



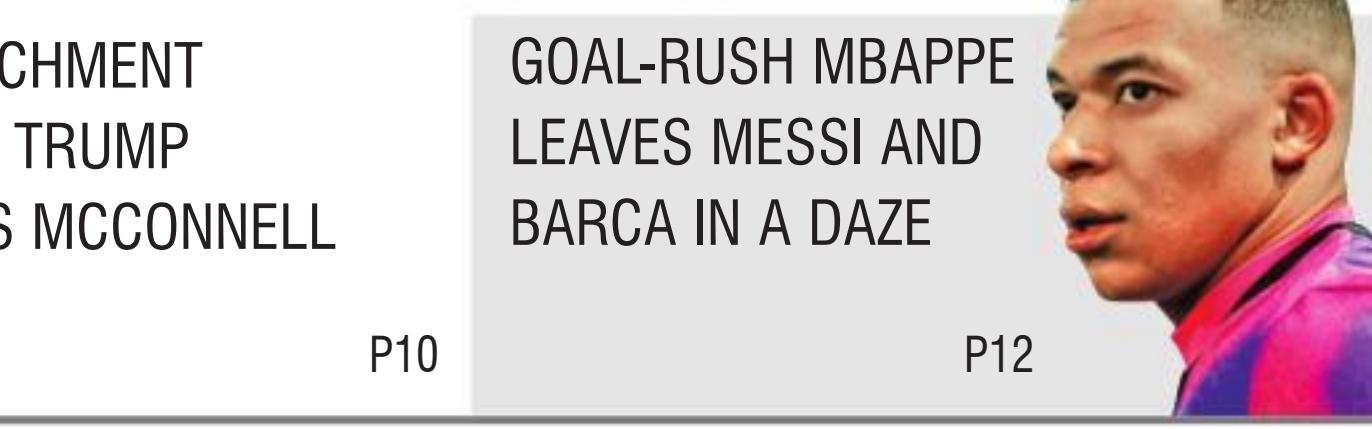
RAHUL FORGIVES
FATHER'S KILLERS



HUNTER BIDEN AND
THE ART OF THE
POSSIBLE



IMPEACHMENT
TRIAL: TRUMP
SLAMS MCCONNELL



GOAL-RUSH MBAPPE
LEAVES MESSI AND
BARCA IN A DAZE

P5

P7

P10

P12

WEATHER

Mainly clear sky. Moderate fog in the morning. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 28 and 11 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: NIL

RELATIVE HUMIDITY

Max: 100% Min: 47%

TEMPERATURE

Max: 27.2°C (+3) Min: 10.7°C (0)

SUN RISES

06:56 hrs 18:13 hrs

MOON RISES

10:44 hrs 00:10 hrs

THUMBNAILS



NSUI activists protest against the arrest of climate activist Disha Ravi, in connection with the 'toolkit' case, in New Delhi on Wednesday. ■ AGENCIES

Manufacturing push for telecom equipment: The government on Wednesday approved a 12,195 crore production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for telecom gear manufacturing in India which is expected to encourage production of equipment worth ₹ 2.44 lakh crore and create direct and indirect employment for about 40,000 people, Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said. The PLI scheme for telecom gear manufacturing will be operational from April 1, 2021.

Juvenile justice law: The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved amendments to the juvenile justice law to increase the scrutiny of child care institutions to ensure the set-up works in the best interests of children. Women and child development minister Smriti Irani told the media that district magistrates along with additional district magistrates will monitor the functioning of various agencies under the JJ Act in every district.

No Covid deaths in last 24 hours in 18 states, UTs; 100 fatalities total

SNS & PTI
NEW DELHI, 17 FEBRUARY

Eighteen states and Union Territories, including Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh, have not reported any death due to Covid-19 in the last 24 hours, the Union health ministry said on Wednesday.

The country as a whole reported 100 fatalities linked to the virus in the same period, the majority of them occurring in Maharashtra (39), Kerala (18) and Tamil Nadu (seven). India reported 11,610 fresh cases during the period, taking its tally of infections to 1,09,37,320, while the death toll now stands at 1,55,913, with the case fatality rate at 1.43 per cent. There are 1,36,549 active cases of the coronavirus infection in the country currently.

According to the Indian Council of Medical Research, 20,79,77,229 samples have so far been tested for the viral disease in the country, including 6,44,931 on Tuesday.

Nearly 90 lakh vaccine doses have been given to beneficiaries through 1,91,373 sessions till 8 a.m. on Wednesday, according to provisional data.

No fresh Covid death in Delhi: No fresh death due to Covid was logged in Delhi today - the third time single-day fatality count stood nil in the city in February - while 134 new coronavirus cases took its caseload to 6,37,315, according to the Delhi government's latest health bulletin.

The city's death toll stood at 10,894. The positivity rate was 0.22 per cent, the health bulletin said.

(SEE ALSO P2)



national oil rates plunging to a two-decade low in April/May last year. While global rates have rebounded with pick up in demand, the government has not restored the taxes, which are at a record high.

Central and state taxes make up for 60 per cent of the retail selling price of petrol and over 54 per cent of diesel.

The Prime Minister further said it was a collective duty to work towards clean and green

Toolkit case: Nikita Jacob gets transit pre-arrest bail

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 17 FEBRUARY

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday granted transit anticipatory bail to advocate Nikita Jacob, a suspect in a case registered by Delhi police in connection with the "toolkit" shared by climate activist Greta Thunberg over the ongoing farmers' protest.

Justice PD Naik gave Jacob three weeks' time to approach the court concerned in Delhi for relief.

The court in its order noted the applicant (Jacob) is a permanent resident of Mumbai and the FIR is lodged in Delhi, and the relief sought by her now is only temporary.

The court said if Jacob is arrested in the three-week period, then she shall be released after furnishing a bond of ₹25,000.

Meanwhile, Shivlal Muluk,

father of green activist Shantanu Muluk, a suspect in the "toolkit" case, told local police that two persons claiming to be personnel of Delhi Police seized a computer hard disk and other items from Muluk's home in Beed in Maharashtra without a search warrant on February 12. Beed superintendent of police Raja Ramaswami said the matter was under investigation.

Man arrested for waving swords: A 30-year-old man who was allegedly swinging swords that "motivated" the protesters at the Red Fort during the violence in Delhi on Republic Day has been arrested, police said on Wednesday.

Maninder Singh, who works as a car AC mechanic, was arrested on Tuesday near the CD block bus stop in Pitampura in northwest Delhi.

Meanwhile, Shivlal Muluk,

'Encourage students to take online exam on cow science'

NEW DELHI, 17 FEBRUARY

The University Grants Commission has asked vice-chancellors of varsities across the country to "encourage" students to take an online voluntary national-level exam to test their knowledge on 'gau vigyan' (cow science).

The 'Kamdhenu Gau Vigyan Prachar-Prasar Examination', for which there is no registration fee, will be held on February 25, and students from primary, secondary and senior-secondary schools as well as colleges can take the test being conducted by the Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog (RKA). Besides them, anyone from the general public can also take the hour-long multiple choice question-based exam that will be held in 11 regional languages and English.

The commission was constituted by the government for conservation, preservation, protection and development of cows. The exam on February 25 aims to "infuse curiosity into all Indians about cows and make them aware of the unexplored potential and business opportunities a cow can offer, even after it stops giving milk", the RKA had said in its notification for the exam on January 5.

The RKA is going to conduct the all-India online 'Kamdhenu Gau Vigyan Prachar-Prasar Examination' for students of primary, secondary and senior secondary schools, colleges, universities and for all citizens. University Grants Commission secretary Rajnish Jain said. The exam will be conducted in English, Hindi, Gujarati, Sanskrit, Punjabi, Marathi, Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil, Marathi, Telugu and Odia. PTT

Envoy greeted with shutdown in Srinagar



Envoy visit Srinagar's Hazratbal Shrine on Wednesday. ■ SNS

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
JAMMU, 17 FEBRUARY

them. The Lal Chowk that is the business hub of Srinagar also observed shutdown. No separatist or other group had called for the shutdown.

The diplomats began their meetings immediately after landing in the valley. They are scheduled to meet a delegation of officers, political leaders, civil society, journalists, traders and those connected with the tourism sector. The National Conference and PDP

have said that they were not invited to meet the envoys.

Among those in the team are ambassadors of the European Union, Italy, France, Ireland, Sweden, Belgium, Brazil, Bangladesh, and Ghana.

In January 2020 European Union chose not to send its representatives unless they were allowed to meet people freely.

The diplomats held meetings with various groups and delegations at the Sher-e-Kashmir International Conference Centre (SKICC) on the banks of the Dal Lake. They visited the Hazratbal Shrine in the heart of Srinagar and took stock of the situation.

Petrol at ₹100: Modi blames previous regimes

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 17 FEBRUARY

On a day when petrol crossed the ₹ 100 a litre mark, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said the middle-class would not have been burdened if the previous governments had focussed on reducing India's energy import dependence.

Without referring to the relentless increase in retail fuel prices, which are linked to international rates, he said India imported over 85 per cent of its oil needs in the 2019-20 financial year and 53 per cent of its gas requirement.

"Can a diverse and talented nation like ours be so energy import dependent?" he asked, addressing an online

event to inaugurate oil and gas projects in oil-bound Tamil Nadu.

"I do not want to criticise anyone but I want to say (that) had we focused on this subject much earlier, our middle-class would not be burdened," he said.

The price of petrol crossed the ₹ 100 per litre mark in Rajasthan after fuel rates were hiked for the ninth day in a row. Since India imports the majority of its oil needs, retail rates are benchmarked to international prices, which have spiralled in recent weeks.

Opposition parties, including the Congress, have criticised the price hikes, blaming it on the Modi government raising taxes to scoop out the benefit that arose from inter-

sources of energy as well as energy independence.

"Our government is sensitive to the concerns of the middle class. That is why India is now increasing the focus on ethanol to help farmers and consumers," he said. Ethanol extracted from sugarcane is being doped in petrol to reduce the requirement of imports. Currently, 8.5 per cent of petrol is ethanol and this proportion is targeted to be raised to 20 per cent by 2025, helping cut imports as well as give farmers an alternate source of income.

India, he said, is looking to cut energy import dependence as well as diversify its sources to reduce risks.

The focus now is also towards using renewable

sources of energy, which will be 2030 form 40 per cent of energy generated in the country, he said, listing measures.

Modi further said India is looking to reduce energy import dependence through capacity building. "In 2019-20, we were fourth in the world in (oil) refining capacity. About 65.2 million tonnes of petroleum product have been exported. This number is expected to rise even further." Also, Indian firms have ventured overseas in the acquisition of oil and gas assets, which provide energy security.

Modi said the nation is looking to build a natural gas pipeline grid to boost usage of the environment-friendly fuel that would help cut carbon emissions.

The exam on February 25 aims to "infuse curiosity into all Indians about cows and make them aware of the unexplored potential and business opportunities a cow can offer, even after it stops giving milk", the RKA had said in its notification for the exam on January 5. The RKA is going to conduct the all-India online 'Kamdhenu Gau Vigyan Prachar-Prasar Examination' for students of primary, secondary and senior secondary schools, colleges, universities and for all citizens. University Grants Commission secretary Rajnish Jain said. The exam will be conducted in English, Hindi, Gujarati, Sanskrit, Punjabi, Marathi, Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil, Marathi, Telugu and Odia. PTT

paper . thestatesman . com



Who has given them permission? They are threatening people. Even I am a victim. Three people came to my house including a woman and they threatened me by asking why I wasn't giving money for the temple

H D KUMARASWAMY
FORMER KARNATAKA CHIEF MINISTER

15,337 more get Covid vaccine in Capital

Number of people who got 2nd dose dipped, with Delhi seeing an overall turnout of 51 pc

SNS & PTI

NEW DELHI, 17 FEBRUARY

Over 15,300 beneficiaries received the Covid-19 shots in Delhi today while the number of people who got second dose dropped compared to the corresponding figures a day before, according to data shared by officials.

Yesterday, 15,053 people were vaccinated in the city, out of whom 2,532 were those who had got their second dose.

Today, altogether 15,337 beneficiaries got the Covid jabs, with an overall turnout of about 51 per cent spread across 300 vaccination centres, according to official data. Out of them, 1,072 were those who got their second dose today, officials said.

The vaccination drive, started on 16 January, has picked up pace in the national capital over the last several days, and last Monday 2,191 healthcare workers who had received their first shots four weeks ago,



Representational image

had got their second dose.

"Four minor cases of AEFI (adverse events following immunisation) were reported," the official said.

Under the nationwide mega vaccination drive launched on January 16, a total of 4,319 (53 per cent) health workers against a target of 8,117 were administered the shots at 81 centres across Delhi on day one. The second Covid vaccine dose is to be given to a bene-

ficiary after a gap of 28 days.

Last Saturday, a total of 13,768 beneficiaries received the Covid vaccine and second dose began to be given to healthcare workers who had received their first jabs 28 days ago.

The district-wise distribution of total four AEFI cases today, as per official data, was: Central Delhi (1), East Delhi (0), New Delhi (0), North-West Delhi (0), North East

Delhi (0), North-West Delhi (0), Shahdara (2), South Delhi (1), South-East Delhi (0), South-West Delhi (0) and West Delhi (0).

Delhi had yesterday recorded 94 coronavirus infections — the lowest in more than nine months — while its positivity rate slipped to 0.17 per cent, according to the Delhi government's health bulletin. The national capital had then reported 1 Covid-linked fatality. The city had recorded 96 coronavirus cases on 27 January, which was the lowest then in about nine months.

No death due to Covid was recorded in the city last Saturday — the second time in February when the single-day fatality count was nil. On 9 February, no fatality from the coronavirus infection was registered in the national capital after a gap of nearly nine months.

Delhi had on Monday recorded 141 Covid cases and two deaths due to this deadly viral disease, while the positivity rate had stood at 0.36 per cent.

Air 'very poor' across Ghaziabad, Noida, Faridabad, Gurgaon for third day

PTI

Noida (UP), 17 FEBRUARY

The average air quality across Ghaziabad, Noida, Greater Noida, Faridabad and Gurgaon was recorded "very poor", which may cause respiratory illness to people on prolonged exposure, for a third day in a row, according to data issued by a government agency on Wednesday.

Pollutants PM 2.5 and PM

10 also remained in the air of the five immediate neighbours of 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 24-hour AQI at 4 pm on Wednesday was 328

in Ghaziabad, 322 in Noida, 337 in Greater Noida, 307 in Faridabad and 316 in Gurgaon, according to CPCB's Sameer app. On Tuesday, it was 356 in Ghaziabad, 335 in Noida, 375 in Greater Noida, 310 in Faridabad and 302 in Gurgaon.

On Monday, it was 369 in Ghaziabad, 368 in Noida, 349 in Greater Noida, 353 in Faridabad and 306 in Gurgaon.

On Sunday, it was 416 in Ghaziabad, 416 in Noida, 402

in Greater Noida, 366 in Faridabad and 288 in Gurgaon.

The CPCB states that an AQI in the "very poor" category may cause respiratory illness to people on prolonged exposure.

The AQI for each city is based on the average value of all monitoring stations there. Ghaziabad, Gurgaon and Noida have four such stations while Greater Noida and Faridabad have two stations each, according to the app.

inches India's image and collaborated with pro-Khalistani elements.

Ravi was arrested from Bengaluru on Saturday by the Delhi Police for allegedly creating and sharing a toolkit in support of the farmers' agitation against the Centre's new agriculture laws.

The Delhi Police had said on Monday that Ravi, along with Mumbai-based lawyer Nikita Jacob and Pune-based engineer Shantanu Mukul, created the toolkit that was shared with others to tar-

'Ramani case to give more women courage to speak up against abuse'

PTI

NEW DELHI, 17 FEBRUARY

Activists and lawyers were among the scores of people to welcome a Delhi court's decision to acquit journalist Priya Ramani in the defamation case filed against her by former Union minister M Akbar, against whom she had made allegations of sexual harassment, saying the verdict will give courage to more women to speak up against abuse and exploitation.

A Delhi court on Wednesday acquitted journalist Ramani in Akbar's criminal defamation case against her over the allegations of sexual harassment, saying a woman has the right to put grievances before any platform of her choice even after divorce.

Kavita Krishnan, secretary of the All India Progressive Women's Association, said the verdict empowers women.

"Bravo #PriyaRamani. Your abuser @mjakbar hit you with a SLAP suit but you stand vindicated. Verdict empowers women, saying we should understand that sometimes a victim may for years not speak up due to mental trauma, cannot be punished for raising her voice against sexual abuse," she tweeted.

Senior advocate Indira Jaising called the verdict a big win for women.

"Congratulations to Priya Ramani and her able legal team led by Rebecca John, a big win for women in general and for her in particular. Thank you Priya for speaking up when you did. This is a big victory for the #MeToo movement," she tweeted.

Netizens also welcomed the verdict.

"A day to remember that #MeToo is not a movement. It's a consciousness about demanding and expecting safe workplaces, whether at home or outside. Women, who can, must always stand up for themselves, and for those who are unable to stand

for themselves #PriyaRamani," a Twitter user said.

Another Twitter user said the truth has prevailed. "Truth prevails. What a resounding victory for India's women, for all who spoke up and continue to do so. For Priya Ramani for refusing to be intimidated and giving courage to so many more who will continue to speak up. #MeToo #Time'sUp," another user tweeted.

Ramani had made allegations of sexual misconduct against Akbar in the wake of #MeToo movement in 2018.

Akbar had filed the complaint against Ramani on October 15, 2018 for allegedly defaming him by accusing him of sexual misconduct decades ago. He resigned as a Union minister on October 17, 2018.

He has denied all the allegations of sexual harassment of the women who came forward against him during the #MeToo campaign.

NSUI protests against Disha Ravi's arrest

PTI

NEW DELHI, 17 FEBRUARY

The National Students' Union of India (NSUI) staged an agitation here on Wednesday against the arrest of environmental activist Disha Ravi and alleged that the government is "flirting with fascistic techniques" to quell democratic protests in the country.

The members of the students' wing of the Congress raised slogans against the BJP-led Centre and the Delhi Police for the "authoritarian crackdown on activists and supporters of the farmers'

agitation".

NSUI president Neeraj Kundan alleged that the Bengaluru-based climate activist was arrested and brought to Delhi without a transit warrant.

"This government flirting with fascistic techniques of quelling democratic protests is nothing new. By waging a war against the students and youth of India, (Prime Minister) Narendra Modi's authoritarian face has once again come out."

"Only four sedition cases out of the 191 filed after this government came to power

have resulted in convictions. The government uses tough laws and misuses them to silence all dissenting voices," he said in a statement.

Ravi was arrested from Bengaluru on Saturday by the Delhi Police for allegedly creating and sharing a toolkit in support of the farmers' agitation against the Centre's new agriculture laws.

The Delhi Police had said on Monday that Ravi, along with Mumbai-based lawyer Nikita Jacob and Pune-based engineer Shantanu Mukul, created the toolkit that was shared with others to tar-

nish India's image and collaborated with pro-Khalistani elements.

The NSUI said the government has "ignored the true essence of democracy" and its "Hitlership attitude" has ruined the country's image, adding that it should look into the matters of Kapil Mishra and Anurag Thakur, who had allegedly incited violence in Delhi last year.

"We recommend the government to put these people behind the bars, instead of locking those who are supporting the farmers' protest," it said.

Classified

LEGAL NOTICES

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT
(Order 5, Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure)
In the Court of
Ms. Neelam Singh
Addl. District Judge-02
South-East District,
Room No. 615
Saket Court, New Delhi
CS - DJ/11678/2016
NOTICE
M/s. Mubarak Versus

Reshma To

M/s. Sameena, w/o Sh. Hasmeed, r/o Near Doodiyaa Peepal, Village Dasna, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh.

Also at : 64, Batla House, Jamia Nagar, Okhla, New Delhi-110025.

Ms. Maina, w/o Sh. Mubeen, d/o Haji Rahimuddin, r/o 72/4, Laxmi Nagar, Delhi-110024.

Ms. Ameena, w/o Sh. Farhad, d/o Haji Rahimuddin, r/o 72/4, Laxmi Nagar, Delhi-110024.

Ms. Saima, w/o Sh. Farheed, d/o Haji Rahimuddin, r/o 72/4, Laxmi Nagar, Delhi-110024.

