India's biggest automaker by revenue, expects domestic passenger vehicles industry to grow in double digits in 2021-22 on account of continued robust demand momentum driven by shift towards personal mobility after the Covid pandemic.

Shailesh Chandra, president at Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles told a virtual media conference on Monday after the launch of its SUV, the new Safari, that sales growth for Tata Motors would be better than the automobile industry.

"There is a market momentum which continues on the demand side because of the shift towards personal mobility," Chandra pointed out, adding that this would remain till everybody gets vaccinated. "We don't know when everyone will get vaccinated."

He said by and large people are and will be cautious and, therefore, there is this gravity towards personal mobility.

As for Tata Motors, he said, "We would expect growth to be much better than the industry."

The new generation Tata Safari is sold in six variants, including options of manual and automatic transmission as well as 6/7-seat configurations.

The prices range from Rs 14.69 lakh for the entry-level XE variant to Rs 20.20 lakh for the top-end XZ+ (Adventure Persona edition) in the manual trims, while the automatic versions of the full-blown SUV cost between Rs 17.25 lakh and Rs 21.45 lakh at Delhi showroom.

Copper surges above \$9,000 as deficit drives record rally

Feb. 22: Copper rallied above \$9,000 a tonne for the first time in more than nine years on bets that increased demand driven by the recovery from the pandemic will spur a historic deficit, putting the economic bellwether on course for a record run of monthly gains.

Prices climbed more than 3 per cent on Monday and are heading for an unprecedented eleventh monthly rise in February. Base metals are on tear on expectations that post-crisis consumption will outstrip near-term supply, with raw materials like copper and nickel getting an additional boost from their importance to the clean-energy transition. The furious pace of the advance has market watchers debating whether a new commodity supercycle is now in the offing.

The metal's revival marks a turnaround from earlier in the month, when copper hit turbulence as investors signalled the need for more details about stimulus measures and on concerns about a softening in Chinese demand. But prices rose during China's Lunar New Year as factory production was more buoyant than usual. Expectations for a revival

in inflation have helped, too

"Market sentiment is heated right now in anticipation of a new cycle of global inflation," Jia Zheng, an analyst with Goldtrust Futures Co, said from Shanghai. "Chinese investors returning from Lunar New Year holidays are waiting for more stimulus from the US and Europe. Fundamentally, Chinese demand has exceeded expectations, as travel restrictions boosted consumption."

Goldman Sachs Group Inc reinforced its bullish stance last week, saying that China's return from the week-long break had

triggered another leg higher for prices. The market is facing the largest deficit in a decade this year, with a high risk of scarcity over the coming months, according to the bank.

There are already signs of emerging tightness on the London Metal Exchange, as spot contracts trade at a premium to futures. That pattern, known as backwardation, was a feature of the market during a record-breaking boom in Chinese demand last year, and suggests that spot demand is once again outpacing supply as exchange inventories run low.

Adding to concerns about a supply squeeze are possible production cuts at a top Chinese smelter.

Inventories tracked by the Shanghai Futures Exchange are the lowest for this time of year in more than a decade.

Three-month copper traded at \$9,110 a tonne on the LME at 9:58 a.m. in Singapore after hitting \$9,187, the highest since 2011. In China, the Shanghai Futures Exchange contract hit the daily limit. Other metals rose, with LME tin at the highest since 2011, and nickel rallying toward \$20,000 a tonne.

—Bloomberg

Potash rally may prod India to cut imports

PRATIK PARIJA FEB. 22

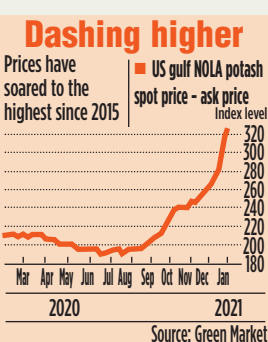
India would be buying less potash after a run-up in prices, according to the country's largest importer of the fertiliser, a move that may undercut expectations for global demand to hit a record this year.

Purchases in the fiscal year starting April may drop from about 5.5 million tonnes the year before, said P.S. Gahlaut, managing director of Indian Potash Ltd, which accounts for almost 50 per cent of the country's imports. He declined to give a forecast, but said

demand will weaken as India still has a sizeable stockpile.

