





## SHORT TAKES

## MAN HELD FOR RAPING GIRL IN GR NOIDA

**Noida (UP):** A man has been arrested for allegedly abducting and raping a 15-year-old girl in Greater Noida last week, police said on Wednesday.

The suspect, who is in his twenties, and the girl lived in the same neighbourhood in Dadri area of Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddh Nagar district. The girl had gone out of her home with her younger sister, aged 9, on January 31, police said. While returning, she was waylaid by the suspect, who assaulted the younger sister and then eloped with the teenager, according to the complaint. Initially the police had lodged a case of kidnapping, but the rape charge and provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act were later added, according to a police statement.

The youth was held on Tuesday evening, it said, adding that further proceedings were being carried out.

— PTI

## AAP teacher body to contest DU polls

**New Delhi:** The Aam Aadmi Party teachers' organisation will fight the Delhi University's executive and academic councils elections, a party leader said on Wednesday. AAP MP Sushil Gupta said just the way the Kejriwal government had made "significant improvements" inside government schools, the party wanted to make similar qualitative changes in Delhi University. Gupta said Narendra Kumar Pandey has been nominated as the candidate of the Delhi Teachers Association (DTA) for the executive council and Sunil Kumar as the academic council candidate for the elections to be held on Friday. Addressing the media, DTA incharge Hansraj Suman said the BJP-led central government had been saying for the past five years that they would regularise ad-hoc teachers. "But nothing has been done.... When our members will be elected in the executive council, our first priority will be given the same kinds of benefits to the ad-hoc teachers like the permanent teachers," he said. The Delhi University has more than 6,000 teachers and 40 per cent of them are women who are between the age of 30-50 years and are teaching in the university for the last 15-20 years, according to the professor. "We will also ensure that there should be a quota for the children of ad-hoc teachers in the admission," he said. — PTI

## Joint pullback on at Pangong, says China

■ **Continued from Page 1** tensions soared in early September last year.

It is learnt Indian troops have not been moved back from these strategic heights on Wednesday.

"If India cedes its sole bargaining chip -- Kailash Range heights -- before China begins to roll back all its land grabs, it will prove a big mistake," tweeted strategic analyst Brahma Chellaney.

As per reports, the Chinese soldiers will also move beyond the Finger 8 area on the northern bank of Pangong Tso and Indian troops will be placed between Finger 2 and Finger 3. Indian and Chinese troops had brutally clashed in the area in May 2020, with many soldiers suffering serious injuries.

The Indian and Chinese corps commanders had held the ninth round of talks on January 24, where both sides had "agreed to push for an early disengagement of the frontline troops" in the eastern Ladakh.

Earlier in June, and then again in July, India and China had agreed to mutually move back from the Galwan Valley, Gogra Post, Hot Springs and Pangong Tso. However, it was only in the Galwan Valley that both troops had moved back to some extent. In Pangong Tso, the Chinese Army had then refused to move back from the guidelines of Finger 4 and the whole of Finger 5 to 8 area, which it had illegally occupied in May. In the Gogra Post and Hot Springs areas too, there was no clarity on China's disengagement. Besides, in the Depsang plains, Chinese troops had been preventing the Indian Army from conducting its patrolling.

## Nursery admissions in Delhi to kickstart from February 18

*First list of selected children will be displayed on March 20*

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 10

The process for nursery admissions in over 1700 schools in Delhi will begin from February 18, the Directorate of Education (DoE) announced on Wednesday, bringing respite for anxious parents who have been waiting for the notification for over two months.

As per the notified schedule, the application process will begin from February 18 and the last date to apply is March 4. The first list of selected children will be displayed on March 20, followed by second list on March 25 and subsequent list for admission, if any, on March 27. The entire admission process will conclude on March 31.

The DoE has also directed

▶ **THE FIRST LIST** of selected children will be displayed on March 20, followed by second list on March 25 and subsequent list for admission, if any, on March 27. The entire admission process will conclude on March 31.

that since schools are closed in view of the Covid-19 pandemic and physical class room learning is not going on for entry level classes at present, no fee except prescribed registration fee, admission fee, caution fee (if school already charges) and tuition fee, shall be charged at the time of admission by the schools and thereafter only tuition fee shall be charged from the students till further orders.