Sh. Ibrahim, s/o Haji Rahimuddin, r/o T-326, Near Bismillah Medicos Khizar Baba Colony, Jamia Nagar, New Delhi-110025.

The Defendant above named.

Whereas you are intentionally evading service of summons. You are hereby directed to appear in person or by pleader on 08-03-2021 at 10:00 a.m. to the court failing which the suit/application will be disposed of ex parte.

Given under my hand and the Seal of the Court on this 15th day of February, 2021.

JSCC/ASC/J/G
(Main Building)
Patiala House Courts, New Delhi

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT
(Order 5, Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure)
In the Court of
Shreya Arora Mehta
JSCC/ASC/J/G
Room No. 21 (Main Building)
Patiala House Courts, New Delhi

Case No. : 857/2019
HDFC Bank Limited
Versus
Ashish Tiwari

To,
Ashish Tiwari, c/o Pravesh Kumar, H. No. 104-A, Jindal Colony, Samalkha Extn., New Delhi-110029

Also at : Progressive Info Vision Pvt. Ltd., c/o WIPRO Infotech, Udyog Vihar, Plot No. 480-481, Phase-III, Gurgaon-120061.

At : H. No. 21/6, STRT Chak No. 121A, Vijay Nagar, Ghaziabad-201002.

Whereas the Plaintiff has instituted above suit against you for Recovery and you are intentionally evading service of summons. You are hereby directed to appear in person or by pleader on 08-03-2021 at 10:00 a.m. to the court failing which the suit/application will be disposed of ex parte.

Given under my hand and the Seal of the Court on this 15th day of February, 2021.

Addl. District Judge-02
South-East District,
Saket Court, New Delhi

Seal of the Court

Seal of the Court

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT
(Order 5, Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure)
In the Court of
SH. RAGHUVIR SINGH
Addl. District Judge-01,
East,
Room No. 8, Second Floor,
Karkardooma Courts, Delhi
PC No. 03/2021

Sh. Pradeep Mittal, s/o Late Sh. Rajendra Mittal, r/o H. No. 188, A, P.T.A., Mayur Vihar, Phase-2, Delhi-110091
Petitioner Versus

Sh. Ibrahim, s/o Haji Rahimuddin, r/o T-326, Near Bismillah Medicos Khizar Baba Colony, Jamia Nagar, New Delhi-110025.

The Defendant above named.

Whereas you are intentionally evading service of summons. It is hereby notified that if you shall not defend the case on the 17th day of April, 2021, the day fixed for the final disposal, it will be heard and determined ex parte.

Given under my hand and the Seal of the Court on this 15th day of February, 2021.

Addl. District Judge-02
South-East District,
Saket Court, New Delhi

Seal of the Court

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT
(Order 5, Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure)
In the Court of
Sh. Sanjeev Jain
District Judge-01
Room No. 04
New Delhi District
Patiala House Courts, New Delhi

Levi Strauss & Company
Versus
Mr. Rajendra Singh

To,
Mr. Rajendra Singh, WZ-172, Durgashwar, Tadapur, Delhi-110012

Whereas abovenamed Plaintiff has instituted a suit against you. You are hereby summoned to appear before this court in person or by pleader on 08-04-2021 at 10:00 a.m. to answer the same.

Take notice that, in default of your appearance on that day beforementioned, the suit will be heard and determined in your absence.

Given under my hand and the Seal of this Court on this 08-02-2021.

Addl. District Judge-01,
East,
Karkardooma Courts, Delhi.

Seal of the Court

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT
(Order 5, Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure)
In the Court of
Sh. Sanjeev Jain
District Judge-01
Room No. 04
New Delhi District
Patiala House Courts, New Delhi
Case No. CS (Comm):
35/2020
Levi Strauss & Company
Versus
Mr. Rajendra Singh

To,
Mr. Rajendra Singh, WZ-172, Durgashwar, Tadapur, Delhi-110012



So whether it was demonetisation, hurried implementation of GST or even the Corona pandemic, they have been used to weaken the SME sector and promote one or two big entities

RAHUL GANDHI
CONGRESS LEADER

The Statesman
NEW DELHI, THURSDAY 18 FEBRUARY 2021

03

SAD, AAP go after Cong post Pb civic polls defeat

Amarinder dispensation resorted to 'state-sponsored repression' to win Punjab municipal polls, alleges SAD

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 17 FEBRUARY

With the ruling Congress sweeping the urban local body polls in Punjab, the Opposition Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) today went after the Capt Amarinder Singh-led Congress government, with the SAD alleging that the ruling party secured a win in the municipal elections by resorting to "state-sponsored repression".

In a statement, SAD spokesman Daljit Singh Cheema said that SAD candidates gave a tough fight to the Congress across the state with almost all seats witnessing a direct contest between the Congress and the SAD.

"More than 500 nomination papers of SAD candidates alone were rejected along with a couple of hundred of other parties in an attempt to make the entire election process a nomination process. This alone calls for sacking of the SEC," the SAD spokesman claimed.

He charged that the Congress had seen the writing on the wall much before the polls and "unleashed a systematic campaign of terror, intimidation, violence and murder".

Strong SAD candidates were identified in advance



tions to the municipal corporations", the SAD leader said.

"It seems the civil machinery and the Punjab Police has won the day for the Congress along with equal help from the State Election Commission (SEC)."

Reacting to these results, the AAP said the party has done well in the first-ever civic polls it contested in Punjab.

In a statement, senior AAP leader and Leader of Opposition in the Punjab Assembly, Harpal Singh Cheema, claimed that the results of the municipal bodies' elections were a "good sign" for the party.

He said the AAP's base in urban areas and its vote share have increased. "This is a good sign for the party that the Aam Aadmi Party will be even stronger in the urban

areas by 2022," he added. Cheema also said the party had some shortcomings as it contested the local body elections for the first time in the state. "These shortcomings will be rectified after self-assessment. The work would be done to strengthen the party before the forthcoming assembly elections," he added.

He said these municipal election results were encouraging for the AAP leaders, workers and sympathizers that "now the party has become stronger in rural as well as urban areas".

Cheema alleged that the farmers of Punjab were being "persecuted" by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's dictatorial attitude. He said that for the last several months, the farmers of Punjab had been agitating on the roads day and night against the Centre's controversial farm laws, but instead of acceding to their demands the Modi government was playing "clumsy tricks" to "discredit" the farmers.

He said the AAP would fight for the rights of the people against the "anti-peasant decisions" being taken by the Modi-led central government and Capt Amarinder Singh-led Punjab government.

Road safety is not just a

Himachal CS stresses on law compliance

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 17 FEBRUARY

Himachal Pradesh Chief Secretary Anil Khachi on Wednesday said compliance of law should be an integral part of one's personality and that it is everyone's responsibility to properly follow the rules to protect one's own and others' lives.

He was addressing the workshop of the State Transport Department under the National Road Safety Month in Shimla to spread awareness among people on road safety through District Youth Officers of Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan and other volunteers.

Khachi said laws had been made for the benefit of the people and disobeying the laws leads to ill-effects.

"Many road accidents take place due to human error. Besides, improvement in the construction of roads could prevent road accidents."

Road safety is not just a



HP Chief Secretary Anil Khachi participating in a workshop on road safety on Wednesday.

SNS

month-long programme but is an awareness campaign that continues throughout life," he added.

He further stated that awareness should be spread amongst people for obeying traffic rules and ill effects of over speed, drunk driving, overload-

ing etc.

Anil Khachi urged the participants to take and spread a positive message on road safety in the society.

"A good Samaritan, who extends help during road accidents, should be encouraged."

The participation of good

Samaritan would decrease the number of people losing lives in road accidents," he added.

He also urged the youth to ensure their active participation in the programmes to be organized on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee Year of the state.

The Chief Secretary also visited the painting exhibition organized by the Transport department on Sadak Suraksha-Jeevan Raksha.

He released the poster of Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan 'Catch the Rain' under the National Water Mission of the Central government.

Principal secretary Transport K K Pant, HP Institute of Public Administration director CP Verma, director Transport Anupam Kashyap, Superintendent of Police, Shimla Mohit Chawla and State Director of Nehru Yuva Kendra Samson Masila were also present on the occasion.

Guv asks HP University to focus on research & devp

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 17 FEBRUARY

Himachal Pradesh Governor Bandaru Dattatraya on Wednesday asked authorities in the Himachal Pradesh University here to ensure fulfilment of academic needs of students and also take responsibility to build their courage and ability to enable them to face current challenges.

The Governor, who is also the Chancellor of the University, was addressing the 32nd Annual Court meeting of HPU, Shimla.

He said that technology should be used to make internal processes transparent and directed the members to increase the accountability and responsibility.

He said that important



observations made by audit should be addressed in a time bound manner and serious irregularities should be addressed first.

He expressed concern over the absence of some members of the University Court and emphasized that preparation

of annual accounts and annual reports should be done in a time bound manner.

Dattatraya said that the University should focus on increasing its income and asked the varsity to lay emphasis on research and development, setting up incubation centers, start-ups and make efforts to patent the same.

He said it is a matter of concern that expenditure of University is increasing and committed liabilities are very high as compared to total income of the University, which leaves little scope for research, innovation and new projects.

He said that we should focus on three major elements which contributed to the progress of the nation including education, employment and empowerment. "The nation develops at a steady pace when the youth of the country are educated and it was the time when commitment was needed to build a strong nation with a universal image," he added and said that this was only possible when the active participation of youth was ensured.

The Governor asked to conduct academic and research activities in such a way that the student can transform into a youth who is capable of dealing with various challenges.

The Governor released the documentary HP University Present Past and Future on the 50 years completion of the University. He also released an amended version of "Kulgeet".

During the meeting, the University Court approved the Annual Accounts for the year 2016-17 and Annual Report of the year 2018-19.

Vice-Chancellor of HPU, Professor Sikander Kumar presented a detailed report on activities of previous year. He also apprised about the achievements of the University.

Registrar, Suneel Sharma conducted the proceedings.

Hostel accommodation demanded for differently abled students in HP

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 17 FEBRUARY

Expert member of Himachal Pradesh State Advisory Board on Disability and Chairman of Umang Foundation, Ajai Srivastava on Wednesday urged Education Minister Govind Thakur to ensure college and school hostel accommodation for visually impaired and other students, who cannot walk due to disability.

In a letter to the minister, he said that freshers were denied hostel accommodation. He said educational institutions have been opened after a yearlong gap, but initially only old students are being given accommodation in the hostels of colleges and schools.

Hesaid in this situation the visually impaired students and those who cannot walk due to disability will face hardships.

Srivastava quoted the case of RKMV College of Shimla

where four visually impaired girls, Shalini (Chamba), Monika (Kinnaur), Kiran (Rohru) and Priya (Sarahan) have got admission in BA. He said if are not given hostel accommodation, they would be deprived of their classes and ensuing examinations.

The same position is in all colleges and schools across the state, he added.

Srivastava said visually impaired and other severely disabled students are not able to manage in private accommodation.

He said percent seats in higher education and 4 percent seats upto twelfth standard have to be reserved for the disabled students in admission as well as hostel accommodation as per norms.

Himachal Pradesh govt okays 2 new paragliding sites in Mandi

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 17 FEBRUARY

Tourists visiting Himachal Pradesh will now be able to enjoy paragliding activities in Mandi district too as the State Tourism Department on Wednesday gave nod for starting commercial paragliding activities at two famous tourist destinations of Parashar and Sapenidhar there.

Parashar is located in Drang area and it is famous for its lake which has a rotating island while Sapenidhar falls under Siraj area of Mandi district.

Two tourist attractions are located at around 180 km and 320 km respectively from state headquarter, Shimla.

Informing about this, Mandi Tourism and Civil Aviation department deputy director Pankaj Sharma said Parashar and Sapenidhar have



Civil Aviation department will be able to start commercial operations.

"The Tourism department has trained youth of the area for paragliding activities and they will be benefited in a big way after the start of paragliding activities at these two locations.

The area has potential for adventure tourism and sports activities," he said, adding efforts will be made to develop these places on the lines of Bir Billing in Kangra district in coming days.

Mandi Deputy Commissioner Rugved Thakur welcomed the decision and said the commencement of commercial paragliding activities in the district will boost tourism activities in the district.

Besides, new employment opportunities will be created for the local youth, he added.

The committee has recommended paragliding activities here after finding both sites suitable for paragliding," he added.

Sharma further stated that the commercial tandem flights had been allowed at these sites and now the pilots registered with the Tourism and

and his living conditions and claimed that the mammal was "safe and well looked after".

After perusing the photographs, Justice Singh said that "it was clear that the hippopotamus has been provided all requisite facilities in terms of living conditions and food and other facilities".

The court also said that the photographs also show that "the hippopotamus is being treated well".

The court had passed the January 22 order to seize the hippo and also issued NBWs against the circus owner -- Riazuddin Khan -- noting that he has failed to take a stand on the issue and has not disclosed the location of the male hippopotamus since filing of the petition by PETA in 2018.

Animals rights organisation, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) approached the high court in 2018, seeking immediate seizure of the male hippopotamus.

It has said, in its plea, that the hippopotamus was imported by the Asiad Circus company from Sanjay Gandhi Biological Park in Patna in February 2015 and was being trained to give "performance illegally" and treated with cruelty.

Nadda meets Shanta



BJP president J P Nadda meets Shanta Kumar in Himachal Bhawan in Delhi on Wednesday.

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 17 FEBRUARY

National President of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Jagat Prakash Nadda on Wednesday met former Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh and former Union Minister, Shanta Kumar, in Delhi and expressed condolences over the demise of

Kumar's wife Santosh Shailja recently. Shailja died of Covid-19 on 29 December, 2020.

Nadda said Shailja was a strong and soft spoken woman. He said she was a great teacher and renowned litterateur.

He said the entire BJP was with Kumar in this hour of sorrow.

EXUBERANCE



LALIT KUMAR

Inspect facilities of trust which has custody of hippo of Asiad Circus: HC to AWBI

PTI
NEW DELHI, 17 FEBRUARY

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday directed the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) to visit the premises of a religious trust in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, where a 9-year-old hippopotamus owned by the Asiad Circus is being presently kept, and to ascertain the living conditions of the mammal and the facilities available to it.

Justice Prathiba M Singh said the AWBI inspection team, which could also include representatives of PETA India,

will thereafter file a status report indicating the animal's conditions, the facilities available to it and whether the Board had any objection to the hippo being retained by the trust.

The court also kept in abeyance, till the next date of hearing, its January 22 direction to the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animal (SPCA) to take custody of the hippo in October 2019.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for the trust, told the court that his clients were not informed until very recently about this litigation by the circus owner.

The trust also placed before the court photographs of the hippo, named chhotu by them,

and his living conditions and claimed that the mammal was "safe and well looked after".

After perusing the photographs, Justice Singh said that "it was clear that the hippopotamus has been provided all requisite facilities in terms of living conditions and food and other facilities".

The court also said that the photographs also show that "the hippopotamus is being treated well".

The court had passed the January 22 order to seize the hippo and also issued NBWs against the circus owner -- Riazuddin Khan -- noting that

he has failed to take a stand on the issue and has not disclosed the location of the male hippopotamus since filing of the petition by PETA in 2018.

Animals rights organisation, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) approached the high court in 2018, seeking immediate seizure of the male hippopotamus.

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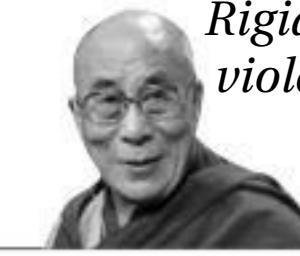
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- JANAKPUR B-1/2, Main Najafgarh Road, Opp. Metro Pillar 543
- NOIDA, Nirula's Sec-2, Near Metro Station, Sec-15, Noida, UP
- LAJPAT NAGAR, 49, Main Ring Road, Adj. Haldi Ram, Near Moolchand Crossing



Rigidity is simply a method of discipline. Whether it is violent or not entirely depends on the motive...

SPIRITUAL LEADER THE DALAI LAMA

SAYING POLICE BEING RIGID ON DUTY IS OKAY AS LONG AS MOTIVATION IS GOOD

India

THUMBNAILS



During an Ash Wednesday service at Cathedral Church in Chennai on Wednesday. ■ IANS

Major tragedy averted: A major tragedy was averted on Wednesday with the timely detection of a suspected Improvised Explosive Device (IED) planted inside a pressure cooker on a busy highway in Rajouri district of J&K, officials said. The suspected IED was found on the roadside and was subsequently destroyed by the Army's Bomb Disposal Squad, the officials said.

STATEMAN NEWS SERVICE
DEHRADUN, 17 FEBRUARY

ITBP team reaches artificial lake site, rescue operation continues

So far 58 bodies have been recovered from the flood-hit area, DRDO team to join operations soon



ITBP team members near the lake at Murenda in Chamoli. ■ SNS

A team of Indo-Tibetan Border Police reached remote Murenda, where an artificial lake was formed after the recent flash flood, in Chamoli on Wednesday. The team carried out a special operation to clear logs and minor obstacles from the lake. Earlier on 13 February, a joint team of the State Disaster Relief Force and National Disaster Relief Force had reached the lake site and provided a ground report to the state government.

After the flash flood the formation of a lake has attracted the attention of scientists, geologists and environmentalists. In a move to monitor the water level of Rishiganga a water level sensor and alarm system was installed and its successful trial was conducted recently.

According to information provided by ITBP, "Indo-Tibetan Border Police team reached Murenda where a lake was formed after the recent floods in Chamoli, Uttarakhand. The team established the base camp, selecting a location for Helipad. Another team with DRDO team to reach soon."

According to the Central Water Commission the size of the lake is 350 Mts in length, with a height of 60 Mts. The SDRF/NDRF team observed that debris has created a field of about 500-700 Mts on the front part of the lake. The team found the large patch, formed by ice, debris and boulder, smooth. With the DRDO team reaching soon, scientific study of the lake will be conducted to present an accurate picture of the situation prevailing there. High speculation prevails about the lake.

Search and rescue operation is going on at war footing in the flash flood hit areas of Tapovan and Reni villages since 7 February. Rescuers started search and rescue work in many new points on Wednesday. So far 58 bodies have been recovered from the flash flood hit area.

NTPC Limited has started releasing compensation to the affected families of Tapovan power project workers, who lost their lives in the natural disaster that hit the hill state on 7 February.

Vimla Devi, who lost her husband Narendra, was provided a cheque of Rs 20 Lakh on Monday.

NTPC has accelerated completion of all modalities to fast-track distribution of compensation; the company has decided to hand over compensation from its end to the families of its deceased workers as per ex-gratia list released by the Uttarakhand government.

Rescue operation at site is in full swing for the tenth consecutive day with extensive coordinated work being carried out by multiple agencies to reach those trapped in the tunnel.

A press release by NTPC states, "It is to be stated here that the Tapovan project had stood like a rock against the tsunami like flood and bore the brunt of nature's fury. In the process, the barrage of the project saved many villages downstream from being swept away."

SC allows Centre to file response to letter linking Chardham project & Uttarakhand disaster

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 17 FEBRUARY

The Supreme Court on Wednesday allowed the Centre to respond to the "allegations" of the Chairman of committee on Chardham project linking broadening of the road to the recent flash floods on Dhauliganga river, which damaged Tapovan hydro project in Uttarakhand.

Attorney General KK Venugopal told the apex court that he would file response to a letter of the chairman of a high-powered committee in which several "allegations" have been made with regard to broadening of the road and the recent disaster in the state.

The high-powered committee is monitoring the Chardham highway project on the widening of the roads up to Indo-China border in Uttarakhand. Venugopal said that the high powered committee chairperson Ravi Chopra has on his own written a letter to the government linking the disaster with the Chardham project.

Taking note of his submission, a bench comprising Justices RF Nariman, Hemant Gupta and BR Gavai, said "You file response to it" and listed the matter for hearing after two weeks. The strategic 900-km Chardham highway project aims to provide all-weather connectivity to four holy towns-Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath in Uttarakhand.

The Centre had urged the top court to accept the majority report of 21-members of the high powered committee recommending the road to be developed to two-lane with paved shoulders considering the strategic requirement and snow removal needs.

The Centre in its affidavit had said that pursuant to the direction of the court on 2 December, last year, the High Powered Committee (HPC) met on 15-16 December, 2020, and deliberated on the issue of width of the road. It said that the report was submitted to the top court on 31 December last.