"In India, consumption of potash is very price sensitive," Gahlaut said in an interview. "Whenever prices have gone up, there's an immediate effect on consumption."

Potash is a nutrient that helps plants withstand drought and diseases. Prices have risen amid a surge in agricultural commodities to multi-year highs as this implies farmers will be planting more acres and using more fertiliser. Bloomberg's Green Markets sees global potash demand at a record



in 2021, while Morningstar Inc says it will likely set a new "high watermark."

Weaker India demand could put pressure on potash suppliers such as

K+S AG, Uralkali PJSC and Canpotex Ltd as these companies may have to lower prices for new deals. India is the fourth-biggest user of potash.

India and China recently signed potash contract deals with Belarusian Potash Co at \$247 a tonne. Although that's above 2020 prices, it caused a stir among some producers expecting even higher prices. Nutrien Ltd, the world's biggest fertiliser company, is selling potash in the US corn belt for about \$350 a ton, while prices in Brazil rose \$50 this year.

Stockpiles of Indian companies and traders

still total more than 1 million tonnes, said Gahlaut. The proposed 11 per cent cut in subsidies for imported phosphatic fertilisers and potash will further dent demand and hurt the government's push for balanced use of fertilisers.

Gahlaut said India's potash consumption is already lower than what is required under the policy. The country promotes balanced fertiliser use to improve crop yields, boost profitability for farmers and reduce subsidy burden. Currently there's an excessive use of urea given the higher financial support.

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Boxers return with five gold medals

New Delhi: Babyrojisana Chanu (51kg) and Arundhati Choudhary (69kg) fetched two more gold medals as Indian women boxers ended with five overall for a top finish in the 30th Adriatic Pearl Tournament in Budva, Montenegro. Lucky Rana (64kg) secured a silver as Indian women emerged as the top team with 10 medals (five gold, three silver and two bronze). Uzbekistan (2 gold) and Czech Republic (1 gold) ended at second and third position respectively. Three-time Khelo India gold-medallist Arundhati pulled off a dominating 5-0 victory over Ukraine's Maryana Stoiko on Sunday. Chanu, who trains at M.C. Mary Kom's Imphal-based academy, got the better of Asian junior champion Sabina Bobokulova of Uzbekistan in a close fight which ended 3-2 in favour of the Indian. — *PTI*

Medvedev among top 3 for first time

Paris: Daniil Medvedev broke into the top three for the first time in Monday's ATP rankings, while Russian compatriot Aslan Karatsev shot up 72 places after his shock run to the Australian Open semi-finals. Karatsev, 27, rose from 114th to 42nd after knocking out three seeds before his dream run was ended by Djokovic in the last four. The title win reinforced Djokovic's status as world number one, guaranteeing he will mark his 311th week there as of March 8, surpassing Roger Federer's record of 310. Meanwhile, Naomi Osaka moved up one spot to second in the WTA rankings following her success at the Australian Open. — *AFP*

Mumbai Falcons clinch third spot

Abu Dhabi: Mumbai Falcons created history here on late Saturday night, becoming the first all-Indian team ever to finish in the top three of an FIA Championship. The team, led by the country's racing star Jehan Daruvala who also clinched the third position in the Driver's Championship standings, grabbed three podiums during the last weekend of the 5-round Formula 3 Asian Championship to end its campaign in style. The Falcons missed the second place by a mere 2 points, riding on an impressive 9 podium finishes through the championship. The Yas Marina International Circuit was abuzz on Saturday, with the stage set for an explosive season finale on the Formula 1 Grand Prix layout. Kush Maini started Race 1 in fourth position while Jehan started in sixth.

Team India finish 5th in ALMS race

Abu Dhabi: Chasing the Le Mans dream, Racing Team India, the first all-Indian team to compete at the international endurance racing stage, ended its first Asian Le Mans Series championship fifth in the overall championship standings. The trio of Narain Karthikeyan, Arjun Maini and Naveen Rao, raced their ORECA 07 LMP2 car to a pair of fifth place finishes in the final two races of the season at Abu Dhabi's Yas Marina track on Friday and Saturday. The results came on the back of the fifth and fourth-placed finishes the team chalked up in the two season-opening races in Dubai. The team will now have to make a presentation to the ACO next week to get an entry for the '24 Hours of Le Mans'. A committee will vet all the applications before finalising the invitations in March.