"Congratulations to all parents and children. We

have to bring the excitement back in schools after defeating coronavirus. Our schools are waiting for their students," Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal tweeted, referring to the notification of nursery admission schedule.

Usually, nursery admissions in around 1,700 schools in the national capital begin in the last week of November. The DoE releases guidelines and schools are asked to furnish required information, following which the application process is rolled out in December. However, there has been no development on it in 2020.

The Delhi government officials had in December said that a proposal to scrap nursery admissions is being considered as the schools have been closed for nine

months due to COVID-19 and will remain closed till a vaccine is available. A whole year of online learning for small children seems unviable, they had said. But school principals had opposed this idea. However, deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia last month had ruled out scrapping nursery admissions.

Sharing the guidelines for admission, Udit Prakash Raj, Director, DOE, said, "No deviation from the above schedule shall be permitted. Each school shall display the admission schedule on its notice board and website. Further each school shall ensure that application forms for admission are made available to all applicants till the last date of submission of admission's application form".



The Covid-19 vaccines arrive at a dispensary for the second round vaccination drive today, in New Delhi on Wednesday.

— G.N. JHA

## 19-yr-old held for harassing over 50 girls in Faridabad

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 10

The Delhi Police has nabbed a 19 year-old boy who allegedly harassed more than 50 women including minors by stalking them on social media platforms and morphing their pictures. Police said that he was arrested from Haryana's Faridabad area.

The accused has been identified as Rahim Khan and he studied upto Class 8th. Police said that he is professionally engaged in operating various morphing apps.

"The accused Khan harassed more than 50 women including minors over various social media platforms after stalking their profiles and initiated sexting with them using a fake identity of a woman.

He even targeted minor girls by morphing their pictures," said police.

According to Ingit Pratap Singh, the Deputy

▶ **THE ACCUSED** has been identified as Rahim Khan and he studied upto Class 8th. Police said that he is professionally engaged in operating various morphing apps

▶ **KHAN HARASSED** more than 50 women including minors over various social media platforms after stalking their profiles and initiated sexting with them using a fake identity of a woman

Commissioner of Police (DCP), Southwest district, an action was taken against Khan after a complaint was received on Tuesday at RP Puram police station by one of the victim who alleged that an unknown person with an Instagram handle "ch\_rahim\_khan786" was sending her morphed pictures and further demanding nude pictures.

"A case was registered under relevant sections of

Indian Penal Code (IPC). Based on technical inquiry and details sought from Instagram, the Cyber Cell team of southwest district succeeded in establishing the whereabouts of the accused Rahim Khan," said the DCP.

"With the help of technical surveillance, Khan was nabbed from his house in Faridabad, Haryana. During interrogation, Khan confessed his involvement in the crime and further revealed that for pleasure and personal satisfaction, he had victimised more than 50 women across India including many minors," said the DCP.

"The police have recovered incriminating evidence including photos, chat and videos shared by victims from Khan's the mobile phone. Further investigation of the case is in progress," said the DCP adding that efforts are being made to connect other victims.

## Iqbal Singh carried ₹50K reward on his head Farmer wanted in Red Fort violence held from Punjab

**BHASKAR HARI SHARMA**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 10



Iqbal Singh

The Special Cell of Delhi Police on Tuesday night nabbed a man wanted in connection with the violence at the Red Fort on Republic Day was arrested by Delhi Police from Punjab. The accused identified as, Iqbal Singh, was also carrying a reward of ₹50,000 on information leading to his arrest.

According to Sanjeev Kumar Yadav, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Special Cell, Iqbal was nabbed from Hoshiarpur in Punjab on Tuesday night by the northern range of Special Cell.

Earlier on Monday, the Special Cell had arrested actor-activist Deep Sidhu, a "prominent player" behind the violence at the Red Fort from Haryana's Karnal bypass.

The Delhi police had announced a cash reward of ₹1 lakh for information that can lead to the arrest of actor Sidhu, Jugraj Singh, Gurjot Singh and Gurjant Singh who hoist-

## Kin of man killed in tractor rally move court for probe

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 10



Navreet Singh

The family of a 25-year-old man, who died after his tractor overturned at Central Delhi's ITO during the protesting farmers' tractor parade on the Republic Day, moved the Delhi Court on Wednesday seeking a court-monitored SIT probe into the incident.