Farooq, two NC MPs to boycott first meeting of Delimitation Commission

STATEMAN NEWS SERVICE
JAMMU, 17 FEBRUARY



2019 is palpably unconstitutional and has been enacted in disregard and violation of mandate and spirit of Constitution of India and therefore not to be acted upon".

"The Hon'ble Supreme Court has referred the petitions against the Reorganisation Act to the constitutional bench (5 judge) for consideration and to examine the Constitutional validity of the Act..", they pointed out.

They urged the chairperson not to go ahead with the meeting as the Supreme Court is yet to decide on the Constitutional validity of the Act.

The NC MPs also pointed out that the Supreme Court had upheld the amendment in 2002 of the Jammu and Kashmir Representation of People's Act 1957 that provided for delimitation of assembly constituencies after the relevant figures for the first census taken after the year 2026 were published.

Jaishankar to visit Dhaka to set stage for Modi's trip

STATEMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 17 FEBRUARY

External affairs minister Jaishankar will visit Dhaka on 4 March to do the groundwork for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's trip to Bangladesh towards the end of the month, official sources said today.

During his visit, Jaishankar will finalise with his Bangladeshi counterpart AK Abdul Momen the agenda for talks between Modi and Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

It is learnt that among other events, Modi will take part in a function on 26 March to mark the birth centenary of Bangladesh's Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the golden jubilee of the country's independence and 50 years of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Bangladesh.

A number of key accords are expected to be signed

between the two countries during Modi's visit, including those on energy and communication.

Relations between India and Bangladesh have witnessed an unprecedented upswing over the last few years.

India has sent nearly two million doses of the Covishield vaccine produced by the Serum Institute of India (SII) to Bangladesh as a gift. Commercial consignments of the vaccine were also sent later.

Bangladesh has been nudging India to quickly settle the Teesta water-sharing issue in the larger interest of the bilateral relations. However, the Modi government has clearly told Dhaka that the water-sharing deal could only be signed once there was domestic political consensus over it in India. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has still not given her approval to the proposed deal.

BKU leader: Farmers will not return home till they win

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SAMBALI (UP), NEW DELHI
17 FEBRUARY

The Bharatiya Kisan Union is fighting for farmers' rights and they will not return home from Delhi's borders till the new agri laws are repealed, the farm organisation's Haryana president Gurmani Singh Chaduni said on Wednesday.

He also said the union will hold programmes, such as panchayats and mahapanchayats, to make the country aware that the government at the Centre is "not for the people but of corporates".

Farmers, mostly from Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, are protesting at Delhi's borders against the legislations since November 28 last year and demanding these be repealed.

"We are fighting for the rights of farmers and they will not return home till they win, and time does not matter in this struggle," Chaduni, who was on his way to Moradabad for a mahapanchayat, told reporters in Uttar Pradesh's Gela village.

"This government is not for the people but of corporates and only people can fight with it. We will hold panchayats in the entire country and make people aware and associate them with us," he said, a day ahead of 'rail roko' announced by the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), an umbrella body of farmer unions which is spearheading the protest.

Chaduni alleged that the entire agri business was being given to corporates and said the farmers' movement was for their "survival".

"Agriculture is our livelihood and not our business. The food grains of the country will go into godowns of corporates and they will indulge in black marketing. This is an 'andolan' (movement) not only of farmers but of all," he said.

Farmers are protesting against the Farmers' Empowerment and Protection Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, the Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.

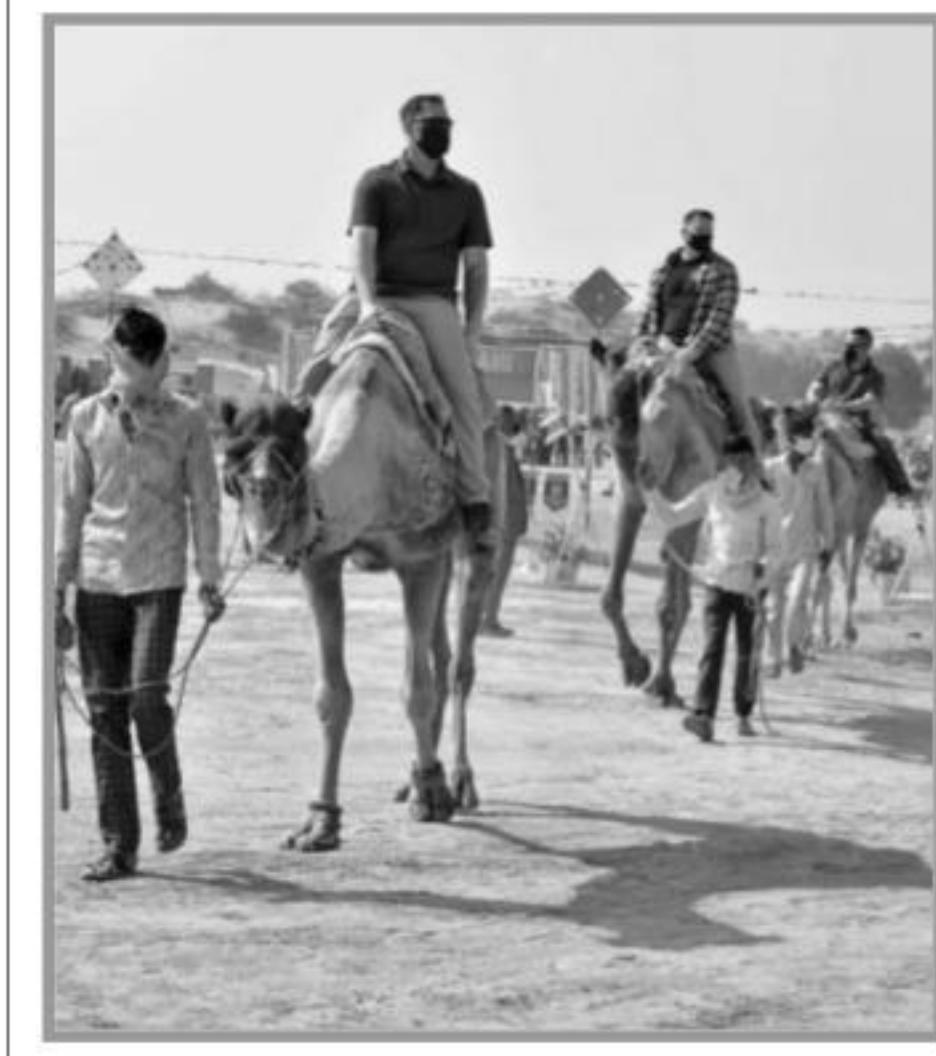
SKM says Centre trying to destroy movement

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha on Wednesday accused the Centre of trying to "counter and destroy" the farmers' movement against the new agri laws and said it has appealed for peaceful protests during the 'rail roko' agitation on 18 February.

The statement of the umbrella body of protesting unions came a day after BJP chief J P Nadda and Home Minister Amit Shah met party functionaries, MPs and MLAs from Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh in the wake of mahapanchayats being organised by farmer leaders.

During the meeting, the BJP leaders from the farm community of these states were asked to clear misconceptions about the laws, sources had said. "The (rail roko) programme will be organised from 12 p.m. to 4 p.m. in which support is expected from all over the country," the SKM said in a statement.

TRADITIONAL FERVOUR



US & Indian Army men celebrate Basant Panchami with traditional fervour in Rajasthan. ■ IANS

MLA's associate killed: A 55-year-old associate of a Congress MLA has been killed in Madhya Pradesh's Chatarpur district, police said on Wednesday. Ghaneshyam Patel's body was found by locals in a hut on his farm on Wednesday morning. A case has been registered and probe is on to ascertain the reason behind the killing.

Dalit abused in Guj for sporting Rajput like turban

AHMEDABAD, 17 FEBRUARY

It's a turban this time that has brought abusive attack on a Dalit youth in Aravalli district of north Gujarat.

The latest incident was reported from Nandasan village near Modasa town when Dalit youth Dhaval Parmar sported a 'pagdi' (turban) while leading his sister's pre-wedding procession on Monday night.

As their procession reached the village square, upper caste youth Dharamraj Chauhan stopped them saying that only Rajputs are entitled to wear such turbans. Chauhan also demanded that Dhaval should remove the turban and hand it over to him, which the Dalit youth resisted. Chauhan's father Jayendrakarsinh too joined the commotion and started abusing Dhaval Parmar for wearing the 'Rajput' style turban. Some villagers informed the police who rushed to the spot and prevented a violent clash between the two groups. SNS

Centre approves more financial powers for Dy COAFs

NEW DELHI, 17 FEBRUARY

The Union Cabinet today approved enhanced delegation of financial powers under capital procurement to levels below the Vice-Chief of the armed forces to effectively deal with the security challenges facing the nation.

As per the approval, under Other Capital Procurement Procedure of Defence Acquisition-2020, financial powers up to Rs 100 crore have been delegated to the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief at Services Command and Regional Commanders, Indian Coast Guard.

Financial powers up to Rs 200 crore have been delegated to the Deputy Chief of Army Staff/Master General Sustenance, Chief of Material, Air Officer Maintenance, Deputy Chief Integrated Defence Staff and Additional Director General Indian Coast Guard.

For the approval, under Other Capital Procurement Procedure of Defence Acquisition-2020, financial powers up to Rs 100 crore have been delegated to the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief at Services Command and Regional Commanders, Indian Coast Guard.

Quotations are invited for supply and installation of one set of "Electrochemical Work Station (Potentiostat/Galvanostat with Impedance Analyzer)". For details please visit Institute website: www.ies.ac.in and <https://e-procurement.gov.in/eprocure/app> in the CPP portal. Bid Submission end date is 25.02.2021, 06:00 PM. (A. Code DRC-T028/20-21)

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GENERAL MANAGER

Make people aware of fraudulent elements taking money in Ram's name...

MAHARASHTRA CHIEF MINISTER UDDHAV THACKERAY
TAKING A VEILED SWIPE AT THE BJP

THUMBNAILS



Tollywood actors join BJP in Kolkata on Wednesday.

■ BISWAJIT GHOSHAL

Two injured in LPG cylinder blast: Two persons were seriously injured on Wednesday morning in a cooking gas cylinder blast in Kasba area, police said. The two are undergoing treatment at a nearby hospital, a police officer said. "The gas cylinders were illegally stored inside a shanty," he said. Local people threw the two cylinders into a nearby canal, the police said. ■ PTI

BJP 'lucky draw': In 'cha chakra' of state BJP president Dilip Ghosh at Jodhpur Park, local BJP organisers distributed lucky coupons for a lottery. Ghosh picked the lucky coupons and winners were given LED lights as gifts. TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said BJP has become a circus and resorting to gimmicks. ■ SNS

48 hours after Modi, CM to take same stage

TMC's rally at the same venue is sign of a party fast losing ground, says BJP MP



Yash, many actors join BJP

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 17 FEBRUARY

The Trinamul Congress in its bid to pose a tough challenge for the BJP has this time decided to throw its gauntlet in the Sahaganj Dunlop ground where it intends to organise a public meeting of its supremo Mamata Banerjee, two days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's public meeting there.

Chief minister Miss Banerjee's rally is slated to be held at Dunlop ground within 48 hours of Modi's meetings scheduled to be held on 22 February. On Tuesday, SPG personnel, to ensure proper security ahead of Modi's visit, carried out an inspection of the ground. At the same time, TMC's Hooghly district president, Dilip Yadav, with other district senior leadership, also visited the venue to make arrangements for Miss Banerjee's rally.

Yadav said, "A massive gathering will take place at Sahaganj Dunlop ground since lakhs of people who have benefited from the many beneficiary

schemes introduced by Mama

Banerjee, will turn up to hear her addressing the people."

Hooghly MP Locket Chatterjee however ridiculed TMC for organising the chief minister's meeting at the same

for youth. "I like the BJP's youth policy, the party's concern to do welfare work for the youth, so I want to work for them. I want to work within a political system. Politician could be criticised for bad acts but one has to work within a system to change the system," he said.

Actor Prosenjit Chatterjee today ruled out the possibility of joining BJP. Yesterday BJP leader Anirban Gangopadhyay met him at his residence and gave a book on Union home minister Amit Shah's political life authored by him. Speculation was rife that he will join BJP.

Meanwhile, CPI-M leader Jakir Balluk, an elected member of the CPI-M today joined BJP. BJP MP Arjun Singh few days ago confirmed his joining. Jakir was an accused in Amdanga shootout case. He was handed the party's flag by Singh.

venue from where Modi will address a public rally. She termed TMC's decision as a sign of deterioration of the party which is fast losing political ground and emulates the BJP." ■ SNS

Won't contest poll: Chiranjeet writes to CM

KOLKATA, 17 FEBRUARY

Trinamul Barasat MLA, actor Chiranjeet today wrote to Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee declining to contest election in 2021 Assembly poll.

He clarified he was not going to switch party.

"In 2011, I declined to contest but Miss Banerjee requested me to contest the election as it was a very crucial year and we all wanted to dislodge the Left Front government. I am an apolitical person, so in sake of Trinamul Congress, I contested the election.

"In 2016, I requested her that you have won so many seats, now I should go back to my film industry. But Miss Banerjee requested me to contest the election for the second time from Barasat."

Asked when actors are either joining TMC or BJP why does he have to leave politics, Chiranjeet said, "politics is not my cup of tea. I respect Mamata Banerjee and joined Trinamul Congress for her."

JD-U to contest Assembly polls without BJP

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 17 FEBRUARY

The Janata Dal (United) today announced its decision to contest the 2021 Assembly polls in Bengal while ruling out any immediate possibility of an alliance with the BJP here despite being part of the NDA government at the Centre.

Within few days of Chirag Paswan's Lok Jan Shakti (LJS) having announced in Kolkata that it will contest all 294 seats in the Bengal polls without any alliance, the JD(U), which recently formed a coalition government in Bihar along with the BJP, today announced its ambitions to contest Bengal polls.

Addressing the Press, Bablu Mahato, chairman of the election committee of JD(U) West Bengal, said, "Bihar and Bengal have different political landscapes and hence we do not feel it is mandatory to strike an alliance with the BJP here." A party insider said JD(U) will

towards establishing a strong and permanent foothold to establish an alternative narrative that advocates for "violence-free politics in Bengal".

The JD(U) leader further added that his party is in touch with several workers from other political parties in Bengal who are "frustrated with the TMC-BJP nexus in the state that is wreaking political violence in Bengal." He added that internal schisms inside both these parties have now become apparent. Taking at dig at BJP state president Dilip Ghosh's 'Chai Pe Charcha' initiative, Mahato said JD(U) is here to do 'Kaam Pe Charcha'.

"Our leader Nitish Kumar believes that Bengal is demanding a change in power and hence JD(U) will provide its people with an alternative. We want peace in Bengal from Cooch Behar to Jhargram. Without an atmosphere of calm, no development can take place here," he said.

The number of policemen regularly posted in the

Security beefed up around CM's Kalighat residence

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 17 FEBRUARY

Security around West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee's Kalighat residence was beefed up, a day after a section of para-teachers waded into the waters of Tolly Nullah only 100 metres from the TMC supremo's house to demand for a salary hike, a senior police officer said.

Police pickets have been posted in at least seven locations.

A boat has been deployed to keep a round the clock surveillance. Personnel of DMG (disaster management group) have been deployed there to avert any chance of misadventure. Vigil from watchtowers from the Alipore Central jail has also been increased, an officer at Lalbazar said.

The number of policemen regularly posted in the

vicinity of the chief minister's house has also been increased.

The attempt by the para-teachers exposed the chinks in the security arrangement in and around the chief minister's residence at Harish Chatterjee Street.

The sensitivity of the incident had forced the commissioner of city police Soumen Mitra and other senior officers to rush to the spot. Six men and a woman were arrested from the spot.

Dilip Ghosh, president of the BJP state unit snapped at the state government for reducing the para-teachers to a point of such a low that they were being forced to wade through canal water to see their demands were addressed.

Contractual teachers have been holding a sit-in in the metropolis for more than 70 days, demanding immediate wage revision.

Shah to have lunch at refugee's home today

KOLKATA, 17 FEBRUARY

Union home minister Amit Shah will have lunch at a Bangladeshi refugee's home at Namkhana tomorrow during the last phase of the 'Parivartan yatra'.

The lunch at Subrata Biswas, a refugee's home is aimed at accuring Matua and other refugee communities' votes.

Shah will land tonight at Kolkata airport to join the yatra tomorrow. Shah will also hold a meeting with the senior leaders of the BJP at a city hotel and listen to their opinion for the last phase of poll preparation.

■ SNS

Dona Ganguly lodges plaint over fake Facebook page

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOLKATA, 17 FEBRUARY

lowing which she approached the police.

"Yes, a page using my name and Dada's (Sourav) photos has been created on Facebook. I was informed by one of my students about this. We have lodged a complaint with the police," she said.

"I should not have minded if they had used mine or Dada's photos but at times people start posting remarks which other start thinking as ours, creating confusion which I don't want to happen. Hopefully, police will help me close this fake account," she added.

Dona said that while her original Facebook account has only a few followers, the fake one has already attracted over 70,000 people to follow it.

Goyal seeks state's cooperation for impending railway projects

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 17 FEBRUARY

Projects in West Bengal, approved years ago, haven't yet seen the light of the day because of mainly land acquisition issues which can be resolved if the state government cooperates with Railways.

The minister was speaking on the occasion of inauguration of host of railway projects including Road Under Bridge (RUB) near Malda and at Manigram, five foot overbridges at Khagrachari Road, Lalbagh Court Road, Tenya, Dahaparadham and Niyalshipara stations and two foot over bridges at Sujnepara

had, has been encroached and the railway line has been implemented in patches. Such projects are a huge loss to the country and to the state of West Bengal," added Goyal.

"I would appeal all the elected representatives and the state government to support us to implement our projects in a timely and speedy manner. In the last six years, we have invested Rs 19,811 crore in West Bengal's railway infrastructure in the state. Also, Rs 710 crore was spent on passenger amenities and during this period electrification of 1040 km of tracks has been done."

Citing an example he said, a project that was started in 1974 is still stuck because of land issues. "Whatever land we

BJP pledges to probe allegations of graft in teachers' recruitment

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOLKATA, 17 FEBRUARY

An inquiry panel will be set up to probe alleged irregularities in the appointment of teachers in West Bengal if the BJP is voted to power in the upcoming assembly polls, a saffron party leader said.

BJP leader Shamik Bhattacharya said that there was not an iota of transparency in the recruitment of teachers since 2014, and the merit list released this week was no exception.

West Bengal Board of Primary Education on Monday released the state-wide merit list for the appointment of 15,284 primary teachers. The Board had earlier announced vacancies for 16,500 posts.

"Irregularities have been institutionalised by the Trinamul Congress government in the process of appointing teachers, even those on contractual basis," he alleged.

The state government, he said, should come out with

a complete merit list and not just roll numbers.

The saffron party leader also alleged that para-teachers in West Bengal are facing huge disparity in salaries as compared to their counterparts in other states.

"On this issue, we will stage a protest march from College Street to Esplanade area in the city on February 19," he added.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had recently announced a three per cent annual pay hike for para-teachers in the state budget, but they said it was not enough.

The education department had increased the salary of para-teachers at the primary level from Rs 5,954 to Rs 10,000 a month, and for those at the higher secondary level from Rs 8,500 to Rs 13,000.

A section of para-teachers on Tuesday staged a protest near the high-security zone of the CM's residence, wading into a canal to press for a salary hike.