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

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

Champions League: Atletico vs Chelsea from 1.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 2; Lazio vs Bayern Munich from 1.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 1

Published by K. Sudhakar for and on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002. and Printed by him at BFL Infotech Limited, C - 9, Sector - III, Noida - 201301.

Editor - T. Venkataram Reddy, RNI Registration number 57290/94, Price in Nepal - Nep. Rs. 20.00 per copy.

ROOT FOR GRASS

Anderson happy with grass on Motera strip but says it won't be there on match day

Ahmedabad, Feb. 22: Veteran fast bowler James Anderson is pretty sure that the newly laid track at the Motera Stadium will be devoid of any grass for the upcoming Day/Night Test against India even though there is a nice green cover on it at the moment.

The third Test under lights will start from Wednesday and for England's premier fast bowler, he doesn't expect it to behave much differently from the second Test track at the Chepauk which India won by 317 runs.

"The pitch, it has got grass on it but I am pretty sure it's not going to be there when we turn up on the match day," Anderson said with a wry smile during a virtual conference on Sunday.

"So we have to wait and watch. As seam bowlers, we have to be prepared to bowl as best we can in any given condition. If it swings, it's great and if it does not, we still have a job to do," Anderson said. He felt that the pink SG Test ball that he bowled with during the net sessions, swung more than its red counterpart.

"Look this is the second pink Test in India and first in February so we don't know how it would behave."

He urged critics of the much-debated rotation policy to look at the "bigger picture", considering the massive amount of cricket to be played by the England team in the coming days.

England did not play Jonny Bairstow and Mark Wood in the first two Tests but have brought them back for the final two games as part of a rotation policy while first-choice keeper Jos Buttler is back home after the opening Test. The idea is to help players cop up with life inside the bio-bubble.

"You have got to try and look at the bigger picture.



Members of the Indian team during a training session at Motera in Ahmedabad on Sunday. — *BCCI*

The idea was if I missed that one, that would give me the best chance of being fit and firing for the pink-ball Test," Anderson said.

Former players, especially Kevin Pietersen, have criticised ECB's thought process, saying the board must play its best players in a big series like this against India.

Anderson, 38, himself played the series-opener where he took five wickets in England's victory but was rested for the second where India emerged triumphant by a massive 317-run margin.

"I am feeling good and fresh and ready to go again if called upon. It's frustrating to an extent but I can see the bigger picture with the amount of cricket that we have got." — *PTI*

Stokes ready to handle all conditions during Tests

Ahmedabad, Feb. 22: Brushing aside the incessant talk around spin-friendly pitches in India, big-hitting England all-rounder Ben Stokes has said that Test players should be proficient in handling all kinds of conditions.

Ahead of the day/night Test here starting Wednesday, Stokes wondered how the newly-refurbished Motera strip would behave but at the same time, stressed that top-flight cricketers should be able to deal with whatever they are

faced with.

"The thing about being a Test batsman is that you need to be able to handle all types of conditions. India is one of the places where it is a lot tougher for overseas batsmen to come and be successful, but then so too is England," he wrote in a column for the *Daily Mirror*.

"And that is part of the game, the challenges and why we love it," he said.

The turning tracks in India became a talking point during the ongoing series when some former

England players such as Michael Vaughan asked whether such strips were ideal for Test cricket.

The series is tied at 1-1 after India's brilliant 317-run win in the second Test in Chennai.

Stokes' bowling quota of just two overs in that game raised a few eyebrows but he said it was about

"Don't read too much into the fact that I didn't bowl a huge amount in the second game, I'm sure if it was a green seamer I would have bowled a lot more overs." — *PTI*

LAHIRU TESTS +VE ON EVE OF WINDIES TOUR

Colombo, Feb. 22: Sri Lankan fast bowler Lahiru Kumara tested positive Monday for coronavirus on the eve of the team's departure to the West Indies for a tour already delayed by the virus.

The 24-year-old had been with the rest of the 35-man squad in a bio-secure bubble since February 10. He played two practice matches on Friday and Saturday.