The petition, which is likely to be listed for hearing on Thursday, is filed by deceased Navreet Singh's grandfather who has sought enforcement of his right to fair investigation and justice as well as the right to know the truth about his grandson's death.

According to the police, the man had died as his tractor overturned at ITO where

many farmers participating in the parade had reached from the Ghazipur border after taking a detour from the pre-agreed route for the march.

The police had claimed that the man was driving the tractor and he came under the vehicle as it overturned. However, the petition said that as per eye-witness accounts reported in the media, Navreet was driving his tractor past the Andhra Education Society in New Delhi, and he was allegedly shot by policemen, due to which he lost control of his tractor which thereafter collided with some barricades and overturned.

ed flags at the Red Fort or were involved in the act.

A cash reward of ₹50,000 each was also announced for Buta Singh, Sukhdev Singh, Jajbir Singh and Iqbal Singh for allegedly instigating protesters.

Of them, Sidhu, Iqbal Singh and Sukhdev Singh have been arrested. Police said raids are being conducted to nab the rest of them. Sidhu has been sent to seven-day police custody by a city court.

## NDMC bans road cutting in its areas till March 31

**New Delhi, Feb. 10:** The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) has banned road cutting in its areas till March 31 except for urgent repair or maintenance work.

"Keeping in view ensuing Swachh Sarvekshan-2021, there will be ban on road cutting from February 9 to March 31, except for urgent repairs, maintenance work for restoration of services," Chief Engineer, Sanjay Gupta, said in an order.

NDMC areas are home to the high and mighty of the country, including Union ministers and parliamentarians besides many top industrialists.

Parliament House, offices of all the ministries, Supreme Court, High Court and residences of Supreme Court judges, senior bureaucrats and senior military officers are in NDMC areas.

Earlier, the North Delhi Municipal Corporation told the Delhi High Court that strike of the sanitation workers was over and cleaning and garbage collection work has commenced in Model Town area here and waste will be lifted from the entire colony in the next 10 days.

— PTI

## Ponzi scheme: Man, wife cheat people of ₹42Kcr, arrested

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 10

The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of Delhi Police has arrested husband-wife duo for allegedly cheating several people to the tune of ₹42 thousand crores after inducing them in their ponzi scheme "Bike Boat".

The accused have been identified as Ravinder and his wife, residents of Jalandhar in Punjab. Police said that the husband and wife, who were also directors in the company, were already in judicial custody and they were arrested in the case after permission from the court. Police said that they till now have arrested 18 directors and officials of the accused company Garvit Innovative Promoters Limited.

According to Dr O.P. Mishra, the Joint Commissioner of Police, EOW, several victims had filed complaints against Sanjay Bhati and others of Garvit Innovative Promoters Limited regarding cheating of approximately ₹42 thousand crores.

"It is alleged that the accused persons have induced the victims to invest ₹62,000 for a bike and to receive ₹9,500 monthly including princi-

▶ **IT IS ALLEGED** that the accused persons have induced the victims to invest ₹62,000 for a bike and to receive ₹9,500 monthly including principal and rental income on bike for one year

pal and rental income on bike for one year," said the Joint CP.

"Due to lucrative offers of alleged, number of victims invested and in January 2019, the alleged company launched the Electric-Bike scheme and offered to deposit ₹1.24 lacs for a bike and to receive ₹17,000 per month till one year. Initially alleged had repaid the assured amount but after winning confidence of investors, they absconded," said the Joint CP.

"During investigation, the account details of the alleged company were obtained and a reply from the RBI was also received, where it was revealed that the alleged company was not registered with RBI as a NBFC and was not authorised to collect money from the public," said the Joint CP.

"Around 8000 complainants against the alleged company are Delhi based and their cheated amount is approx ₹250 crores," he added.

## Walkout by Opp. as PM...

■ **Continued from Page 1** target protesting farmers, which he had used in his speech in the Rajya Sabha earlier.

There were strong words for the Congress, which the BJP has repeatedly accused of instigating the farmers. "No matter how much you may try to sabotage it, you will fail to do so, because the truth is out there, that the farmers have not lost anything since the laws came into effect," Mr Modi said, but without naming the Congress.

Mr Modi said the

Congress was a "divided and confused" party, saying it was adopting different positions on various issues in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha as it had no clear-cut stand.