It is to the knowledge of all concerned that the society has filed a freeze list of members to the registrar of cooperative societies delhi for verification. Objections, if any, in this respect, be brought to the knowledge of the society within 15 days in writing. Sd/- Surinder Manik (Secretary)

The Kalkaji Best Friends Co-operative Group Housing Society Ltd. H. No. 1180, 1st Floor, Gali No. 13, Gobind Puri, N. D.-19 Mob: 9811252432

BEFORE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL-II, DELHI
4th Floor, Jeevan Tara Building, Parliament Street, New Delhi - 110001
Notice under section 19(4) of the Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act 1993 read with Rule 12 & 13 of the Debts Recovery Tribunal (Procedure Rules) 1993
In the matter of OA No. 335/2020/DRT-II
KOTAL MAHINDRA BANK
Applicant
Vs
MR. SANDEEP GAUTAM
Defendants

Before Debts Recovery Tribunal - III, Delhi
4TH FLOOR, JEEVAN TARA BUILDING, PARLIAMENT STREET, NEW DELHI - 110001
Notice under Section 19(4) of the Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act 1993 read with Rule 12 & 13 of the Debts Recovery Tribunal (Procedure Rules) 1993
In the matter of OA No. 335/2020/DRT-III
KOTAL MAHINDRA BANK
Applicant
Vs
MR. SANDEEP GAUTAM
Defendants

To
D-1. SH. SANDEEP GAUTAM
C- 12, GROUND FLOOR, SECTOR - 52, ARDEE CITY GURGRAM
D-2. M/S SUPERTECH LTD.
1114, HEMKUNT CHAMBERS, 89, NEHRU PLACE, NEW DELHI
ALSO AT- SUPERTECH HOUSE, B-28-29, SECTOR-58, NOIDA-201307

Whereas the above named applicant has instituted a case against you and whereas it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that it is not possible to serve you in ordinary way. Therefore, this notice is given by advertisement directing you to make appearance in this Tribunal on 25.03.2021 at 10:30 A.M.

Take notice that in case of your failure to appear on the above mentioned day before this Tribunal, the case will be heard and decided in your absence.

Due to ongoing Pandemic situation, all the matters will be taken up through Video Conferencing and for that purpose :- (1) All the advocates/litigants shall download the Cisco Webex application/software;

(2) Meeting ID and Password for the next date of hearing qua cases to be taken by Registrar/Recovery Officer - I and Recovery Officer-II shall be available one day prior to the next date at DRT official portal i.e. drt.gov.in under the Public Notice Head.

No. 2374869.

Given under my hand and seal of this Tribunal on the 09th day of Feb., 2021.

By Order of the Tribunal, Assistant Registrar, DRT-III, New Delhi

For Registrar, DRT-III, New Delhi

SNS

Before Debts Recovery Tribunal - III, Delhi
4TH FLOOR, JEEVAN TARA BUILDING, PARLIAMENT STREET, NEW DELHI - 110001
Notice under section 19(4) of the Recovery of Debts due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act 1993 read with Rule 12 & 13 of the Debts Recovery Tribunal (Procedure Rules) 1993
In the matter of OA No. 335/2020/DRT-III
KOTAL MAHINDRA BANK
Applicant
Vs
Mr. Abhishek Kumar Jha & Ors. (Defendants)

To
D-1) M/S Mascot Homes Pvt. Ltd.
Through its directors

Having its registered address

B-22, Ghazipur, New Delhi-110096

Also at: Plot No. GH-4/B-1, Sector-16, Greater Noida - West, U.P. - 201301

Whereas the above named applicant has instituted a case against you and whereas it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that it is not possible to serve you in ordinary way. Therefore this notice is given by advertisement directing you to make appearance before this Tribunal on 04.03.2021 at 10:30 AM.

Take notice that in case of your failure to appear on the above mentioned day before the Tribunal, the case will be heard and decided in your absence.

Due to ongoing Pandemic situation, all the matters will be taken up through Video Conferencing and for that purpose :- (1) All the advocates/litigants shall download the Cisco Webex application/software; (2) Meeting ID and password for the next date of hearing qua cases to be taken by Registrar/Recovery Officer-I and recovery officer-II shall be available one day prior to the next date at DRT official portal i.e. drt.gov.in under the Public Notice Head.

(3) In any exigency qua that, the advocates/litigants can contact the concerned official at Ph. No. 2374869.

Given under my hand and seal of the Tribunal on this 5th day of Jan., 2021.

For Registrar, DRT-3, New Delhi

SNS

BEFORE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL-II, DELHI
4th Floor, Jeevan Tara Building, Parliament Street, New Delhi-110001
OA NO. 542/19 DATE: 03.02.2021
State Bank of

Telling toolkit

The arrest by Delhi Police of 21-year-old climate activist Disha Ravi in connection with an FIR on a toolkit shared online by climate campaigner Greta Thunberg in support of the ongoing farmer protests has, predictably, raised a political storm. The usual positions on the Left and Right have been reiterated as matter of course with each side painting the other as the devil incarnate. Perhaps a calmer view of the events that have unfolded would help in identifying the issue at stake which is far more telling than a mere toolkit. There certainly is a case to be made that both government and police have over-reacted. Technically, the government and its supporters can and have put forth the argument that police has acted independently in investigating a duly registered FIR and its decision to take a suspect into custody is open to judicial review. But it is no secret in India that police, especially in this case, rarely if ever takes decisive action in publicly sensitive cases without a nod from above.

More crucially, the decision on the sections under which Ms Ravi has been booked is of crucial import and here, it would be fair to say, police in general does make up its own mind based on the evidence it has gathered rather than await such granular instructions from its political masters. Further, it is entirely correct to state that neither gender nor age can be an extenuating circumstance when a crime is committed; if that argument were to be taken to its logical conclusion, no woman under the age of 22 could ever be arrested or tried for a crime. That's as far as the facts go. In terms of political rhetoric, those who endorse the ruling dispensation's worldview are clearly in sync with the majority opinion in the country. Ergo, a Union minister tweeted that if it is about fetting 21-year-olds for their courage he would rather champion Param Vir Chakra awardee Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal.

A BJP spokesperson pointed out that Ajmal Kasab was 21 too when he attacked Mumbai, and the party's social media head rubbed it in by iterating that the episode was another example of the "Left using impressionable minds as cannon fodder". But being in the majority is not synonymous with being right and there is an element of whataboutery in these statements. What, then, of the political opposition and voluntary sector which is up in arms over Ms Ravi's arrest? Their rhetoric too is par for the course ~ the Congress president and leading lights have made it about freedom of speech and speaking truth to power, the Delhi chief minister has underlined Ms Ravi's support for farmers as an alibi, and sundry online warriors have heaped abuse on the establishment for being "fascist". In a sense, this reaction sums up precisely the dangers of an echo-chamber-enabled social media discourse which is light on facts and even lighter on due diligence. Imagine if Ms Ravi, while exercising her unalienable right to dissent, had ensured she was not interacting with and/or sharing notes with pro-Khalistan networks and other extremist outfits as police alleges. Even those who disagree with her views deeply would then never have countenanced throwing the book at her.

Now the courtroom

With Donald Trump's acquittal at his second impeachment trial ~ in itself unprecedented in American history ~ there is life yet in the debate on whether the court is a more appropriate forum to hold the former President accountable than a Senate trial. The Senate proceedings, therefore, may not be the final word on whether he is to blame for the outrageous attack on the Capitol on 6 January, alleged to have been masterminded by him in the twilight phase of his administration. Hence the rather subjective reflection that while Mr Trump has merely escaped his possible comeuppance, he has indubitably been exonerated nonetheless. Well may Mr Trump take recourse to the legal option. And his next step could be the court. Now a private citizen, Trump is stripped of his protection from legal liability that the Presidency afforded him. That change in status is something that even Republicans, who voted on Saturday to acquit him of inciting the ugly developments as 2021 unfolded, are emphasising as they urge Americans to move on from impeachment. Quite the most amazing response has come from the Senate minority leader, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky. "President Trump is still liable for everything he did while he was in office, as an ordinary citizen, unless the statute of limitations has run." He insisted that the courts were a more appropriate venue to hold Mr Trump accountable than a Senate trial. "He didn't get away with anything yet," McConnell said. "Yet." On closer reflection, the insurrection at the Capitol, in which five people died two weeks before Joe Biden's inaugural, is just one of the legal cases shadowing Mr Trump in the months after he was voted out of office, last November. He also faces legal exposure in Georgia over an alleged pressure campaign on state election officials, and in glitzy Manhattan over hush-money payments and business deals. The grot has overshadowed the glitz. There is, therefore, a litigation too many pending against him. And it would be presumptuous quite yet to suggest that he lives to fight another day. What was wrapped up in five days was only the legislative judgment.

Arguably, the judicial procedure might take much longer than what appears to be a rapid-fire enquiry by the political class. But the former President's culpability under the law for inciting the riot is far from clear-cut. The standard is high under court decisions that date back 50 years. New evidence is emerging every day. Not that the plot has thickened, but it may not be readily possible to walk free from the courtroom.

The poverty battle

After more than seven decades of developmental plans and programmes, India holds the distinction of having the most numbers of poor of the world. As a result, South Asia has become the world's biggest centre of extreme poverty



In his classical work entitled *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith, the Father of Economics, in the 18th century projected India, particularly Bengal, as one of the most prosperous regions on the globe. Subsequently, economic decline began. Adam Smith attributed the beginning of the economic decline of the British domain in India to "some injudicious restraints imposed by the servants of the East India Company". The decline continued throughout the nineteenth century, along with many other changes taking place in British India. Economic descent and decline were quite relentless right into the first half of the twentieth century.

The British economic historian Angus Maddison has precisely demonstrated that at the beginning of the 18th century India's share of the world economy was 23 per cent, as large as all of Europe put together. By the time the British departed India, it had dropped to just over 3 per cent. The reason was simple: India was governed for the benefit of Britain. Britain's rise for 200 years was financed by its deprivations in India.

On the eve of the departure of the British, on 14 August 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, reminded the country that the task ahead included "the ending of poverty and ignorance and diseases and inequality of opportunity." But after more than seven decades of developmental plans and programmes, India holds the distinction of having the most numbers of poor of the world. As a result, South Asia has become the world's biggest centre of extreme poverty.

In 2010, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), an economic research centre at the University of Oxford, developed the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) to determine the incidence and intensity of poverty experienced by a given population. Besides economic poverty it looks at three other indicators namely health, education, and standard of living ~ and assesses countries based on 10 indicators (nutrition, child mortality, years of schooling, school attendance, cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing and assets). MPI 2020 says that of the world's 5.9 billion people, 1.3 billion are multidimensionally poor. About 84.3 per cent of are in Asia (530 million). According to Global MPI 2020, India is 62nd among 107 countries with MPI score of 0.213 and 27.92 per cent headcount ratio (around 364 million MPI poor).

India is well-endowed with land, good climate and plenty of natural resources. The country has also 62.5 per cent of its popu-

lation in the age group of 15-59 years which is ever increasing. The window of demographic dividend opportunity in India is available for five decades from 2005-2006 to 2055-2056, longer than any other country in the world. A vibrant and enduring democracy and the rule of law prevail here. So why does India continue to be dirt poor after more than seven decades of independence? Given the multitude of languages, cultures, customs and castes in India, the reasons for poverty in India are also numerous. An attempt is made to highlight six important reasons for the persistent poverty prevailing in India.

Social inequality: Societies cannot progress if certain sections are left out simply because they happen to be from the 'wrong' class, caste, ethnic group, race or sex. A study of the World Economic Forum (WEF) reveals that India's social inequality keeps a significant section of the population poor forever despite the country's impressive economic growth. Interestingly, according to a latest report of the WEF entitled Global Mobility Report 2020: Equality, Opportunity and a New Economic Imperative, Indians born in low-income families would take seven generations to approach even the country's median income. Some 220 million Indians are sustained on an expenditure level of less than Rs 32 per day ~ the poverty line for rural India ~ going by the last headcount of the poor in India in 2013.

Education: Education provides a foundation for eradicating poverty and fostering economic development. Adam Smith called for the public provision of education: "an instructed and intelligent people ... are more disposed to examine, and more capable of seeing through, the interested complaint of faction and sedition..." Smith argued, therefore, that the whole society is at risk when any segment of society is poorly educated. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen observed that the social opportunities "offered by market-based economic growth are severely limited in a society in which very large numbers cannot read or write or count, cannot follow printed or hand-written instructions, cannot operate comfortably in a modern industry, and so on. Inequality in basic education thus translates into inefficiency as well as further inequality in the use of economic opportunities." Education promotes economic growth because it provides skill that increase employment opportunities and income. Nearly 60 million people escape poverty if

all adults had just two more years of schooling, and 420 million people could be lifted out of poverty if all adults completed secondary education, according to UNESCO. Status India's literacy reveals an overall literacy rate of 77.7 per cent (urban: 87.7 per cent and rural: 73.5 per cent); male literacy rate of 84.7 per cent and female literacy rate of 70.3 per cent. India is paying a quite heavy price for her faulty education system. Identifying the serious inadequacy in our education system Prof Sen said: "India does have many achievements in the success of a relatively small group of privileged people well trained in higher education and specialised expertise. Yet our education system remains deeply unjust. Among other bad consequences, the low coverage and low quality of school education in India extracts a heavy price in the pattern of our economic development."

Gender inequality: The most famous saying of Jawaharlal Nehru is: 'To awaken the people, it is the women who must be awakened. Once she is on the move, the nation family moves, the village moves, the nation moves.' Woman is both a core concern and an essential part of human development. Indian social fabric is highly patriarchal which has left women significantly exploited and discriminated. If the caste-based biases work only outside home in open society, exploitation against women operates both in and out of homes. Attitude of men towards women is largely patronising. The weak status of women in society is at the root of all chronic problems which result in high mortality rate, undernutrition among children, overpopulation and lower education. All these factors are enough to feed and sustain poverty. To track progress on relative gaps between women and men on health, education, economy and politics, the World Economic Forum (WEF) publishes the Global Gender Gap report annually. India has ranked 112th among 153 countries in the Global Gender Gap report 2020.

Population: India is the second most populated country in the world with nearly a fifth of the world's population. While the growth rate of population has decreased significantly over the decade, India's current growth rate is 1.2 per cent. Around 15 million people are added every year. Population growth is likely to reduce per capita income growth and well-being which increases poverty. This apart, in densely populated nations with pressure on land, population growth increases landlessness

and hence the incidence of poverty. In the words of Jeffry Sachs: "High fertility rates, in turn, are a factor in causing the poverty trap."

Corruption: Gunnar Myrdal once commented that "the prevalence of corruption provides strong inhibitions and obstacles to development." Corruption and leakage in governmental schemes are widespread in India.

Late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had famously admitted that only about 15 per cent of government's loan subsidy actually reaches ultimate beneficiaries. Even if we discard the figure as highly pessimistic and assume that 30-40 per cent of welfare funds reach designated targets, the rest is siphoned off by people connected to the implementing government machinery.

Another common form of corruption in schemes designed for the poor is the inclusion of non-poor people with political connections in the list of beneficiaries. The end result is that the eligible poor are denied benefits. The scale of corruption has increased steadily since the economic reforms were started in 1952. Political system: Poverty rules in all polities. Even democracy does not automatically guarantee equal opportunities for people. There is enough evidence to prove that poverty and income inequalities in most democratic countries are increasing. Why are democracies so tolerant of poverty? Mainly because democracies favour direct rather than indirect attacks on poverty. Direct attacks include subsidies, job reservation, transfer of assets and benefits of poverty alleviation programmes. Does neither assuage the psychological frustrations of poverty-stricken people nor are they economically sustainable.

Indeed, democracies today are majoritarian rather than egalitarian. The middle classes, caught between the high-income group (around 15 per cent) and the working class (around 30 per cent of population), have more votes. There is no reason at all for democracy to favour the bottom 30 per cent and upper 15 per cent. Thus poverty alleviation programmes, paraded in the name of the working class, fail to alleviate poverty. Benefits are reaped by the middle class due to mismanagement and corruption. Poverty continues. Aristotle said 'poverty is the parent of revolution and crime.' Indeed, poverty eradication is an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of mankind. An integrated strategy is needed. In the words of then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, "The campaign to make poverty history ~ a central moral challenge of our age ~ cannot remain a task for a few, it must become a calling for the many ... I urge everyone to join this struggle. Together, we can make real and sufficient progress towards the end of poverty."

A MEMBER OF THE **ANN**
ASIAN VOICES

Who broke them in the first place?

The case of the two Aeta men charged under the new anti-terrorism law has become curioser and curioser after government lawyers hijacked their case at the Supreme Court, where they asked to be allowed to join those challenging the constitutionality of the law. Unknown to the National Union of Peoples' Lawyers (NUPL), which filed the petition-in-intervention for Japer Gurung and Junior Ramos, Solicitor General Jose Calida came to the second round of oral arguments on the anti-terrorism law last Tuesday with a coup of sorts. He told the Supreme Court that the two Aeta men were forced by the NUPL to sign the petition in exchange for P1,000, and were now withdrawing it.

This development, Calida told the high court, was a "supervening event that will affect the oral arguments and the resolution of this case," and he wanted to read the affidavits and present videos of the Aeta men's change of heart. But Chief Justice Diosdado Peralta cut him off, disclosing that the high court had in fact dismissed the petition. The NUPL denied forcing the Aeta men to file the petition, in which Gurung and Ramos said they were tortured and falsely accused of terrorism by the military following an alleged encounter with communist insurgents in Zambales last year.

"We would like to know when they talked to the Aetas? Were there counsels present? Why were we not aware?" NUPL chair Neri Colmenares said in objecting to Calida's manifestation.

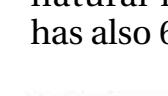
A day after Calida's manifestation, Gurung and Ramos were presented in a press conference by the National Task Force to End Local Communist

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
Armed Conflict (NTF-Elcac). Presidential Communications Undersecretary Lorraine Badoy and National Commission on Indigenous Peoples director for legal affairs Marlon Bosantog (whose job, it must be noted, is the protection of the well-being of indigenous peoples) acted as the government handlers, alternately assuaging the distraught Aeta men and coaching them with leading questions; the men confirmed they had indeed dropped NUPL and would now be represented by the Public Attorney's Office and the NCIP.

At one point, Gurung broke down and lamented their fate: "Dati ang saya-saya namin sa bundok, pagtatanum. Nung wala pang gumulo sa bundok namin, ang saya po ng mga pamilya namin. Nung nawasak na po, parang ang lungkot-lungkot na po dahil hindi na buo yung pamilya." Badoy told him: "Huwag po kayong mawawala ng pag-asa kasi meron naman pong pag-asa."

Nagsisimula na ho tayo ngayon, puwedeng mabuo yung mga nawasak at puwedeng maghilom ang mga sugar nating lahat dito... Hindi kayo mag-isaa sa laban na ito, kasama n'yo po ang buong gobyoemo dito." The hypocrisy is cruel and galling. As NUPL lawyer Bonifacio Cruz correctly pointed out, it was the government that broke these men and ruined their lives in the first place. "It's them who arrested, who tortured, who had them jailed, and who charged them under the anti-terror law," Cruz said. In their petition at the Supreme Court, Gurung said he was mauled, placed inside a sack, and hung upside down, suffocated with cigarette smoke in a plastic bag, and forced to eat his own feces to make him admit that he is a member of the New People's Army. This serious charge of torture, submitted to the Olongapo City regional trial court where the two are facing charges of terrorism and illegal possession of firearms and explosives, has not been specifically refuted, either in Calida's manifestation or during the NTF-Elcac press conference.

Disha Ravi and others charged with sedition. Yours, etc., Protush Chatterjee, Kolkata, 16 February.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

The predicament of Disha

SIR, The reason I am compelled to write this letter is a piece of information. It is about the arrest of young environment activist Disha Ravi from Bengaluru. Her crime, she took part in criticizing the government on the farmers' agitation, along with Greta Thunberg and other notable environmentalists of the World. This piece of news raises a very intriguing question in the mind - is ours a totalitarian state? Any criticism of or agitation against the government is termed anti-national activity these days and police arrest them on sedition charge. In the recent past, we know of a foreign

student studying in Bengaluru who took part in an anti-government agitation in Bengaluru. His visa was summarily cancelled for this and he was ordered out of the country. This is a dangerous trend. It only undermines the democratic set up in and out of the country. India is not North Korea or China. Our country had many problems, but freedom of speech was never attacked in the

past. I think as free citizens of a democratic country, we should have absolute freedom in criticizing the government, even take part in any global agitation against the country. These are not anti-national acts. There is difference between the country and the government. Government is not the country. In this matter I would like to refer to an incidence in USA. USA was then in the midst of Vietnam war and was getting badly criticized in and out of the country. In many Universities in USA students and faculty were regularly bringing out rallies condemning the government for atrocities in Viet-

nam. In these agitations, many foreign students also used to take part. But they were never asked to leave the country for taking part in anti-government rallies. This is what should happen in a democratic country. Through this letter I demand immediate release of

THE DANGER OF STRAY DOGS

SIR, Cases of dog-bites in Kolkata and its suburbs are increasing each day. Such reports are pouring in with regular frequency. Most of the alleys in our neighbourhood are full of stray dogs roaming around, fed and supported by local animal lovers and a few NGOs. As often as not, these dogs attack passers-by and harass kids and old people with a degree of ferocity. This is quite a difficult problem. I do not harbour any grudge against these stray dogs; I do believe that these poor animals have the right to live in this world with the love and support of a sympathetic community, whose services I cherish with deep respect and admiration. I would only suggest that these animal lovers and the NGOs should be more attentive in probing the psychological behaviour pattern of these pariahs and the reason behind their restive and aggressive ways. I believe that the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, the NGOs and animal lovers should initiate a sustainable campaign programme, outlined by experts. This can minimise the woes of the people who are exposed to the whims of the hostile dogs. Also necessary is a proactive, comprehensive and prophylactic sterilising programme by the departments concerned in order to curb the soaring reproductive pattern of the canine population. Operational activities in this respect have slackened miserably.