News of the infection is the latest blow to the tour of three one-day internationals, three Twenty20s and two Tests due to start in Antigua on March 3.

It was originally due to begin on February 21 but was postponed after Sri Lanka's

Lahiru Thirimanne and coach Mickey Arthur tested positive. Both have fully recovered and will travel with the rest of the squad, which was yet to be officially named. — *AFP*

Pep & Co march on towards title

London, Feb. 22: Manchester City remain 10 points clear at the top of the Premier League as Raheem Sterling's early header was enough to beat Arsenal 1-0 on Sunday, while Jose Mourinho's Tottenham suffered another damaging defeat at fourth-placed West Ham.

An 18th consecutive win in all competitions edged City ever closer to a third league title in four years even if Pep Guardiola's men did not hit the heights they have in recent weeks at the Emirates.

Sterling could have scored three times inside the first five minutes, but his soaring leap to nod home Riyad Mahrez's cross secured all three points as City kept a 10th clean sheet in their last 13 league games.

Arsenal remain in 10th with their best chance of a return to the Champions League next season dependent on success in the Europa League.

Tottenham are just two points better off than their north London rivals in ninth, nine points off the top four after a fifth defeat in their last six league games.

Mourinho's men were undone by a slow start to each half at the London Stadium and lost 2-1.

Michail Antonio opened the scoring after just five minutes before the rejuvenated Jesse Lingard smashed home the third goal of his loan spell from Manchester United two

THE RESULTS	
Arsenal	0
Manchester City (Sterling 2)	1
Manchester United	3
(Rashford 30, James 57, Fernandes 75-pen)	
Newcastle (Saint-Maximin 36)	1
Aston Villa (Traore 48)	1
Leicester (Maddison 19, Barnes 23)	2
West Ham (Antonio 5, Lingard 47)	2
Tottenham (Moura 64)	1

minutes into the second half.

"The results are the consequences of multiple situations in football. Mine and my coaching staff methods are second to nobody in the world," said a defiant Mourinho.

"Our potential is higher than where we are so there is frustration."

Tottenham rallied after Lucas Moura's powerful header pulled a goal back as the impressive Gareth Bale and Son Heung-min hit the woodwork late on.

But West Ham held on to bolster their unexpected challenge for Champions League football by moving two points ahead of fifth-placed Chelsea.

Leicester are up to second after a bright first-half performance saw off Aston Villa 2-1. — *AFP*



Manchester City's Raheem Sterling (left) scores against Arsenal in their English Premier League match at the Emirates Stadium in London on Sunday. — *AFP*

Messi scores but Cadiz snatch late equaliser

Barcelona, Feb. 22: Cádiz snatched a late penalty to draw 1-1 at Camp Nou and deal Barcelona an unexpected setback in their bid for the Spanish league title on Sunday.

Five days after being beaten 4-1 by Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League, Ronald Koeman's side saw two points slip away when substitute Alex Fernández converted an 88th-minute penalty conceded by Clement Lenglet. Lionel Messi appeared to put Barcelona on their way to an easy win in his club record 506th league appear-

ance in Spain. But after Messi scored from the penalty spot in the 32nd minute, Barcelona were unable to finish off many scoring chances.

The draw leaves Barcelona in third place and eight points behind leaders Atlético Madrid, who lost 2-0 to Levante on Saturday. Real Madrid were the biggest beneficiary of the round, moving three points behind Atlético after winning 1-0 at Valladolid on Saturday. Madrid has played one more match than Atlético and Barcelona. — *AP*

Gujarat post second victory on trot

Surat, Feb. 22: Hosts Gujarat recorded their second successive win in the Vijay Hazare Trophy, beating Goa by eight wickets in an Elite Group A game here on Monday.

Gujarat had started their campaign with a three-wicket win over Chhattisgarh.

Opting to bat, Goa were bundled out for 159 in 45.4 overs, with Gujarat's slow-left arm spinner Hardik Patel (3/34) doing the bulk of the damage.

Gujarat then chased the target in 27.4 overs with half centuries from Priyank Panchal (57 not out) and Bhargav Merai (57 off 55 balls).