He said: "The Congress today is a confused and divided party. It has reduced itself to this. Such a confused party cannot help the country or anyone else. You want to shout inside Parliament, just as you do outside, then please go ahead, but hiding behind lies will never get you anywhere."

## Biggest wargames by...

■ **Continued from Page 1** This exercise was aimed at validating the coastal defence setup, that was entirely revamped after the 26/11 terror attacks in Mumbai.

Exercise Sea Vigil was followed by a large-scale tri-Service joint amphibious exercise Amphex-21, conducted in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands on January 21-25. The amphibious exercise was aimed at validating India's capabilities to safeguard the territorial integrity of its islands and enhancing opera-

tional synergy and joint warfighting capabilities among the three services.

The Weapon Workup Phase of TropeX, which ended recently, witnessed multiple "on-target" ordnance deliveries, including missiles, torpedoes and rockets from frontline warships, aircraft and submarines and demonstrated the lethal firepower of the Indian Navy and reaffirmed the Navy's capability to carry out long-range maritime strikes in the Indian Ocean Region.

## ITBP teams, Army intensify efforts to reach 30-35 men...

■ **Continued from Page 1** mouth of the Tapovan tunnel," the ITBP chief said.

"I can tell you that we will continue our efforts till any length of time... for whatever time it takes to reach the logical conclusion and find the workers. My boys are determined to locate those trapped there and we may reach that slip tunnel spot (where those trapped are said to be located) by Wednesday evening," he said.

A multi-agency team of rescuers comprising the ITBP, NDRE, state disaster response force and the Army have cleared about 120 metres of slush inside the 22-25 feet high tunnel till now, but the continuous flow of the silt is hampering their rescue efforts. A camera-mounted drone flown inside the tunnel on Tuesday also could not provide any leads to the rescue teams.

The ITBP said some of the challenges of the operation were the narrow passage (20-25 feet) of the tunnel that allows only one big earthmover to remove the debris at one go, and it comes back in reverse gear to dump the

slush outside to make way for the rescuers to further go deep inside.

Mr Deswal said about 450 troops of the border-guarding force, led by a DIG-rank officer and a commandant, are camping in the area to run the operation across 24 hours.

He said about five ITBP border posts along the Line of Actual Control with China that have been disconnected through the land route, as some bridges snapped in and around the Raini village, are in "contact" and the 400 troops there have rations and other essentials stocked with them.

"In fact, troops of these border posts are ferrying food packets on their back to about a dozen villages that have been cut off. My troops collect these air-dropped packets of food and other essential items, after multiple helicopter sorties, from the Lata helipad being operated by us," he said.

There are about 500 houses in these cut-off villages like Jugu, Juagoar, Gwar, Lata, Suki, Balgaon, Tolma, Fagti, Long, Rainipalli, Pang and Surai Thoha, a senior

official present on the ground said.

Another officer based in Uttarakhand said a fresh ITBP team is now looking for survivors in the Tapovan barrage area where the flood waters hit on Sunday leading to large-scale damage to the structure.

"Some videos have emerged that show those stranded on the barrage jumped down. We are looking for least 30-35 missing people in this area at a depth of about 30 feet," he said.

Meanwhile, two persons who were listed as missing returned to their homes safely on Wednesday after being stranded in different areas of Chamoli district. Suraj Singh from Chamoli in Uttarakhand and Rashid from Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh returned to their homes Wednesday.

Chamoli's additional district information officer Ravindra Negi said. Singh and Rashid were among those listed as missing after the calamity, as per official records. The duo was stranded while returning to their villages, officials added.

## SC stays HC order asking schools to give gadgets to poor

**New Delhi, Feb. 10:** The Supreme Court Wednesday stayed the Delhi High Court verdict which directed private unaided as well as government schools like Kendriya Vidyalayas to provide gadgets and internet packages to students from economically weaker section (EWS) or disadvantaged group for online classes during the Covid-19 lockdown.

A bench headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde agreed to hear the plea filed by the Delhi government challenging the high court judgement of September 18 last year.

Issue notice. In the meantime, there shall be stay of operation of the impugned order of the high court, the bench, also comprising Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian, said in its order.

A division bench of the high court had directed that cost of gadgets and internet package are not a part of tuition fee and have to be provided free of cost to these students by the schools, subject to the right of private unaided schools to claim reimbursement from the state in

accordance with provision of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009.