Yours, etc., Biswanath Chaudhuri, Kolkata, 12 February.

SUNIL SHARAN

An actress goes on the casting couch, that is she sleeps for roles. She becomes rich and famous. Other women have more compunctions. They wither on the vine.

The actress has learned a powerful lesson. There is a side door to everything. She has college-bound kids now. She'll just bribe college admissions officials to get them in. Into Yale, other Ivy Leagues, Stanford, the creme de la creme. What she doesn't realize or doesn't care to realize is that every seat her undeserving kids take, another meritorious candidate is denied.

There is a US Senator called Josh Hawley. He is a Republican from the state of Missouri. Hawley wrote a book. One of the premier publishers in the US, Simon and Schuster, picked up his book. The book is something about Big Tech and how evil it is. Republicans are furious that Twitter bounced their godman from its platform. It's unclear what qualifications Hawley has to write the book, or to even be a writer.

Maybe it's one of those ghost-written deals. If you are in the business of publishing, you will note that ghostwriters are everywhere. It's a lucrative profession. So many senators want their book published. The publishing house doesn't care about the quality of the book or that someone else other than the purported writer wrote it. The senator has name recognition. The book will sell. That's all that matters to the publisher.

Ever wonder why despite being a native English speaking country America produces such few quality writers in English. Senators like Hawley push out quality writers who may not have the platform that they do. So America produces junk in massive quantities.

Came January 6 this year. The US Capitol was attacked by hordes of white supremacists, KKK members, QAnon members, Proud Boys and the rest of them. Their godfather had been thrashed fair and square in the elections and they didn't like it one bit. Five or six people died in the insurrection. The white boys threatened to kill vaunted members of Congress. These members of Congress were Hawley's colleagues.

What was Hawley busy doing during the insurrection? He was raising a fist in public in support of the

Hunter Biden and the art of the possible

proud boys. Simon and Schuster pulled his book. But another major publisher, Regnery, snapped him up. Regnery says that it is against cancel culture, so that's why it is publishing the book. It feels that anybody should be allowed to say anything. For four long years, the godfather was spewing hate on Twitter. It was only when Twitter could not spew his hate any further that it blocked him. Otherwise it benefitted from his hate traffic all these years. Facebook too.

White supremacy is a rotten ideology. Joe Biden campaigned against white supremacy and won the election. What are the two things one notices about Biden? One, that his life has been consumed with tragedy. And second, it's that stutter. As someone who has his own disabilities, you can't help but relate to that stutter, and how a man with such an impediment since childhood overcame it to win the most powerful office in the world, even to get to where he has had to think about his stutter every second of every day.

That's what makes Biden so endearing. That's why you wish he completes his first term in rude health, and the second one as well. Time alone will tell. But let it be known. People voted for Joe. For Joe alone. For Joe alone has the stutter. They didn't vote for Jill or Hunter or Kamala or anyone else. All of them are baggage that Joe has carried with him to the White House.

People were so fed up with the godfather that they forgave the perceived transgressions of Joe's son, Hunter. Hunter has a drug addiction that he is battling, as his father confessed so directly on the campaign train. No matter, many people have addictions, many for no fault of their own. Hunter could be one of them. While Joe was vice president, Hunter got a board seat at Burisma, a Ukrainian energy company, which paid him in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. It's unclear what Hunter's qualifications were to sit on the board of an energy company. The general feeling was that Hunter would keep a very



low profile during Biden's presidency. But that is not proving to be the case. Suddenly Hunter has discovered the artsy-fartsy within himself. His art will go on display at a prestigious New York gallery this year. Simon and Schuster (them again) are publishing his book, which can only be described as Hunter's musings. Now all of us will get to benefit from Hunter's pearls of wisdom. US press secretary Jen Psaki was asked about Hunter's dealings with a Chinese company. She responded that he was a private citizen and that the question was best posed directly to him. Is Hunter a private citizen? As the president's son,

which he has become for no reason other than the grace of God, Hunter finds himself at the apex of Washingtonian glitterati. There is no elite like the Washington elite. They truly believe that they rule the world. And Hunter rules them now. So his paintings sell now. His books do too. In about two weeks into the Biden presidency, he has become a Renaissance man. And you, the writer? You have been dredging it out for 11 long years, trying to build your platform. Is it a million people now? Half a million? Two million? It's hard to say. The Internet is fickle with numbers. But your platform is never large enough for the

Simon and Schusters and the Regnerys of the world. You, the writer, you are not a notorious fist-pumping senator supporting an assault on your own office, against your own colleagues. Now you, the senator, want to become president in 2024. Make sure to highlight your white power salute. And you, the writer, you are not the drug-addled son of a president. For he is not a private citizen when art galleries and publishers rush to his door. He is only a private citizen when he has shady deals to conceal.

The writer is an expert on energy and contributes regularly to publications in India and overseas.

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

Dr. G.D. Hale Carpenter, who was sent by the Tropical Diseases Committee of the Royal Society in 1910 to study the tsetse fly in Central Africa, has just published a full account of the observations which he carried out on the islands in the north-west portion of Lake Victoria from the date of his going out till the outbreak of war. At the close of last century these islands supported a thriving population. Sleeping sickness became epidemic in 1901, and caused such havoc to the population that in 1907 the Government removed the remnant of the people from the islands in order to save them from extinction. Yet one of the facts which have been ascertained about these islands is that, apart from the sleeping sickness, they are exceptionally healthy. Malaria mosquitoes are rare, and the ticks that infest cattle on the mainland are also unknown. It appears that the natural host of the "human" parasite of sleeping sickness in that region is the sitatunga antelope, and one result of the depopulation of the islands is that these antelopes, being good swimmers, have invaded several islands where they were previously unknown and have carried sleeping sickness with them. The tsetse fly, however, feeds on other animals as well. It bites the crocodile, avoiding its scaly skin but choosing an eyelid as the site of its operations. It also feeds on the Varanus lizard, an amphibious creature that grows to a length of six feet.

NEWS ITEMS

DISPUTE OVER SIKH TEMPLE

Mohan Singh, trustee of the Burra Sangat Sikh temple at Cross Street, made an application before the Chief Presidency Magistrate on Friday, in connection with the management of the temple. He stated that the Sikh temple was consecrated over 250 years ago, and the worship of the Granta Sahib had been carried on with customary dignity and in accordance with recognised rituals. Lately, however, a section of the local Sikhs, consisting of motor-drivers and businessmen, had combined to take forcible possession of the Guru Darbar. In December last, these men met in the temple premises and bought down the Granta Sahib from its pedestal. They also passed informal resolutions removing the present trustees. He asked that these men should be bound over to keep the peace.

VICTORIA INSTITUTION FOR GIRLS

The annual prize-distribution of the Victoria Institution for Girls took place yesterday afternoon in the University Institute Hall before a large gathering of parents and friends. The Hon. Mr. P.C. Mitter, the Education Minister, presided and Mrs. Mrinalini Sen gave away the prizes. Among those present were the Dowager Maharani of Mayoorbhanj, with her little son and daughter; Mr. Spry, the Reforms Commissioner; and a large number of Indian ladies. The annual report recorded good all-round progress during the year. Mr. P.C. Mitter after congratulating the school on its excellent achievements, said that he was glad to find that in that institution the girls besides being given a general education which would make their minds cultured were being taught useful domestic duties.

UNDER BOLSHEVIK RULE

Reliable information shows that the conditions prevailing in those parts of Turkistan which are under Bolshevik rule are becoming more pitiful every day. In October a very miserable state of affairs was reported to be prevailing at Samara. The population was keenly in want of food and clothing, while the inhabitants lived under fear of merciless repression. In Fergana, as is well-known, the Bolsheviks are forcibly conscripting all males of military age, no matter to what race they belong. Worse still from the point of view of the civil population are the merciless exactions. Ten per cent of all grain, 30 per cent of all cattle and sheep are taken, in payment for which a sum is given which does not even cover transport expenses.

COFFEE PLANTING IN UNITED PROVINCES

In the Planters Chronicle, Messrs. Volkart Bros, draw the attention of planters to the possibilities of coffee planting in the Central Provinces on the assurance of Mr. Best, Forest - officer of Melghat Division at Chikalda. They state that the Government would be quite prepared to give forest land to intending coffee planters in Melghat district on very advantageous terms. Mr. Best believes that the ground could be had at a rental of a rupee per acre, for a period of five to ten years with a revision of rates after this period. This year he hopes to get as much as Rs 300 per acre.

Rich must share surplus vaccines

ROBIN COHEN

In a number of wealthy countries, the number of Covid-19 vaccines ordered vastly exceeds what's needed, while many poorer countries will have to wait – possibly for years – for vaccines to become widely available. If these rich countries' orders are fulfilled, what will happen to the excess vaccines? Will they be wasted, traded to the highest bidder, or allocated free or at cost to those poorer countries where Covid-19 is stillraging?

Lamenting many countries' lack of access to vaccines, the director-general of the World Health Organization (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, has described the world as being "on the brink of a catastrophic moral failure". Wasting these over-ordered doses would compound this accusation many times over.

Ordering so many vaccines is not in itself immoral. It was completely reasonable that those in charge of procurement in countries such as the UK and Canada ordered a wide portfolio of vaccines. There was no way of knowing which would meet regulatory approval.

The speed of development, as well as the relatively low number of failures, has also been unexpected, producing a good number of potentially viable vaccines in a short space of time. Nonetheless, Covid-19 vaccine development cannot be considered a success until this redistribution issue is resolved.

The Duke Global Health Innovation Center in the US is tracking how many vaccine doses each country has



while Canada has ordered 188 million full vaccinations for its 32 million adults (an excess of 156 million).

Of course, these surpluses will change as fresh data emerges. New orders will be placed, some may be cancelled, and vaccines still in development could fail during testing.

Note that I've focused on Canada, the UK and the EU for a few reasons. While they aren't the only nations to have over-ordered, this group of countries engages significantly with the WHO and with international development issues more generally. Civil society organisations in the field of global justice are also active in holding these governments to account, so there's a much greater

likelihood that they will develop policies for redistribution.

Much will rest on the goodwill of governments and the nature of their contracts with vaccine makers.

It could be argued that vaccine hoarding by governments is sensible, considering the possibility that annual or periodic vaccinations may be needed. However, the expiration dates on vaccines and the likelihood that vaccines will need to be tweaked to handle new variants suggests that hoarding is irrational.

Some contracts may also allow for over-ordered batches to be deferred or cancelled, but this is unlikely to make the problem of excess vaccines disappear completely. Also, unused vaccines that have nearly expired, or those less effective in some parts of the world in the face of mutated variants of the virus, might suddenly become available for redistribution in large quantities.

Several international agencies could help with the redistribution, including the WHO, Gavi and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations. But perhaps the most obvious redistribution route is the Covid-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility – known as Covax. This was set up specifically to share COVID-19 vaccines fairly around the world. It has already made progress in ordering new vaccines and planning their initial distribution, but it has yet to clarify how it would redistribute any surplus vaccines donated to it.

Covax also has no power to compel states to share their surpluses with it. The decisions of individual governments will therefore be crucial. It

appears that the European Commission has decided to leave redistribution to individual countries. Norway, for instance, has committed to sending its surpluses to Covax. Canada has said it will do likewise. Other decisions are in the balance. It's possible that vaccine surpluses may be used instead to placate near neighbours or to advance foreign-policy goals. Spain, for example, announced on 19 January 2021 that it will sell 30,000 excess doses to Andorra at cost.

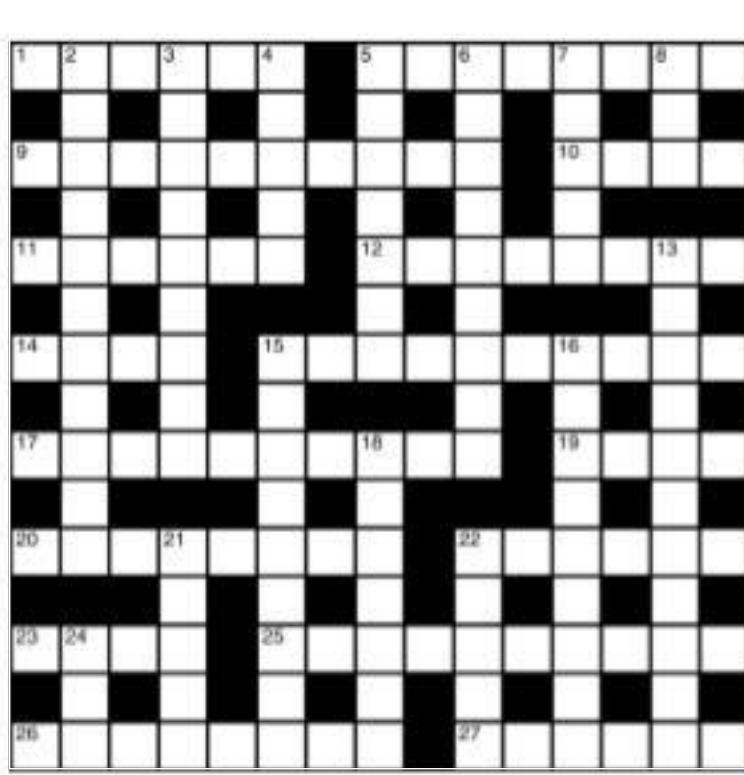
For countries that don't hand their surpluses to Covax, a more positive approach would be for redistribution to be led by need. If this were the case, the next step would be to identify where vaccines should be sent. Two targets suggest themselves: places where infection is high and places home to displaced people, such as in Yemen, Syria, South Sudan and Bangladesh, where it is difficult to socially distance and medical supplies, hand sanitiser and PPE are often lacking.

Finally, surplus vaccines requiring intense cold storage will be harder to distribute, as not all countries will have the necessary infrastructure. One innovative idea could be to use international airports in recipient countries as "coolports", with freezers installed and all approved vaccines administered from there. However, it might be easier to simply redeploy vaccines with easy storage requirements to countries where cold storage is difficult. To some extent, redistribution may end up being driven not by need or politics, but by logistics.

The writer is Emeritus Professor, Development Studies, University of Oxford. This article was published on www.theconversation.com

NO 28829

CROSSWORD



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

WOOLGATHERING	N U T E U E
KNOCKER	R U B B I S H
CUFF	K A R A T E C H O P
SPREE	S C O O B Y D O O
T	D E U A C
A T O N E M E N T	N A D I R
R B S M	D O A
THEATRICAL	P S S T
E L R N I R S E	
RAILING	O V A R I E S
S A L L M E	
SKINNYDIPPERS	

ACROSS

- 1/5D/13 See rough-and-ready hospital boss met misguided WHO man (6,7,11)
- 5 Chance one day to cut stress (8)
- 9 Much ado about Republican as dystopian leader (3,7)
- 10 Cleans out bottle (4)
- 11 Drive out in attempt to cross North Island (6)
- 12 Wanting coin? Twas ever thus (2,6)
- 14 Bottomless river with source in Pennines (4)

DOWN

- 15 Seize public land we're told, and forest creatures (10)
- 17 Hackneyed article about studied line in music? (10)
- 19 Buckle after fighting pressure (4)
- 20 Perks up when embracing chum in the Six Counties? (8)
- 22 Dogs unleashed possibly taking steamship around carrier (6)
- 23 Whisky certainly available here over bar (4)
- 24 One tends to watch crazed girl shoot, having source in Pennines (4)
- 26 Brave upstanding character died after Pinter plays (8)
- 27 Prize tree and fertiliser (6)
- 28 Shakespeare's age when he wrote Hamlet? (11)
- 29 Dish Jewish leader initially put in hamper (6,3)
- 30 Don't talk about fate or sin (5)
- 31 See 1 Across
- 32 Rail about dissolute fellow's sentimental at first (9)
- 33 Deity elevated old woman showing blind (10)

DOWN

- 8 Fortune Truss keeps after taxes (3)
- 13 See 1 Across
- 15 Time served in rebel vessel for training (9)
- 16 Unqualified and not working properly (9)
- 18 Certain country backed deporting one journalist (7)
- 21 Carla gutted to leave Mediterranean island, but no big deal (5)
- 22 Old country girl needing surgery (5)
- 24 Man-mountain? (3)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

THUMBNAILS

T-Serv launched by Toyota Kirloskar Motor on Wednesday announced the launch of a pilot project, 'T-Serv', here in partnership with multi-brand service outlets. The initiative is in line with the evolving Indian automobile market, which is witnessing rapid changes in customer ownership and service behavioural patterns, Bengaluru-headquartered TKM said. PTI

Centre clears food processing projects: The Union Food Processing Industries Ministry on Wednesday said it has cleared 20 projects worth Rs 363.4 crore under two central government schemes. The government will provide a grant-in-aid of Rs 102.91 crore for these projects. PTI

ICICI Lombard & Flipkart: E-commerce company Flipkart has partnered with ICICI Lombard to offer 'Group SafeGuard' insurance, a group insurance policy to its consumers. Group SafeGuard is a benefit offering that allows consumers to avail a pay-out of hospitalisation. PTI

Govt to infuse ₹1,500 cr into Exim Bank next fiscal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 17 FEBRUARY

The government has decided to infuse Rs 1,500 crore capital into state-owned Export-Import Bank of India (Exim Bank) in the next financial year.

The amount is Rs 200 crore higher than the provision made by the government for the current fiscal. The government has earmarked Rs 1,300 crore capital infusion for the bank.

"The (Rs 1,500 crore) provision is for Exim Bank as equity support/ subscription to increase the paid up capital of the bank to the level of its authorised capital," as per the Budget documents presented in Parliament earlier this month.

The government doubled the authorised capital of the

Govt to remove regulations from IT industry: PM Modi

The decision will strengthen the technology startup ecosystem and Aatmanirbhar Bharat mission'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 17 FEBRUARY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday underlined the role of the IT sector in bringing about transparency in governance even as he assured players in the IT industry of his government's resolve to remove unnecessary regulations from the sector.

Modi's remarks came at the beginning of the two-day conclave NASSCOM Technology and Leadership Forum (NTLF) via video conferencing being organised by the NASSCOM.

Talking about centrality of transparency in governance, the Prime Minister noted people's growing trust in the government. He said that governance has been brought to dashboard from the files for proper monitoring by the citizens. He also mentioned improvement in process and transparency in government procurement through GeM portal,' a PMO note quoting Modi said.

"Think how you can create institutions that will outlast this century. Think how you can create world class



stressed the need for use of technology in governance. He gave examples of geo tagging of infrastructure products, houses of poor and such projects so that they can be completed on time. He talked of use of drones in mapping village households and reduction in human interface to improve transparency especially in tax related matters,' the PMO note further added.

Modi exhorted the startups to create products with global benchmarks and create institutions that would outlast the present century.

"Think how you can create institutions that will outlast this century. Think how you can create world class

products that will set the global benchmark on excellence,' the Prime Minister said. He asked the tech leaders to emphasize imprint of Make for India in their solutions. He called upon them to establish new parameters of competitiveness to maintain momentum and Indian technological leadership. He also stressed on the culture of excellence and institution building.

Modi further asked the startups to think about giving world class products and leaders in the run up to 100 years of Independence in 2047. 'Decide your goals, Country is with you,' the Prime Minister added. He said it was the

responsibility of the tech industry to give proactive technological solutions for 21st century challenges to India. He asked them to work for solutions in water and fertilization requirement of agriculture, health and wellness, telemedicine and education and skill development.