In the other two league games, Baroda rode on skipper Krunal Pandya's unbeaten 127 to beat Tripura by six wickets, while Hyderabad defeated Chhattisgarh by seven

BRIEF SCORES	
■ Goa 159 in 45.4 overs (Darshan Mital 44; KD Eknath 36; Hardik Patel 3/34, Arzan Nagwaswalla 2/31) lost to Gujarat 162/2 in 27.4 overs (Priyank Panchal 57 not out, Bhargav Merai 57; Deepraj Goankar 1/26, Amulya Pandrekar 1/29) by eight wickets.	■ Krishnamurthy Siddharth 76) beat Bihar 87 in 27.2 overs (Sakibul Gani 37; Prasidh Krishna 4/17) by 267 runs.
■ Tamil Nadu 176 in 41.3 overs (B. Aparajith 40, R Sonu Yadav 37, R Sai Kishore 29, Shoaib Mohammed Khan 3/24, Stephen 3/46) lost to Andhra 181 for 3 in 29.1 overs (Ashwin Hebbar 101 not out, Ricky Bhui 52 not out) by seven wickets.	■ Chhattisgarh 242/7 in 50 overs (Harpreet Singh Bhatia 63, Ashutosh Singh 51; Mehdi Hasan 3/32, T Ravi Teja 2/60) lost to Hyderabad 243/3 in 40.4 overs (Tanmay Agarwal 122, Tilak Verma 60; Jwaniyot Singh 1-2, Ashutosh Singh 1/31) by seven wickets.
■ Uttar Pradesh 283 in 49.4 overs (Akashdeep Nath 68, Priyam Garg 57, Abhishek Goswami 54; Sreesanth 5/65) lost to Kerala 284/7 in 48.4 overs (Robin Uthappa 81, Sachin Baby 76) by three wickets.	■ Tripura 302/7 in 50 overs (Udiyan Bose 56, Bishal Ghosh 50, Manishankar Murasingh 42; Ninad Rathwa 2/37, Pradeep Yadav 1/19) lost to Baroda 303/4 in 49 overs (Krunal Pandya 127 not out, Vishnu Solanki 97; Pratyush Singh 1/19) by six wickets.
■ Jharkhand 217/9 in 50 overs (Utkarsh Singh 51, Shahbaz Nadeem 45 not out, Siddharth Kaul 3/44) beat Punjab 215 all out in 45.5 overs (Mandeep Singh 68, Abhishek Sharma 56, Gurkeerat Mann 37, Rahul Shukla 2/34, Shahbaz Nadeem 2/36) by two runs.	■ Odisha 230 in 49.3 overs (Ankit Yadav 48; T Pradeep 3/54) lost to Railways 232/2 in 44.3 overs (Shivam Chaudhary 81 not out, Pratham Singh 63, Arindam Ghosh 39 not out) by eight wickets.
■ Karnataka 354/3 in 50 overs (Ravikumar Samarth 158 not out, Devdutt Padikkal 97,	■ Madhya Pradesh 243/9 in 50 overs (Parth Sahani 68 not out, Aditya Shrivastava 52, Aditya Sarvate 3/39) lost to Vidarbha 246/6 in 48.5 overs (Ganesh Satish 47, Faiz Fazal 43, Aditya Sarvate 39 not out) by four wickets.

wickets.

HEBBAR HAMMERS TON AS ANDHRA UPSET TN
In Indore, Ashwin Hebbar

slammed an unbeaten 101 and powered Andhra to a seven-wicket win over Tamil Nadu in a Group B match.

Andhra captain G Hanuma Vihari won the toss and sent Tamil Nadu in to bat and the bowlers did very well to dismiss

the opponent for 176 in 41.3 overs.

Hebbar was in cracking form and toyed with the opposition to attack to fashion a comfortable win.

SREESANTH LEADS KERALA TO WIN

On a comeback trail after the end of his spot-fixing ban, pacer S. Sreesanth on Monday picked up his first five-wicket haul in List A cricket in almost 15 years to help Kerala pull-off a three-wicket win over Uttar Pradesh in Bengaluru.

He dismissed UP under 200 with wickets of skipper Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Mohsin Khan, Akshdeep Nath, and Shivam Sharma en route to his only the second five-for of his List A career. In reply, Kerala sealed the chase in 48.5 overs. — *PTI*