While staying the verdict, the apex court also issued notices to NGO Justice for All, on whose petition the high court had delivered the judgement, and others on Delhi government's plea.

Senior advocate Vikas Singh, appearing for Delhi government, told the bench that additional burden has been put on the state by the high court verdict.

We are already spending a lot on the education front, Singh told the bench.

The bench, while observing that the apex court had earlier delivered a verdict on a similar issue in a case arising out of Himachal Pradesh, asked Singh to place that judgement before it.

The high court had delivered the judgement on a plea filed by the NGO seeking directions to the Centre and the Delhi government to provide free laptops, tablets or mobile phones to poor students so that they can access classes online during the Covid-19 lockdown. — PTI



## SHORT TAKES

## Director who shot porn films arrested

**Mumbai:** The Mumbai police has arrested one more person, who directed nude films for OTT platforms, in connection with a pornographic films racket busted last week, taking the total number of those held in the case so far to nine, including an actress, an official said on Wednesday. The city crime branch's property cell nabbed the ninth accused, aged 40 years, from Surat in Gujarat on Tuesday night, he said, adding the accused used to direct films that cast actors in nude and send them to OTT (over-the-top) platforms. This accused has been involved in such acts for a year, the official said. He was produced before a court here, which remanded him in police custody till February 15. Last week, the police's property cell conducted a raid on a bungalow at Madh in Malwani area here and busted a racket of making pornographic films.

## PM Modi gets call from Trudeau

**New Delhi:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi received a call from his Canadian counterpart Justin Trudeau late on Wednesday evening for facilitation of vaccine supplies to Canada following which PM Modi agreed that India would "do its best". This comes two months after India had issued a demarche to Canada for "unacceptable interference" in India's internal affairs in response to comments made then by senior Canadian politicians, including Mr Trudeau, on the farmers' protests. "Was happy to receive a call from my friend @JustinTrudeau. Assured him that India would do its best to facilitate supplies of Covid vaccines sought by Canada. We also agreed to continue collaborating on other important issues like Climate Change and the global economic recovery," PM Modi tweeted late on Wednesday night.

## Assam man gets death for rape

**Guwahati:** A court in Assam's Hojai district on Wednesday sentenced a man to death for raping and murdering a 5-year-old girl last year. Additional district and sessions judge N. Senabai convicted Chandan Harijan of raping and murdering the minor girl under the IPC and POCSO Act. The court also slapped a fine of ₹5 lakh on the convict, which would be paid to the victims family as compensation. Harijan lured the girl who she was playing outside her house to a secluded place, raped her and strangled her to death on February 26, 2020. The police submitted the chargesheet within two months of filing the case but the hearing did not take place as courts were shut due to the lockdown. — PTI

## KANGANA WITHDRAWS SUIT AGAINST BMC

SHAHAB ANSARI  
MUMBAI, FEB. 10

Kangana Ranaut withdrew the suit she had filed against the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) over a demolition notice in connection with an illegal construction of her house in 2018. She informed that court that she would file a regularisation application before the BMC in connection with the structure. The HC permitted Ms Ranaut to withdraw the appeal and said that no coercive action be taken by the civic body till the application of regularisation is considered and decided, and for two weeks thereafter to enable her to appeal in case of an adverse order on her regularisation application. Now, the actress will apply for regularisation of the structure within four weeks and the court has ordered the civic body to decide her application for regularisation expeditiously in accordance with the law. In case the BMC order is against Ms Ranaut, she will get two weeks time to approach the court again. The BMC had opposed it saying that no such relief can be granted. The court ordered this when Ms Ranaut's lawyer Birendra Saraf informed the court that the suit will be withdrawn within four days.

## Parl clears bill to give autonomy to ports

Minister says it does not aim to privatise country's top 12 major ports

New Delhi, Feb. 10: (PTI) Allaying fears that the Major Ports Authority Bill, 2020 aims at privatisation of the country's top 12 major ports, ports, shipping and waterways minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Wednesday said it seeks to provide autonomy to these ports and boost their decision-making powers in order to compete with private ports. The Major Ports Authority Bill, 2020 was passed through ballot votes in the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday with 84 votes in its favour and 44 against it. The Lok Sabha had passed the bill on September 23 last year. Taking a strong objection to some members' remarks that it is intended to benefit big corporate houses and would result in the ruining of the ports

and their plunder, Mandaviya, in his reply to the debate on the bill, said rather, it would turn these ports into world-class ports and enable their boards to take decisions on their own. "Would a patriot oppose this bill? This bill is not for privatisation of ports.... The bill has nothing to do with privatisation. Former finance minister Arun Jaitley and former shipping minister Nitin Gadkari had also specified that there will not be privatisation of ports.... The bill is not to sell ports," he said. Various opposition parties, including the Congress, TMC, SP, RJD, DMK, AAP, CPI(M) and CPI raised objections on the bill in the Upper House of Parliament and alleged that it is aimed at privatising the ports and