Referring to his government's various initiatives Modi said steps like National Education Policy and Atal Tinkering labs and Atal Incubation Centre had been promoting skills and innovation. He said such efforts also needed industry support. He called for paying attention to the outcomes of their CSR activities and pushed for focusing the activities towards backward areas and digital education.

He sought to draw the attention to the opportunities that are emerging in tier-2 and tier-3 cities for entrepreneurs and innovators.

The Prime Minister said his government was taking steps to remove regulations from the IT industry. 'Government is aware that restrictions are not conducive for the develop-

ment of the future's leadership. The Government is working to free the tech industry from unnecessary regulations,' Modi said.

He listed the steps taken by his government such as National Communication Policy, policy to make India Global Software Product Hub and Other Service Provider' (OSDP) guidelines which were issued during Corona period. He noted that inclusion of Information services into 12 champion service sectors has started bearing fruit. Recent liberalization of maps and geospatial data will strengthen the tech start up ecosystem and the wider mission of Aatmanirbhar Bharat, he added.

'Young entrepreneurs should have the freedom to leverage the new opportunities.'

The Government has full faith in the start up and innovators. Steps like self-certification, use of IT solutions in governance, data democratization through Digital India have taken the process forward,' the Prime Minister further said.

'Employers keen on hiring freshers across job roles'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 17 FEBRUARY

continues to be on a strong growth trajectory. For the period February-April 2021, freshers hiring intent has improved by 2.5 times from the lockdown period and as the economy opens up, it is expected to go up further," said TeamLease EdTech founder and CEO Shantanu Rooj.

Rooj further said that "apart from the buoyancy, what stood out was the growing focus on specialised skills that employers expect from fresh job entrants".

Out of the 90 job roles that corporates are looking at hiring freshers, over 65 percent are the ones that require specialised skills, Rooj added.

As per the findings, employers expect freshers to be equipped with domain skills like product and service advertising, data analytics, web and mobile app development, and spreadsheet skills. Additionally, according to the report, employers also expect freshers to possess soft skills like reasoning, analytical thinking, complex problem solving, active learning and critical reasoning. The courses that freshers can look at to improve their employability are automation, software development and graphic designing.

India to be among fastest growing emerging economies in FY22

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 17 FEBRUARY

S&P Global Ratings on Wednesday said India will be one of the fastest growing emerging market economies with a 10 per cent growth in the next fiscal, and future sovereign rating action would hinge on lowering fiscal deficit and sustaining debt burden.

S&P Director, Sovereign & International Public Finance Ratings, Andrew Wood said the forecast for India in 2021 is on stronger side and shows that a lot of economic activity, which was frozen last year, is coming back on line to normalisation thereby brightening the growth prospects, as well as structural strengths of Indian economy coming back to the fore.

"India will be one of the fastest growing economy in the EM (emerging market) space. India's contraction this year was steep and may be deep-

er than global average, but bounce back of 10 per cent that we are expecting next fiscal year will be putting India amongst the fastest growers in 2021 and more importantly we see Indian economy growing at 6 per cent over medium term, may be slightly higher, and that compares very well to EM all around the world," Wood said in a webinar on India outlook for 2021.

S&P said India's economy has stabilised over recent months, with progressively better manufacturing, services, labour market, and rev-

enue data. The hard part will be converting these trends into a sustained recovery over the next few years.

India has exceeded its fiscal deficit target of 3.5 per cent in the current fiscal by a wide margin due to higher spendings to stimulate economy amid the pandemic.

For the next 2021-22 fiscal, the deficit has been put at 6.8 per cent of the GDP, which will be further lowered to 4.5 per cent by 2025-26 fiscal ending March 31, 2026.

"Vast economic growth is crucial and critical for maintaining those deficits at those rates financing them and keeping debt stocks from rising even further. If that were to the case if the economy were to recover at a much lower pace than expected we would have additional concerns regarding the sustainability of those fiscal accounts," Wood added.

S&P currently has a 'BBB-' rating on India, with a stable outlook.

To a query on what could put downside pressure on ratings, Wood said, "If we have a much lower than expected recovery, slower nominal GDP growth, that would be a concern. If economy is not growing quickly then fiscal deficit would be lot higher and debt stock could be rising rather than stabilising. That would entail high government deficit and higher general government debt stock which could cause us to question the sustainability of India's public finances."

India's general government debt/GDP ratio, which stood at 72 per cent in 2019, has risen to around 90 per cent. On the banking sector, S&P said large capital raising would bolster bank balance sheet and expects capital infusion in state-owned banks to be sufficient to support credit growth.

Lodha Developers files draft papers for ₹2,500-cr IPO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 17 FEBRUARY

Reviving its IPO plan for the third time, realty major Lodha Developers has filed draft papers with market regulator SEBI for its proposed initial public offering to raise around Rs 2,500 crore, according to sources.

Mumbai-based Lodha Developers Ltd, which has been renamed as Macrotech Developers, filed the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) with the Securities Exchange Board of India (Sebi) late on Tuesday.

This would be the third attempt by Lodha Developers to launch a public issue and list its shares on the stock exchanges.

The company had filed its DRHP for the first time in September 2009, to raise about Rs 2,800 crore. It had received Sebi's nod in January 2010, but later shelved the plan due to



bank from Rs 10,000 crore to Rs 20,000 crore in 2019.

Xim Bank is the principal export credit agency in India and the capital infusion will give an impetus to new initiatives such as supporting Indian textile industry, likely changes in the concessional finance scheme, likelihood of new letters of cred-

it in future in view of the country's active foreign policy and strategic intent. Established in 1982, the bank primarily lends for exports from India, including supporting overseas buyers and Indian suppliers for export of developmental and infrastructure projects, equipment, goods and services from the country.

Govt approves over ₹12,000 cr for manufacturing telecom equipment

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 17 FEBRUARY

The government on Wednesday approved a 12,195 crore production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for telecom gear manufacturing in India, a move that will position the nation as a global powerhouse for production of such equipment ahead of 5G roll-outs.

The PLI scheme for telecom gear manufacturing, will be operational from April 1, 2021.

It will lead to incremental production of around Rs 2.4 lakh crores with exports of around Rs 2 lakh crores over five years. The scheme is expected to bring investment of over Rs 3,000 crore and generate huge direct and indirect employment and taxes both, an official release said.

The scheme is expected to offset huge imports of telecom equipment worth more than Rs 50,000 crores and

Briefing reporters after a meeting of the Cabinet, Communications Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said that the government is positioning India as a global powerhouse for manufacturing, and has created a conducive environment for ease of doing business.

"Cabinet has approved PLI for telecom sector...to ensure further progress of Make-in-India in telecom equipment space...5G equipment will also come...so it was important to give incentives."

We held widespread consultation with stakeholders," Prasad said adding that the scheme also aims to promote MSMEs in 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'.

The scheme is expected to offset huge imports of telecom equipment worth more than Rs 50,000 crores and

reinforce it with Made in India products both for domestic markets and exports, the release said.

The new scheme has an outlay of Rs 12,195 crores over five years, and its eligibility will be subject to achievement of a minimum threshold of cumulative incremental investment and incremental sales of manufactured goods.

The incentive structure ranges between 4 and 7 per cent for different categories and years. Financial Year 2019-20 will be treated as the base year for computation of cumulative incremental sales of manufactured goods net of taxes, the release added.

Minimum investment threshold for MSMEs has been kept at Rs 10 crores and for others at Rs 100 crores.

Labour minister to launch software for 5 surveys

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 17 FEBRUARY

Labour Minister Santosh Gangwar will launch software applications for five all India surveys, including on migrant and domestic workers on February 18, the labour ministry said on Wednesday.

Gangwar will also release instruction manuals with questionnaire for five All India Surveys being con-

ducted by the Labour Bureau, the ministry said.

These five surveys being undertaken by Labour Bureau are All India Survey on Migrant workers, All India Survey on Domestic Workers, All India Survey on Employment Generated by Professionals, All India Survey on Employment Generated in Transport Sector, and All-India Quarterly Establishment based Employment Survey.

The objective of the All India Survey on Domestic Workers (DW) would be to estimate the proportion of Domestic workers in the workforce by major states and all-India and percentage distribution of these Domestic workers or households that employ them by important socio-demographic key characteristics.

The survey on migrant workers is aimed at finding the estimated number of migrant workers in India and also collecting information on their living conditions, working conditions and other socio-economic conditions.

The objectives of all-India survey on employment generated by professionals are essentially two-fold, firstly to estimate the total number of active professionals in the country and secondly to capture the employment generated by these professionals.

Hyundai to focus on electrification of cars in India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 17 FEBRUARY

Bullish on the long-term growth prospects of the Indian auto industry, South Korean auto major Hyundai aims to focus on various aspects like electrification, connected features and autonomous technology as part of its future product strategy in the country, as per a top company official.

The automaker, which has completed 25 years in the Indian market with over \$ 4 billion investment so far, also plans to enhance digitisation across its all business verticals and focus on mobility services like subscription, hailing and sharing verticals to fuel future growth in the country going ahead.

As an OEM, we are preparing various steps for the market depending upon the market dynamics. We will continue to bring in advanced technologies and models in this market, Hyundai Motor India Ltd (HMIL) MD and CEO SS Kim told reporters in an interaction.

He noted that customer convenience remained at the centre of its business plans.

Mobility services, electrification, connected features and autonomous technology will define our future direction in the country, Kim said.

Elaborating on the company's plans regarding the electric vehicle segment, he said it remained the automaker's number one priority.

As we are aware that electrification is one of the top pri-



orities of the Indian government, so we strongly believe that it is our responsibility as well to move in that direction... We have proven technology in this vertical so we are reviewing technologies and products

that would be best for the Indian customers, Kim noted.

He noted that there has been no delay in the development process of the low-cost EV, which it plans to launch in the country in the next 2-

3 years. When asked about the domestic sales scenario, Kim noted that it would take the industry 2-3 years to reach back to the pre-COVID volume levels.

He said that uncertainties still prevailed in the market and therefore it was uncertain to predict the future.

He noted that the company remained positive about the long-term growth prospects of the Indian auto industry.

We are quite positive about Indian market because of low penetration of vehicles as compared with other countries. Besides the government is investing huge amounts on infrastructure development so we believe that in 2-3 years we could reach to the pre-COVID lev-

els. We are cautiously optimistic, Kim said.

He said that pent up demand for personal vehicles is still there in the market.

The pent up demand is still alive and we expect it to continue up to the first half of this year, Kim noted.

When asked about the impact on the company due to the shortage of critical components like semiconductors, he said: It is not an OEM issue, it is an industry issue. I can say that we are closely collaborating with our vendors to come up with a solution and also maintain some consistency in terms of operations. Every Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) is impacted to some extent and HMIL is trying its best to control the situation, Kim noted.

Ashok Leyland to reduce carbon footprint

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 17 FEBRUARY

Hinduja Group flagship Ashok Leyland on Wednesday said it has increased the sourcing of clean energy to 60 per cent for its countrywide operations. Now 75 per cent of the company's energy consumption in Tamil Nadu and 60 per cent throughout the country is procured through the solar rooftop, solar ground mount, and wind-based renewable energy, Ashok Leyland said in a statement.

Hinduja Renewables, a part of the Hinduja Group, is focused on building sustainable and clean energy plants in India and has built a solar plant for Ash

Some court decisions on technical matters in the past have negatively impacted the growth of the country's tech industry.

FAWAD CHAUDHRY, PAKISTAN'S MINISTER FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
AT A TWO-DAY INTERNATIONAL MEDIA CONFERENCE AT THE FATIMA JINNAH WOMEN UNIVERSITY

The Statesman

NEW DELHI, THURSDAY 18 FEBRUARY 2021

09

Myanmar coup protesters mass again

UN rapporteur Tom Andrews says that he was alarmed by reports of soldiers being transported into Yangon

ASSOCIATED PRESS
YANGON, 17 FEBRUARY

Hundreds of thousands of people marched in Myanmar on Wednesday, rejecting the army's assertion that the public supported its overthrow of elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi and vowing they would not be cowed in their bid to end military rule, even after a UN human rights expert warned that troops being brought to Yangon and elsewhere could signal the prospect of major violence.

UN rapporteur Tom Andrews had said late Tuesday that he was alarmed by reports of soldiers being transported into Yangon, Myanmar's biggest city. In the past, such troop movements preceded killings, disappearances, and detentions on a mass scale, he said in a statement issued by the UN



Demonstrators gather close to Sule Pagoda to protest against the military coup in Yangon, Myanmar on Wednesday. ■ AP

the biggest so far in the city. Protesters have adopted a tactic of blocking off roads from security forces by parking their vehicles mid-street with their hoods up, using the excuse of having engine trouble.

One motorist, who declined to give his name for fear of repercussions, explained, tongue-in-cheek, that his car had broken down due to the suffering that our people are undergoing now. We just stopped the

cars here on the road to show that we do not want the military regime. The high turnout was spurred partly by the junta's expectation that the protest movement was running out of steam, said Kyi Pyar, a former lawmaker from Suu Kyi's party. She referred to the military's claim at a news conference Tuesday that there would be a gradual reduction in the number of protesters. "This upset the people, she

said. We are not weak, we will never step back in the fight against the military regime. So we are back on the street again. In Naypyitaw, thousands of people, including private bank employees and engineers, marched down the city's wide boulevards, chanting for the release of Suu Kyi and President Win Myint.

Protesters also poured into the streets of Mandalay, where on Monday security forces had pointed guns at a group of 1,000 demonstrators and attacked them with slingshots and sticks. Local media reported that police also fired rubber bullets into a crowd and that several people were injured.

The marches have been organised as part of a civil disobedience movement, spearheaded by medical workers and supported by many civil servants. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson issued a strong denunciation of the legal maneuver against Suu Kyi.

New charges against Aung San Suu Kyi fabricated by the Myanmar military are a clear violation of her human rights, he tweeted. We stand with the people of Myanmar and will ensure those responsible for this coup are held to account.

On Tuesday night, the military for a third day in a row ordered an internet blackout almost entirely blocking online access from 1 a.m. to 9 a.m. It has also prepared a draft law that would tighten surveillance of cyberspace and criminalise many online activities.

While the military did not say why the internet was being blocked, there is widespread speculation that the government is installing a firewall system to allow it to monitor or block online activity. Social media users have speculated widely that neighboring China, with extensive experience in censoring the internet, was giving technical assistance for such a project.

SAfrican inquiry panel to seek jail term for Zuma

ASSOCIATED PRESS
JOHANNESBURG, 17 FEBRUARY

The head of a South African inquiry commission into alleged state corruption has said he would seek former president Jacob Zuma to be held in contempt of court for his persistent refusal to continue testimony at hearings, and impose a jail term if found guilty.

Zuma last year walked out of a hearing at the Commission of Inquiry into State Capture in South Africa without the permission of the chairperson, which was deemed to be in contempt of court. Zuma has insisted that he will not return unless the chairperson of the Commis-

RARE VIEW



In this photo provided by the North Korean government, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, visits Kumsusan Palace of the Sun, marking the 79th birth anniversary of his late father Kim Jong Il, in Pyongyang, North Korea. ■ AP

UNHR to raise missing Dubai princess with UAE

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LONDON, 17 FEBRUARY

The United Nations' human rights body said Wednesday it will seek information from the United Arab Emirates about a daughter of Dubai's powerful ruler after she said in video messages that she was being imprisoned in a heavily guarded villa.

Sheikha Latifa bint Mohammed AlMaktoum tried to flee the wealthy Gulf state in 2018 but was detained by commandos in a boat off India. She had not been heard from until Tuesday, when the BBC's Panorama investigative programme broadcast video



ful for her safety, he said.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights said it would "raise these new developments with the UAE."

Other parts of the UN human rights system with relevant mandates may also become involved once they have analysed the new material or received specific alle-

gements," spokesman Rupert Colville told the BBC. British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab called the videos very distressing and said he supported a UN investigation. Raab said Britain was concerned, but suggested there was little the government could do because Latifa is not a UK national. Sheikh Mohammed and the Dubai royal court have said Latifa is safe in the loving care of her family. The UAE government's Dubai Media Office did not respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press. In 2018, the AP reported how a friend and an ex-French spy helped Sheikha Latifa escape

by boat, only to be captured off India. The dramatic escape attempt and its aftermath intruded into the carefully controlled image maintained by the family of Latifa's father, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum.

Sheikh Mohammed, who

rules Dubai and also serves as

the prime minister and vice

president in the hereditarily

ruler UAE, is believed to have

several dozen children from

multiple wives. Some of his

sons and daughters figure

prominently in local media and

online, but others are rarely

seen. Sheikha Latifa was widely

known for her love of sky-

diving prior to 2018.

US ship sails through SCS

WASHINGTON, 17 FEBRUARY

A U.S. Navy warship sailed by islands claimed by China in the South China Sea on Wednesday in a freedom of navigation operation, marking the latest move by Washington to challenge Beijing's territorial claims in the contested waters.

The U.S. Navy's 7th Fleet said destroyer USS Russell "asserted navigational rights and freedoms in the Spratly Islands, consistent with international law." AGENCIES

Pak unlikely to exit FATF list until June

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD, 17 FEBRUARY

Pakistan is unlikely to exit the Financial Action Task Force's 'grey' list until June, despite its efforts to garner support from the member nations ahead of the plenary meeting of the global terror financing and money laundering watchdog next week, according to a media report on Wednesday.

The FATF's Plenary and Working Group meetings, scheduled to be held from February 21 to 26 in Paris, are all set to decide on Pakistan's grey list status.

en Islamabad's chances of formally exiting the 'grey' list by June. "If agreed, the FATF on-site visit will help Pakistan come out of the grey list by June this year," a senior Pakistani official dealing with the matter was quoted by the report.

Over the past few days, the Foreign Office has been inviting ambassadors and diplomats of FATF-member countries to brief them about the substantive progress made by Pakistan to implement the 27-point action plan, the report said, quoting officials familiar with the development.

Pakistan has requested the member nations to support its case and allow the on-site inspection by the FATF, a crucial step that leads to the removal of the country from the grey list, it said.

The FATF is an inter-governmental body established in 1989 to combat money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.

The FATF currently has 39 members including two regional organisations - the European Commission and Gulf Cooperation Council.

Pakistan needs 12 votes out of 39 to exit the 'grey' list and move to the 'white' list. To avoid 'black' list, it needs support of three countries.

Japan begins vaccination drive amidst Olympic worries

ASSOCIATED PRESS
TOKYO, 17 FEBRUARY

Months after other major economies, Japan began giving the first vaccines to frontline health workers Wednesday. Many are wondering if the campaign will reach enough people, and in time, to save a Summer Olympics already delayed a year by the worst pandemic in a century.

Despite recent rising infections, Japan has largely dodged the kind of cataclysm that has battered other wealthy countries' economies, social networks and healthcare systems. But the fate of the Olympics, and the billions of dollars at stake should the Games fail, makes Japan's vaccine campaign crucial.

Japanese officials are also

well aware that China, which

because of fears of relatively rare side effects that have been played up by the media in the past.

The late rollout will make it impossible to reach so-called herd immunity against the virus before the Olympics begin in July, experts say.

The vaccination drive has the support of the government, but there's widespread wariness, even opposition, among citizens to having the Games at all. About 80% of those polled in recent media surveys support cancellation or further postponement of the Olympics because of the virus worries.

has had success eradicating the virus, will host next year's Winter Olympics, something that heightens the desire to make the Tokyo Games happen.

A big problem as the vaccines roll out first to medical workers, then the elderly and then, possibly in late spring or early summer, to the rest of the population are worries about shortages of the imported vaccines Japan relies on, and a long-time reluctance among many Japanese to take vaccines

LEISURE

10 MINUTE CROSSWORD



CROSSWORD
SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD
ACROSS 1 Culinary herb (4), 3 Assistant (4), 7 Region (4), 8 Commercial plane (8), 9 Chat (12), 11 Consisting of flowers (6), 13 List of names (6), 15 Precarious structure (5,2,5), 18 Diatribe (8), 20 Dull heavy sound (4), 21 Blood vessel (4), 22 Man (informal) (4). DOWN 1 Order of architecture (5), 2 Trainee driver (7), 3 Ventilate (3), 4 Stray (5), 5 London station (8), 6 Turn into (6), 10 Lair low (8), 12 Back scrubber (6), 14 Extend (7), 16 Writing tablet (5), 17 Drink or eat noisily (5), 19 Alcohol drink (3).