Union minister Prakash Javdekar with MoS finance Anurag Thakur during the ongoing Budget Session of Parliament in New Delhi on Wednesday.

diluting the powers of the states on land use. However, the BJD, JD(U), YSRCP supported it, saying it is a welcome move to expand the port devel-

opment infrastructure. Mandaviya questioned: "Have Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra governments not given ports to

private companies for development? Did that happen in the tenure of Narendra Modi?"

He said the government, led by Prime Minister Modi, believes in the federal structure and assured the Upper House that "state government representatives will not be removed".

The minister said: "We developed the Kolkata port on the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. We paid the liabilities for all pensioners. The loss-making ports are now profitable. This is because of the reforms."

Taking a dig at the Opposition for opposing the bill, Mr Mandaviya said "the sky has not fallen" and the bill was introduced after taking into account the major recommendations of the standing committee. — PTI

## SC stays HC order against Andhra CM Jagan, lawyers

PARMOD KUMAR  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 10

The Supreme Court on Tuesday stayed the Andhra Pradesh high court order castigating the wisdom of the state government, the chief minister Jaganmohan Reddy and that of the lawyers representing the government.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde, Justice A.S. Bopanna and Justice V. Ramasubramanian stayed the December 30, 2020, state high court order in an appeal by the Andhra Pradesh government.

Senior lawyer Sajjan Poovayya assisted by advocate Mahfooz Ahsan Nazaki appeared for the Andhra Pradesh government.

The high court by its December 30, 2020, order had questioned the wisdom of the government,

the chief minister and advocates representing the state on different counts, including the conduct of some lawyers representing the government.

The critical observations by the HC had come on an application by the state government seeking the recusal of a judge on the grounds that the said judge had prejudged the issue without hearing the state government.

The Jaganmohan Reddy government was aggrieved with an observation in the course of an earlier hearing where the court had questioned the decision of the state government to auction certain properties wondering whether the state had become bankrupt.

"How could the government auction the properties of the state, had the government become bankrupt to auction gov-

ernment properties, we will declare there is a breakdown of constitutional machinery in the state and hand over the administration to the Central government."

The assertion that this statement was made by one of the members of the bench has been disputed.

The petition by the Andhra Pradesh government has said that a perusal of the contents of the "unprecedented" order, which is completely unrelated to the issue raised in the matter, would show that the high court has not stopped merely at castigating the government/its functionaries and the advocates appearing for the government but even goes on to cast aspersions on the top court collegiums on the mere ipse dixit (an assertion without proof) of the judge.

## TN CM not rattled by Sasikala rally

G BABU JAYAKUMAR  
AND D SEKAR  
CHENNAI, FEB 10

The grandiose roadshow that marked the return of expelled AIADMK general secretary V.K. Sasikala from jail on Monday and her clarion call for unity have not made any impact on the party leadership, who remain firm on not reinstating her or any of her family members without heeding to her call.

Sasikala, on her part, is also silent though she has been meeting functionaries of the AMMK, the party launched by her nephew T.T.V. Dhinakaran after he was

thrown out of the AIADMK, and others at the house of her niece Krishana Priya in T Nagar, where she is now put up.

But chief minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami, speaking at a campaign meeting in Krishnagiri on Wednesday, categorically stated that there was no scope for any one expelled from the party to rejoin it. In an indirect reference to Sasikala, he said that they would not allow the domination of any family in the party.

Only a party worker could become Chief Minister and a single family's control on the



Edappadi K. Palaniswami

party would not be tolerated, said Palaniswami, who had openly hit out at Dhinakaran on Tuesday night, pointing out that he was thrown out of the party by J. Jayalalitha.