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS 12 Threat, 13 Beacon, 15 Castaway, 18 Clot, 20 Lake District, 21 Vent, 22 Gig. DOWN 11 Parquet, 13 Ear, 14 Calling, 16 Scare, 17 Arid, 19 Stag. 23 Desotic, 4 Wince, 5 Desotic, 6 Sari, 10 Sanctity.

By arrangement with The Independent. Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required

BEETLE BAILEY/Mort Walker



RED EYE/Bill Yates & Mel Casson



DADDY DAZE/John Kovaleski



NEED TO KNOW

HOSPITALS

22586262, 22585007

RAILWAY INQUIRY

General Inquiry 139

Toll Free Nos. 1800112511

SMS Inquiry Nos. 57886, 54959, 5676747

ROADWAYS INQUIRY

ISBT (General Inquiry):

23868836, 23865181

INDIGO AIRLINES New Delhi City Office 43513185, Call Centre 09910383333,

18001803838, Reservation 43513186; Indigo Airlines Airline 09910383333;

Guru Tegh Bahadur 23717473, 23325320

FLIGHT INQUIRY

AIR INDIA Flight Inquiry and

Reservation 09910383333

INDIGO AIRLINES Reservation 23466262 (City)

25656421/25656431 Reservation 415281407

Air France Flight Inquiry and

Reservation 23466262 (City)

Kuwait Airways Flight Inquiry and

Reservation 23354373

SCRABBLE BRAND

G R A M S I

2nd Letter Double

I S T F E R

Triple Word Score

R D S E I B E

Quadruple Word Score

C A K L L S M

Quintuple Word Score

P A R S O N S

Par Score 110-120

by JUDD

FOUR RACK TOTAL TIME LIMIT: 20 MIN

SCRABBLE®

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JUDD'S TOTAL

PAR SCORE 130-140

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JUDD'S TOTAL



I get up in the morning and look at Jill and say, Where the hell are we? I find myself extremely self-conscious

US PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN

WEATHER

CITY	MAX	MIN
SINGAPORE	19°C	16°C H
HONG KONG	17°C	15°C CL
TOKYO	02°C	01°C CL
LONDON	11°C	08°C R
DUBAI	24°C	17°C S
SAN FRANCISCO	07°C	04°C S
NEW YORK	-03°C	-07°C S
MOSCOW	-11°C	-09°C H

S= sunny, CL= clear,
H= hazy, R= rainy...

THUMBNAILS



People walk and cycle at St. Kilda Beach in Melbourne, on Wednesday. Melbourne, Australia's second-largest city, will relax its 3rd lockdown restrictions after authorities contained the spread of a Covid cluster. AP

Domes for Covid patients: A shortage of hospital beds during the coronavirus pandemic has led architects in Colombia to design portable, inflatable chambers for Covid patients that can be placed in gyms or parking lots. The domes each 5 metres wide can house two patients and are connected by inflatable hallways. AP

Spain rapper protest: Police in Spain say 14 people were arrested in violent street protests in several cities following the arrest of Spanish rap artist Pablo Hasel, who had barricaded himself at a university with dozens of supporters to avoid prison and defend his fight for free speech. Emergency services said that 33 people were treated for injuries. AP

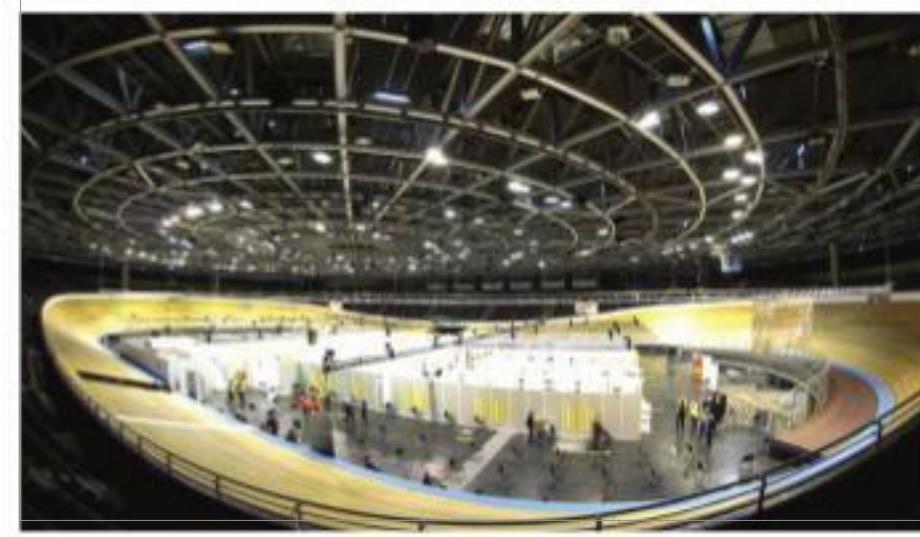
Ex-Ecuadorian leader dies: Former President Gustavo Noboa (83), who restored some stability to Ecuador during a profound economic crisis that produced political turmoil at the beginning of the century, died Tuesday in the U.S. following surgery for a brain tumor. President Lenn Moreno confirmed Noboa's death in a tweet. AP

LA boat fire: The captain of a scuba diving boat that burned and sank off the California coast, killing 34 people, pleaded not guilty on Tuesday to manslaughter charges. Jerry Boylan was arraigned in federal court in Los Angeles on 34 counts of seaman's manslaughter. Each count carries a potential 10-year prison term. AP

Centenary visit of Tagore: The centenary celebration of Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore's visit here in February 1921 was held amidst freezing temperatures at the Tagore Grove memorial in Ray Miller Park on Saturday, followed by a virtual concert the next day with presentations of the poet's music and recitation. The two-day event, organised by the Tagore Society of Houston. AP

Pfizer-BioNTech to provide EU 200 mn more Covid-19 shots

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BERLIN, 17 FEBRUARY



Interior view of a new Covid, vaccination center at the 'Velodrom' in Berlin, on Wednesday. AP

As worries about vaccine delays swept across Europe, Pfizer and BioNTech said Wednesday they have finalised an agreement to supply the European Union with another 200 million doses of their Covid vaccine.

The U.S. and German companies said in a statement that the doses come on top of the 300 million vaccine doses the bloc has initially ordered. The EU's executive Commission has an option to request a further 100 million doses.

They said the 200 million doses are expected to be delivered this year, with an esti-

mated 75 million of them in the second quarter.

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was the first of three so

far to be approved for use in the EU, which has faced strong criticism for a slow start to its vaccination campaign com-

UK to begin world-first human trials to study Covid: The UK is to begin the world's first Covid human trials to study the impact of the deadly virus on a healthy body's immune system, after receiving the approval of the country's clinical trials ethics body on Wednesday. The initial study is intended to help scientists understand how the immune system reacts to the virus that causes Covid, and identify factors that influence how it is transmitted -- including how a person who is infected sheds infectious virus particles into the environment. The study will involve up to 90 carefully selected healthy adult volunteers being exposed to the virus in a safe and controlled environment. Our eventual aim is to quickly test which vaccines and treatments work best in beating this disease, said Chief Investigator Dr Chris Chiu, from the Department of Infectious Diseases at Imperial College London. AP

pared with countries such as Israel, Britain and the United States. The other two EU-approved vaccines are from

Moderna and AstraZeneca.

Delays to planned deliveries from all those vaccine manufacturers have helped fuel dis-

satisfaction among European governments.

Last month, Pfizer said it was temporarily reducing deliveries to Europe and Canada while it upgraded production capacity at its plant in Belgium. The EU also had a public spat with AstraZeneca over getting fewer of its vaccine shots than anticipated.

We are continuing to evaluate, together with governments, authorities and partners at all levels, how we might address an even higher future supply requirement for our vaccines, he said.

Wednesday's statement didn't give financial details of the latest EU-Pfizer deal. On Tuesday, the European Medicines Agency said it had received a request from Johnson & Johnson for its vaccine to be authorised.

New York sues Amazon over worker safety during Covid

The suit from New York Attorney General landed just days after Amazon preemptively sued to block the suit over its Covid-19 safety protocols

NEW YORK, 17 FEBRUARY

New York is suing Amazon, claiming the company failed to provide workers with a safe environment at two warehouses in the state as Covid infections surged nationwide.

In addition to the 23 February hearing, the two committees are pressing for information from almost two dozen agencies and departments about the response.

The attack. The Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee and the Senate Rules Committee announced Tuesday that they had invited former Capitol Police Chief Steven Sund, former Senate Sergeant at Arms Michael Stenger and former House Sergeant at Arms Paul Irving to the hearing, along with Robert Conner, the chief of the District of Columbia's Metropolitan Police Department. The hearing will begin a broad examination of the security failures that led to the breach.

Legislation to set up the commission could be introduced in the House as soon as this week, according to a person familiar with the process and granted anonymity to discuss the planning. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer is expected to support the commission, and a spokesman said Tuesday that he "looks forward to it being approved by both chambers with overwhelming bipartisan support."

At the White House, press secretary Jen Psaki said President Joe Biden supports it as well. Biden "backs efforts to shed additional light on the facts to ensure something like that never happens again," she said. In her letter to Democratic colleagues, Pelosi said the House will also put forth supplemental spending to boost security at the Capitol.

The first congressional hearings will come next week, with two Senate panels calling in the former chief of Capitol Police and the former heads of security for the House and Senate, all three of whom resigned immediately after

the security breakdown on 6 January, as the House and Senate met for a joint session to count electoral votes, was severe. The Capitol Police had planned for a free speech demonstration, not a violent insurrection by Trump supporters to overturn the election.

With the diminished security presence, the rioters not only breached the Capitol but entered the Senate chamber minutes after senators had fled.

The acting chief of the Capitol Police, Yogananda Pitman, has acknowledged the department knew before 6 January that extremists and white supremacists could be in the crowd outside the Capitol.

Aus news media 'large and small' pursue Google deals

ASSOCIATED PRESS
CANBERRA, 17 FEBRUARY

that these are generous deals, Frydenberg said.

These are good deals. These are good deals for the Australian media businesses, he added.

Google and Facebook, which take a combined 81% of online advertising in Australia, have condemned the code as unworkable.

Google has threatened to make its search engine unavailable in Australia if the code were introduced. Facebook said it might block Australians from sharing news if the platform were forced to pay for news.

Frydenberg said after weekend talks with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Sundar Pichai, chief executive of Alphabet Inc. and its subsidiary Google, that he was convinced that the platforms do want to enter into these commercial arrangements.

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg denied he had been left in no doubt about the ... government's resolve.

Google confirmed in a statement it was "in discussions with publishers large and small. Facebook is also seeking news deals. Facebook said in a statement it didn't have anything to confirm at this time. The Australian deals with Google are being negotiated under Google's own model, News Showcase. The company has reached pay deals with more than 450 publications globally since it launched News Showcase in October.

ICING ON THE LAKE

ICING ON THE LAKE



A couple looks out over the frozen Mississippi River near Chain of Rocks Bridge on Tuesday in Madison County, Ill. The region has been plunged into a deep freeze with brutally cold temperatures and more snow in the forecast. AP

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OCEAN ISLE BEACH, N.C.

17 FEBRUARY

A winter storm that left millions without power in record-breaking cold weather claimed more lives, including three people found dead after a tornado hit a seaside town in North Carolina and four family members who perished in a Houston-area house fire while using a fireplace to stay warm.

The storm that overwhelmed power grids and immobilized the Southern Plains on Tuesday carried heavy snow and freezing rain into New England and the Deep South and left behind painfully low temperatures.



People cleaning cars in Carolina.

Wind-chill warnings extended from Canada into Mexico. In all, at least 20 deaths were reported. Other causes included car crashes and carbon monoxide poisoning. The weather also threatened to

affect the nation's vaccination effort. President Joe Biden's administration said delays in vaccine shipments and deliveries were likely. North Carolina's Brunswick County had little notice of the dangerous weather.

In Chicago, a foot and a half (46 centimeters) of new snow forced public schools to cancel in-person classes for Tuesday. Hours earlier, along the normally balmy Gulf of Mexico, cross-country skier Sam Fagg hit fresh powder on the beach in Galveston, Texas.

The worst U.S. power outages were in Texas, affecting

more than 2 million homes and businesses. More than 250,000 people also lost power across parts of Appalachia, and another 200,000 were without electricity following an ice storm in northwest Oregon, according to poweroutage.us, which tracks utility outage reports.

Four million people lost power in Mexico.

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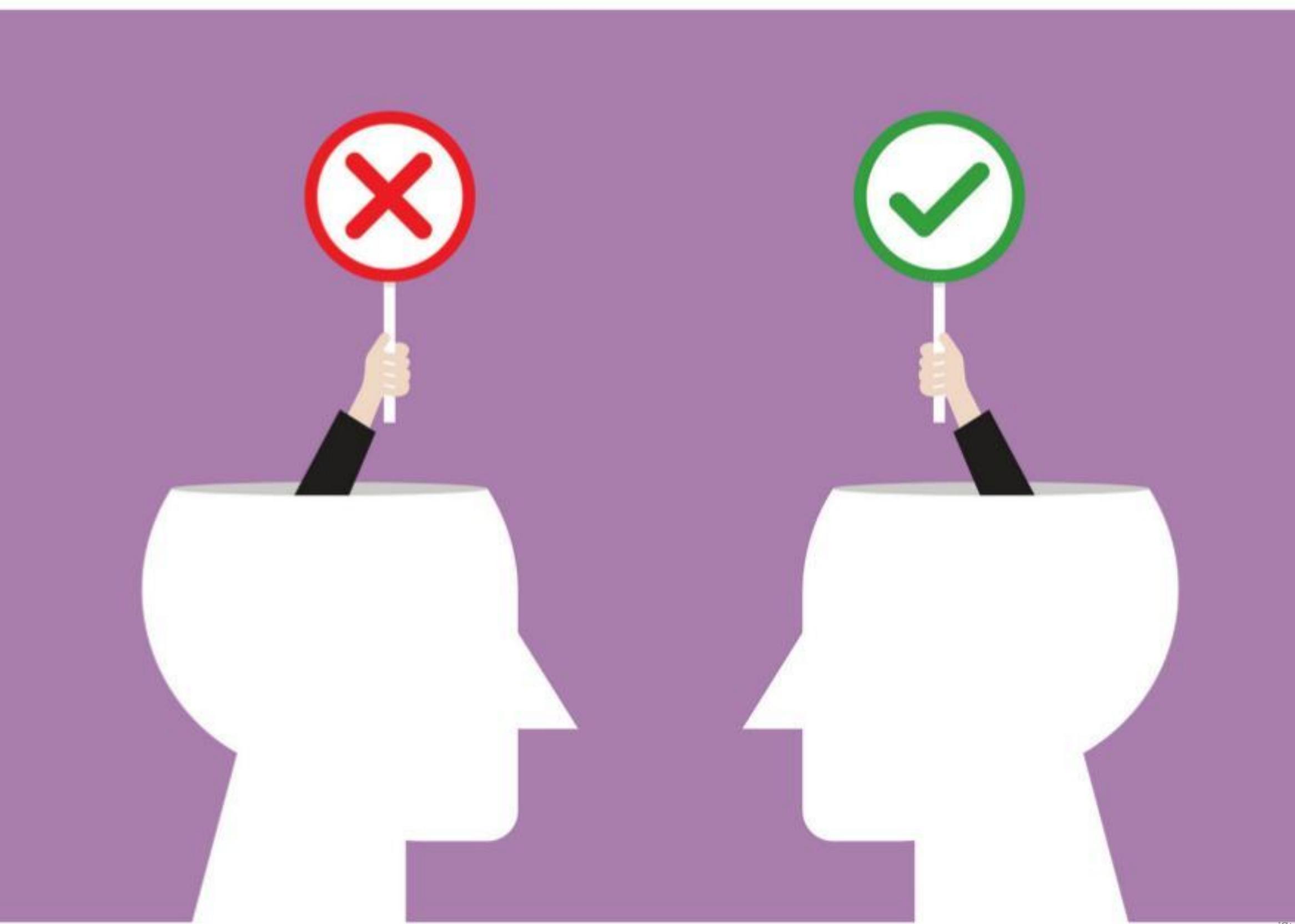
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Dissent and disobedience

The right to dissent – whether by a judge or a citizen – must be fiercely guarded, says SANAH SINGH



In an extremely charged environment, emotions and perceptions get the better of facts and legality. Societal issues are divided on partisan lines with opposing sides deploying flexible justifications. Divided sections throw all sorts of logic at each other, including some that awkwardly boomerang. Recent discourse on the farmers' protest is defined by regrettably few empathetic and civilized discussions and more by accusatory and intimidating language, which has further polarised society. Reckless name-calling and conflation of a self-declared civil movement to a religious/secessionist movement can have serious social consequences. Many ignorantly point to judicial pronouncements, observations and actions, to make a denialist point. However, invoking a simplistic understanding of law and the Constitution (neither of which debar dissent), in order to deny a section to raise their concerns is morally and legally wrong.

The legacy of peaceful dissent via the Civil Disobedience Movement i.e. Ahimsa, has been bestowed by our founding fathers, as part of our freedom struggle. Protest also means expressing dissent which is part of the legacy left by the father of the country (Mahatma Gandhi) in the form of the Civil Disobedience Movement, following the path of Ahimsa. It is equally true that the right to dissent does not extend to violence, desecration or destruction as such actions cross the rubicon. Therefore, it is imperative on both sides of the contention to separate and isolate such elements from the larger issue.

You can accuse the whole movement of harbouring malintent only when it seeks to defend wrongdoing or violence, as is frequently seen in certain regions which are facing insurgent movements. But, in the farmers' protest the undeniable patriotism of the farmers who are concurrently waving the tricolor and

calling upon the conscience of the nation, to cast aspersions on their patriotism is sheer instigation. In a democracy, disagreeing with a law is fundamentally different from disobeying the law, the former is allowed and even necessary sometimes, but the latter isn't.

Recently popular conscience was rightfully shaken by a clearly insensitive and retrograde ruling by a judge, that groping a minor's breast without 'skin-to-skin contact' was not sexual assault. In this specific case, till the Supreme Courts intervened, the legality of the ruling stood, irrespective of what sections of society thought. But to disagree with the same, as indeed, disagree and dissent with the legal ruling, is not only legally and constitutionally allowed, but necessary from a humane perspective – highlighting the difference between disagreeing and disobeying.

Secondly, the context of the 'larger view of the society/nation' is used

to deny dissent by trying to stifle a minority opinion, but this amounts to majoritarianism and not democracy. It is a societal reality that progressive laws emanate from challenging the well-accepted norms of society, because only when a discomforting level of 'whys' are asked does society actually change.

As an example, till very recently the laws governing homosexuality (Section 377) were dictated by British era laws from 1861. Presumably there wasn't enough societal support to revise laws that were based on societal norms of over 150 years ago, yet it took a minority section to challenge majoritarian thinking. So, to argue that a movement like the farmers' protest is not reflective of farmers across the country is irrelevant (it may be so or may not be so) – what matters is the right to peacefully disagree.

The principle of dissent or disagreement is allowed within the

ambit of law itself. In many cases the disagreement of one or more judges against the majority view of the bench is called a Dissenting Judgment. These concurrently published dissent statements often become the bedrock of persuasive reasoning and argument for subsequent revisit of the matter on hand. It was the courageous and minority (singular) voice of dissent by Justice HR Khanna in the habeas corpus case against Indira Gandhi's Emergency which had sought the Right to Privacy to be suspended. It took another 41 years for the same to be upheld as a fundamental right under the Constitution.

More recently Justice DY Chandrachud's dissenting note in the Aadhaar judgement - that it amounted to fraud and illegality - was also a minority dissent initially. Society is often served better owing to the courageous dissent of a few, even when the majority disagree. This healthy and necessary dissent within the legal sphere is also an extension of the same constitutional right to dissent available to all.

There is another false perception amongst many that disagreement with the legal provisions amounts to contempt of court. For a civil or criminal contempt, the operative expressions are 'disobedience of any judgments' or 'scandalises the court with obstructions, interferences and prejudices to any judicial proceeding' – and not just by expressions of mere disagreement. If anything, as the guardians of constitutionality the courts cannot be thin-skinned but be considerate enough to demonstrate the highest traditions of 'majestic liberalism'.