There was a conspiracy to capture the AIADMK and whatever Mr Dhinakaran did he would not be able to pull it off,

he said and called upon the party cadre to help realise the dreams of MGR and Jaya.

Reacting to rumours that Mr Palaniswami and Sasikala were planning to meet, fisheries minister D. Jayakumar clearly said that there was no scope for it in this lifetime. He was speaking to media persons at Saidapet on Wednesday morning.

Making a firm stand on not heeding to the call for unity, he said the 'common enemy' mentioned by Sasikala was the AIADMK party, to which both the Sasikala group and the DMK were pitted against.

## Kerala film fest adjusts to new normal but strikes a cigar and a dissenting note



SUPARNA SHARMA

**Thiruvananthapuram, Feb. 10:** The 25th edition of the International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK) opened on Wednesday all masked up, with strict adherence to social distancing and to a note of warning. The IFFK, whose fumigated and sanitised auditoriums are running at just 50 per cent capacity and all delegates have to undergo rigorous antigen tests — 70 out of 800 tested on Tuesday turned out to be "positive" and are in quarantine — has adjusted well to the Coronavirus-induced new normal, but it continues to strike a note of dissent through the films it picks. The festival's opening



A still from Quo Vadis, Aida?

film, Bosnia's Oscar entry Quo Vadis, Aida?, which had its India premiere on Wednesday evening after chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan inaugurated the film festival, is a cautionary tale about "what happens when we fail to react on time to warning signs". Directed by Jasmila bani, Quo Vadis, Aida? is based on recorded facts and recalls in shocking detail the Srebrenica massacre of July 1995.

After the traditional inauguration with the lighting of the lamp, legendary French filmmaker Jean Luc Godard received the Lifetime Achievement award. Greeting the audience from his home through videoconferencing, Godard said, "I am

sorry for speaking in the tongue of the dominators (English). Thank you very much Kerala. Thank you to the Kerala festival for screening good and sensible films. It is great that five of my films are being screened there," and in his quintessential style, lit a cigar.

Quo Vadis, Aida? (Where are you going, Aida?) leads a long list of foreign and Indian films at IFFK that have dissent as their central theme. This Is Not A Burial, It's A Resurrection, which is part of the festival's International Competition section, tells the story of an 80-year-old widow in Lesotho who is making arrangements to die when the forced resettlement of her village

brings her to the forefront of a movement to stand for land rights.

Another "subversive" film in the International competition this year is There Is No Evil by Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof. It tells the story of a nation that enforces the death penalty through four men whose destinies are loosely connected by their willingness or refusal to assist in state-ordered assassinations. The film won the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival last year and a month later Iranian authorities sentenced Rasoulof, who lives in Germany, to jail on the charge that his films were "propaganda against the system".

The IFFK is held in Thiruvananthapuram every year. But this year, to avoid crowding, the festival is being held in four locations. It is scheduled to run between February 10 and 14 in Thiruvananthapuram, and after that all films will travel to Ernakulam (from February 17-21), Thalassery (February 23-27) and Palakkad (March 1-5).

## SPECIAL TRAIN

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

04021/04022 Delhi Sarai Rohilla - Jaipur - Delhi Sarai Rohilla Sainik Special Express Train (via Siker)		(Tri-weekly)	
Train No. 04021	STATION	Train No. 04022	
Arr.	Dep.	Arr.	Dep.
--	22:25	Delhi Sarai Rohilla	05:35
22:40	22:42	Delhi Cantt	05:05
22:58	23:00	Gurgaon	04:48
23:21	23:23	Patna Road	04:25
23:55	00:05	Rewari	04:04
00:25	00:27	Dahina Zainabad	02:58
00:36	00:38	Kanina Khas	02:47
00:52	00:54	Mahendragarh	02:31
01:45	02:20	Loharu	01:35
02:36	02:38	Surajgarh	00:28
02:50	02:52	Chirawa	00:14
03:07	03:09	Ratan Shahar	23:58
03:23	03:25	Jhunjhunu	23:41
--	--	Nua	23:27
03:53	03:55	Dundlod Mukundgarh	23:11
04:24	04:26	Nawalgarh	22:57
04:55	05:00	Sikar Jn	22:23
05:23	05:25	Palsana	21:54
05:58	06:03	Ringsar	21:32
06:16	06:18	Govindgarh Malikpur	21:13
06:28	06:30	Chomun Samod	21:01
06:49	06:52	Dahar Ka Balaji	20:37
07:20	--	Jaipur	--

Days of Run:- 04021 Ex. Delhi Sarai Rohilla on every Tuesday, Thursday & Saturday from 16.02.2021 till further advice and 04022 Ex. Jaipur on every Wednesday, Friday & Sunday from 17.02.2021 till further advice.