Former Supreme Court Judge Deepak Gupta, noted the recent trend of questioning various institutions to be equivalent to sedition when he said, "Criticism of the executive, the judiciary, the bureaucracy, the armed forces cannot be termed sedition." Most importantly, he had cautioned, "If we stifle criticism of these institutions, we shall become a police state instead of a democracy."

Given India's various diversities and inequities, a certain disaffection, particularly amongst the 'minorities' (of religion, caste, occupation or even opinions) needs to be generously harmonised, entertained and allied, not necessarily by acceding to all demands always, but certainly with dignity, honesty and by sparing them of ridicule. Importantly, the sincerity of such attempts has to be understood from the point of view of the disaffected and dissatisfied, and not just those that hold majoritarian views.

In the specific case of the farmers' protest, irrespective of the arguments for and against the farm laws, the disagreeing party deserves sensitivity and dignity towards its disagreement.

The writer is a freelance writer and law student.

INTERPRETATION OF THE LAW RAISES QUESTIONS

Sexual assault does not need skin to skin contact, says SUNIL GARODIA

It is true that individual judges can have their own interpretation of the statutes and such interpretations can sometimes beat variance with what would have come to be known as the accepted version.

But when a judge gives an interpretation which is completely against both the letter and spirit of the law, it raises several questions about how judges arrive at their decisions.

The "skin-to-skin" order under the POCSO Act in the case of sexual molestation of a child by a Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court falls in this category. The logic set out in the order clearly shows that the judge has misinterpreted the provisions of the Act and has given a ruling that goes against the very premise on which the law was based.

There is a huge difference between sex and sexual assault and the latter can happen in hundreds of ways which can be both physical and mental. Some of these ways do not even need a touch, let alone "skin-to-skin" contact, although the POCSO Act requires physical touching.

But when the matter is as serious as groping a breast, it is sexual assault regard-



iStock

less of the fact how it was done. It does not matter if the girl was clothed or naked, whether the man used his hands or legs or mouth. Any physical touching of the breast done knowingly, even just a brush, is enough to qualify as sexual assault. Under the POCSO Act, the additional parameter is that it will be treated as sexual assault even if it is done with the consent of the child below 18 years of age. Was the judge not aware of this?

Section 7 of POCSO Act says: Sexual assault – Whoever, with sexual intent touches the vagina, penis, anus or breast of the child or makes the child touch the vagina, penis, anus or breast of such person or any other person, or does any other act with sexual intent which involves physical contact without penetration is said to commit sexual assault.

In his order, the judge said that "the act of pressing the breast of a child aged 12 years, in the absence of any specific detail as to whether the top was removed or whether he inserted his hand inside top and pressed her breast, would not fall in the definition of sexual assault." This reasoning defies logic and goes contrary to what the law means and what is generally accepted to be physical contact and on intentional progression thereof, sexual assault.

There is no need for specific detail of whether the top was removed or if the offender inserted his hand inside the top – the very act of pressing the breast from outside is also sexual assault.

The operative phrase here is physical contact. It is described in various dictionaries as "the act of touching physically". It does not matter if the person touched is fully clothed or naked or whether skin contact was made. If two fully clothed persons hug, it would be physical contact and if a person even touches the arm of another while talking it would be physical contact. Then how could a person groping the breast of a child who might be wearing several layers of clothing not count as physical contact?

It is good that the Supreme Court has stayed the Bombay High Court order. A pervert cannot be allowed to walk away after traumatizing a child just because a judge interpreted the law erroneously. The Supreme Court must examine the order and set it aside as it is clearly a wrong interpretation of the provisions of the POCSO Act.

The writer is Editor-in-chief www.indiacommentary.com

Black coat revolution gone horribly wrong

Increasing lawlessness by Pakistan's lawyers has placed the institution of judiciary under a cloud, says ZAHID HUSSAIN.

The much-hyped black coat revolution that shook Pervez Musharraf's military regime has gone sour. What we have been witnessing over the years in Pakistan are scenes of black coats on the rampage. The storming of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) by a group of lawyers who virtually held Chief Justice Athar Minallah hostage for several hours last week was the worst example of hooliganism perpetrated by the 'guardians of the legal order'.

It was indeed a most shameful act of vandalism challenging the sanctity of the court. The rioters barged into the court offices and damaged property. "When I was made hostage, I was ready for the worst," Justice Minallah said.

Most appalling, however, was the fact that the lawyers were protesting against the demolition by the city's civic authorities of their illegally built offices on a football ground. It was a planned attack to browbeat the judges who were hearing this case of encroachment.

Instead of condemning the rioters, the lawyers' bodies gave a strike call to demand the restoration of the razed chambers on the encroached area. It speaks volumes about the so-called defenders of the rule of law. Regrettably, even the Supreme Court Bar Association defended the illegal constructions. The IHC incident was a new low in what can be described as a growing culture of impunity that rationalises unlawful actions.

It was an attack on the judiciary and that too by elements belonging to the legal fraternity. It is commendable that the assault didn't deter the court from ordering the removal of all illegal chambers from state land. The court is right in demanding exemplary punishment for those who kept the judges hostage. "It is a serious incident and those involved should be punished," Justice Minallah reportedly remarked during the hearing on the encroachment case.

But many will ask if the culprits



will be brought to justice for the crime or will manage to escape punishment because of the powerful bar associations. It has often been pointed out that pressure has protected lawyers involved in attacks on the judiciary.

Ironically, it was the historic lawyers' movement that started in 2007 for the restoration of the judges removed by former military ruler Gen Musharraf that gave rise to the lawyers' power. The movement did indeed lead to the restoration of democracy in the country. But it also witnessed an unprecedented rise of populist judicial activism under former Supreme Court chief justice Iftikhar Chaudhry. That period was aptly described as a "judicial dictatorship".

For some elements in the legal fraternity, the breaking of the law

became the norm. One such demonstration of lawlessness was witnessed some years ago when a group of lawyers demanding the transfer of a sessions court judge attacked the chambers of the then chief justice of the Lahore High Court (LHC). No action was taken against the lawbreakers.

But the worst came in July 2017 when a group of lawyers led by the then president of the Multan chapter of the Lahore High Court Bar Association allegedly attacked a judge. After the incident, the then LHC chief justice withdrew the judges from the Multan bench. Despite the notices the accused refused to appear before the court. Lawyers ran amok after a bench issued non-bailable arrest warrants for the LHC bar president and other co-accused on contempt charges. They vandalised the high

court building and laid siege to the courtroom of the then chief justice Mansoor Ali Shah raising slogans against the judges. They violently clashed with the law-enforcement agencies.

It turned into a direct conflict between the bar and the bench, one of the worst incidents in Pakistan's judicial history. Unfortunately, some bar associations rallied in support of the accused encouraging the use of violence to intimidate the judiciary.

It was commendable of the LHC to decide to take action against those involved in the attack on a brother judge. But unfortunately, the accused got away scot-free after the then SC chief justice Saqib Nisar succumbed to the bar's pressure. He seemed more interested in placating the powerful lawyers' lobby than ensuring the sanctity of the judiciary and uphold-

ing the rule of law. The incident certainly weakened the judiciary and subsequently encouraged the lawless brigade.

Perhaps one of the most controversial chief justices in Pakistan's recent judicial history, Saqib Nisar dealt a huge blow to the image of the judiciary. His populist judicial activism was self-serving. His reluctance to take real action against those responsible for the attack on a high court judge and vandalism was not surprising. The inaction gave impunity to the group of lawyers engaged in violence and intimidation.

In another incident in 2019, a group of lawyers led by some local bar association leaders raided a hospital in Lahore and beat up doctors and other medical staff. They also clashed with the police and destroyed public property. The spectacle of lawyers armed with sticks and iron rods rampaging through hospital corridors and chasing doctors was horrifying.

Unfortunately, that incident of hooliganism too was condoned by some lawyers' bodies. Some of those involved in the attack were arrested but later set free. Breaking the law seems to have become a habit with lawyers.

The construction of lawyers' offices on encroached public property around Islamabad's court complex has been going on for years with the authorities looking the other way instead of clamping down on the illegal activity probably because of the lawyers' clout. Nothing would happen about the petition filed by citizens. But finally the authorities found some courage to act against the lawbreakers. The IHC's landmark ruling ordering the demolition of the illegal construction is indeed commendable. It may have drawn the wrath of the lawless brigade, but it will go a long way in boosting efforts to establish the rule of law. The judiciary is now faced with a test regarding the punishment of those involved in last week's attack on the court.

The writer is an author and journalist. Dawn/ANH.



SICK AND TIRED

Novak Djokovic (photo, left) says most tennis players do not want to continue with the season if it means going through multiple periods of quarantine. Many European countries now have significant restrictions on travel and Djokovic, who set up a player body separate from the Association of Tennis Players last year, has called for urgent discussions.

For more updates

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THUMBNAILS

Torch relay: The governor in a western Japanese prefecture is talking about cancelling torch relay events in his area ahead of the Tokyo Olympics. Tatsuya Maruyama of Shimanami is unhappy with Covid-19 prevention measures surrounding the relay.

Qualifier cancelled: The final global boxing qualifier for the Tokyo Olympics is being scrapped, Japan said on Tuesday, with places at the pandemic-delayed Games likely to be determined by rankings. The qualifier was to have taken place in Paris in June.

French move: French government officials agreed to give more financial support to professional soccer clubs badly hit by falling revenue during the coronavirus pandemic. A working group has been created to assess the situation and examine aid schemes.

Fifa trial: Prosecutors in Switzerland were said on Tuesday to have appealed against federal court verdicts that had cleared former Fifa official Jerome Valcke of bribery and acquitted Qatari soccer and broadcasting executive Nasser Al-Khelaifi on a lesser charge.



Ronaldo's return: Cristiano Ronaldo returns to his native Portugal for the first time as a Juventus player as his side face Porto with the Italian giants fighting to keep up with Europe's most powerful clubs in the Champions League. Juve dominate Serie A.

Guardiola worried: Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola is concerned players could become infected with the coronavirus if they fly away to play for their countries in World Cup qualifying in March, potentially damaging his team's bid for titles this season.



Gunners netted: Arsenal will remind captain Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang of his responsibilities after a video emerged of him getting a tattoo, which could be a breach of coronavirus restrictions. Tattoo artist Alejandro Nicolas Bernal posted the clip.

Death threats: Mike Dean will return to officiate in the Premier League on Saturday, having sat out last weekend's games after he and his family received death threats in a backdoor to controversial red card decisions. He will take charge of the Burnley-West Brom game.

Gambhir's prediction: Gautam Gambhir reckons that Royal Challengers Bangalore will look for someone like Australian all-rounder Glenn Maxwell during Thursday's Indian Premier League auction to reduce pressure on Virat Kohli and AB de Villiers in batting.

World Cup: The National Rifle Association of India on Tuesday announced a 57-member Indian team for the year's first combined International Shooting Sport Federation World Cup rifle/pistol/shotgun stage, scheduled to be held in New Delhi in March.

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Sport

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Tsitsipas edges Nadal in Oz Open

AGENCIES

MELBOURNE, 17 FEBRUARY

For the 225th time in his illustrious career, Rafael Nadal grabbed a two-set lead in a Grand Slam match. For only the second time, he blew that big edge and lost.

A couple of uncharacteristically sloppy overheads and a framed backhand in a third-set tiebreaker began Nadal's undoing, and his bid for a men's record 21st major championship eventually ended in the Australian Open quarterfinals Wednesday with 3-6, 2-6, 7-6 (4), 6-4, 7-5 loss to Stefanos Tsitsipas.

At his put-the-ball-where-he-wants-it best in the early going, Nadal went ahead rather easily, winning 27 consecutive points on his serve in one stretch and running his streak of consecutive sets won at major tournaments to 35, one shy of Roger Federer's record for the professional era.

Nadal and Federer are currently tied at 20 Grand Slam singles titles, more than any other man in the history of tennis.

The women's semifinals Thursday (Wednesday night EST) are Serena Williams vs.

Naomi Osaka, and Jennifer Brady vs. Karolina Muchova.

Nadal came into this year's first major with doubts about his back, citing that as his reason for pulling out of the ATP Cup team competition that preceded the Australian Open

and saying the problem prevented him from practicing properly for about three weeks.

But he hadn't ceded a set at Melbourne Park through four matches; he won all 21 sets he played, at last year's French Open, where he picked

up his 20th Slam trophy to pull even with Federer (Williams has 23, Margaret Court 24).

Federer hasn't competed in more than a year after two knee operations.

With squawking seagulls providing an odd nighttime

soundtrack at Rod Laver Arena but no spectators, because they've been banned during a local COVID-19 lockdown, and won't return until Thursday. Nadal always had an answer for anything Tsitsipas tried at the outset.

Rush the net? Here comes an angled passing shot. Hang out at the baseline? Good luck trying to outslug Nadal from there.

It looked like it could be a repeat of their 2019 semifinal in Australia, when Nadal overwhelmed Tsitsipas and allowed him to win just six games.

But this time, Tsitsipas came in after three full days off, because the man he was supposed to face in the fourth round, No. 9 Matteo Berrettini, withdrew with an abdominal injury.

That and a 12-year age difference might have contributed to Tsitsipas' being fresher in the late going as they played beyond four hours.

Tsitsipas, who's been pegged as a future star for years, nearly pulled off this sort of shocker against Djokovic in the French Open semifinals in October, going from two sets

down to forcing a fifth.

Tsitsipas couldn't seal the deal back then.

He did against Nadal.

Tsitsipas moved out front at 6-5 in the fifth by breaking atlove as Nadal flubbed a series of shots, then served out the victory by converting his third match point with a backhand winner.

Top-ranked Ash Barty built a big lead in her quarterfinal match at the Australian Open before her opponent took a medical timeout and left the court.

More than an hour later, it was Barty heading abruptly through the exit. She was upset Wednesday by Karolina Muchova, 1-6, 6-3, 6-2.

Seeded No. 25, Muchova earned her first semifinal berth in a Grand Slam. Her comeback win ended Barty's bid to become the first Australian woman to win the title in Melbourne since Chris O'Neill in 1978.

It's heartbreakng, of course, Barty said. But the sun will come up tomorrow. You're either winning or you're learning, and today is a massive learning curve for me.



Root apologises to Ali for saying he 'chose' to go home

AGENCIES

LONDON, 17 FEBRUARY

England skipper Joe Root has apologised to Moeen Ali (in photo) for saying that the all-rounder has "chosen" to go home after the second Test though it was already agreed upon as part of the national team's rotation policy, according to reports.

After taking eight wickets and top-scoring with an 18-ball 43 in England's second innings yesterday in the second Test against India in Chennai, his first match since Ashes 2019, Ali chose to stick to the original plan and left for UK for a 10-day break.

According to the Mirror, Root apologised to Ali at the team hotel for saying that "he has chosen" to go home. A few other British newspapers also reported on similar lines.

Following a 317-run loss to India in Chennai on Tuesday, Root had said: "Moeen has chosen to go home. It's obviously been a very tricky tour for him. As we mentioned at the start (of the winter), if players feel like they need to get out of the bubble, then that's been an option. It is really important that we stand by that."

"With Moeen it wasn't more asking if he wanted to stay, it was a decision he had chosen. Of course we wanted as many players available for as long as possible, but you also want them to be very comfortable here," Jos Buttler, an all-format



player like Ali, went home after the first Test and would be back in India for the tour's limited-overs leg. Ben Stokes and Jofra Archer were rested for the recent Test series in Sri Lanka.

There was an intense debate around Jonny Bairstow's unavailability for the first two Tests in India but he too had been rested after the Sri Lanka tour as the England and Wales Cricket Board had a clear rotation policy in place with cricketers having to spend months in a bio-secure bubble owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Bairstow is in India now for the last two Tests and the white-ball leg of the tour.

Inconsistency detected

England need not moan about the condition of Indian pitches and instead rectify their inconsistency in their spin department if they want positive results in the remaining two Tests against India, says captain Naseer Hussain.

Hussain said Dom Bess' inability to maintain his length has been the biggest issue for England, who suffered a massive 317-run defeat in the second Test to leave the series levelled at 1-1.

IPL Auctions: RCB, CSK could bid for Maxwell; all eyes on Moeen, Malan & Azharuddeen

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHENNAI, 17 FEBRUARY

Flamboyant Australian Glenn Maxwell is expected to be a favourite, despite his overwhelming record, along with England's spin bowling all-rounder Moeen Ali during a condensed IPL players auction slated here on Thursday.

A total of 292 players have been enlisted for the shortened auctions -- 164 of them Indian and 125 overseas. There will also be three associate players in the auction.

With 61 slots across eight franchises up for grabs, Royal Challengers Bangalore has the maximum, 11 vacancies, to fill with a purse of Rs 35.4 crore while Sunrisers Hyderabad has only three slots available with Rs 10.75 crore in its kitty.

The highest purse available is with Anil Kumble-coached 'Punjab Kings', formerly Kings XI Punjab, which has Rs 53.20 crore available with a base price of Rs 1.5 crore.

With the IPL back in India after being held in the UAE last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, focus will be on big-hitters as well as slow bowlers and Maxwell and Moeen fit the category of nine spots.

One of the most keenly watched teams going into the auction will be Chennai Super Kings after a nightmarish 2020 season when they failed to qualify for the IPL play-offs for the first time in tournament's history.

Mahendra Singh Dhoni and head coach Stephen Fleming have always valued experience way more than exuberance of youth in their team.

A case in point is Robin Uthappa, who hasn't per-

formed for at least five seasons, being picked by CSK from Rajasthan Royals during the trading window with an all-cash deal.

"Check out the kind of players Dhoni picks. It's always middle-level senior guys who have experience of handling pressure situations. It doesn't matter how the guy is perceived as a player in the fraternity."

"The only time his expectations didn't match was with Kedar Jadhav. Or else, he likes a bit of seniority and those with game awareness," a source close to the franchise told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

So, with nearly Rs 20 crore (19.90 crore) to spend and six vacancies to fill, Dhoni will look at some potential big hitters to help him, Suresh Raina and Paf Plessis in the middle.

As usual, there would be some eye-popping bids for the uncapped domestic players like Kerala's Mohammed Azharudddeen (Junior), Tamil Nadu's handsome hulk Shah Rukh Khan, all-rounder R Sonu Yadav, Baroda's Vishnu Solanki and Bengal's Akash Deep. They could invite mini-bidding wars with their lowest base price bracket of Rs 20 lakh.

Sachin Tendulkar's son Arjun, a left-arm fast bowler who made his senior Mumbai team debut this year, is bracketed in the Rs 20 lakh category and the kind of traction that the young kid brings along could mean that some bidders will be there for him.

Chennaiyin FC eye win as they near tournament exit

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BAMBOOLIM, 17 FEBRUARY

But it wasn't so fantastic and no so positive especially in offence."

"It (North-East) will be a tough game. They have made good recruitment especially the foreigners. And in this game we see if we get the opportunity or not but our target is to win this game. Our attention is on playing successful football and scoring goals. We go into the game the way we went against Goa and this is our target," said Laszlo, whose side hasn't won in their last seven games.

Meanwhile, North East United are unbeaten in the last six games under coach Khalid Jamil and are eyeing the playoffs.

They have won four and drawn 2 taking them into the top four. But the goal hasn't been achieved yet as four teams are still vying for the last two play-offs spots.

The Highlanders' assistant coach Alison Kharsinyan urged his team to not take their opponents lightly.

Du Plessis quits Test cricket to focus on T20s

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
JOHANNESBURG

Africa's Test and T20 captain last year after taking over from the charismatic A B de Villiers back in 2016. He captained the team in 36 Tests, winning 18 of them.

"If someone had told me 15 years ago that I would play 69 Test matches for South Africa and captain the side, I wouldn't have believed them. I stand in a place of utmost gratitude for a Test career full of blessings bestowed on me. Every high and low has shaped me into the man I am proud to stand up as today," he added.

Du Plessis had wanted to say goodbye to the longest format after the home series against Australia scheduled for later this month. It has now been postponed indefinitely because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"I will be in conversation with CSA over the next couple of months on what the future might look like for me over the next year to find a solution that works for both of us," he said.

"It has been an incredible journey, with many stories that I look forward to one day sharing," he added.

Du Plessis thanked his family, coaches and Cricket South Africa for their support during his stint. The right-hand batsman has so far played 143 ODIs for his country apart from 50 T20 Internationals. He averages over 47 in 50-over cricket and 35.5 in the shortest format.

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