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

Note: The above Special Train will have the reserved accommodation only.

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

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

Phone 139 to 139 Visit RailMadad website: [www.northernrailways.gov.in](http://www.northernrailways.gov.in) Visit us at: [www.northernrailways.gov.in](http://www.northernrailways.gov.in) Visit RailMadad website: [www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in](http://www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in) & download RailMadad app.

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

एसजेवीएन लिमिटेड SJVN Limited  
(भारत सरकार एवं हिमाचल प्रदेश सरकार का संयुक्त उपक्रम)  
(A Joint Venture of Govt. of India & Govt. of H.P.)  
CIN No. L40101HP1988GOI008409

NATHPA JHAKRI HYDRO POWER STATION

PRESS NOTICE

Bid No. : GEM / 2021 / B / 1025360

Online bids (through GeM portal) on Domestic Competitive Bidding (DCB) are invited on behalf of SJVN Ltd. for, "Custom Bid for Services- Manpower Outsourcing Services for Routine/ Preventive/Breakdown Maintenance jobs of Power House Electrical & Mechanical Equipments, water supply, W&T & related office work in 1500 MW NUHPS for one year". For details, please visit websites : [www.sjvn.nic.in](http://www.sjvn.nic.in) & <https://gem.gov.in>

Bid End Date/Time : 03.03.2021 (14:00 Hrs.)

Bid Opening Date/Time : 03.03.2021 (14:30 Hrs.)

Amendment (s), if any, shall be issued on above websites only.

Dy. General Manager (P&C Deptt.)

NUHPS, SJVN Ltd., Jhakri, Distt. Shimla (HP)-172201

NORTHERN RAILWAY

Open E-Tender Notice

The Sr. Divisional Engineer-Ill, Northern Railway, Delhi Division invites E-Tender for the following work:

Name of Work : TTR(S) with 60KG/52Kg Rails, 7.678Km in the section of SSE/P-way/NDLS under ADEN/NDLS (TTR(S) 3.982 Km and TTR(S) 3.696 Km in the section of SSE/P-way/NDLS under ADEN/NDLS)

Approx. Cost of work : Rs.7285138.71/- (Rupees Seventy Two Lakh Eighty Five Thousand One Hundred Thirty Eight and paise Seventy One only)

Earnest Money to be Deposit : Rs.0.00

Cost of tender document : Rs.0/-

Date & Time of submission of tender bid and opening of tender : 09.03.2021 @ 15:00 Hrs.

Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen : [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in)

The tenderer/s must be registered on the Indian Railway E-Procurement system (IREPS) site i.e. [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in) for participating in the e-tender system. For all terms and conditions please refer tender document. No manual offers are acceptable. Cost of tender document and Earnest money will be acceptable through net banking or payment gateway only.

No. 128-W/280/- Tender Notice/NT/39/2020-21/W-3

Dated : 09.02.2021

Serving Customers With A Smile

28/5/2021

CAN FIN HOMES LTD.

BO: DP-11, 1st FLOOR LOCAL SHOPPING COMPLEX, Above Canara Bank, PITAMPURA, DELHI - 110034 MB. NO.7625079150

Ph. No. 011-41761717, E-mail : [pitampura@canfinhomes.com](mailto:pitampura@canfinhomes.com)

CIN:L85110KA198PLC008699

[proviso to rule 9 (1)] Sale notice for sale of immovable properties

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

NOTICE is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of Can Fin Homes Ltd. NCR-Pitampura Branch, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" on 04.03.2021 for recovery of Rs. 24,94,520/- (Rupees Twenty four lakhs ninety four thousand five hundred twenty Only) due to Can Fin Homes Ltd. from Mr. Anis Khan S/o Mr. Bandey Ali Khan and Mrs. Shahnaz Bano D/o Mr. Babu Khan and Mr. Mohd. Asad Warsi S/o Bandey Ali Khan as on 01.08.2018 together with further interest and other charges thereon. The reserve price will be Rs. 18,00,000/- (Rupees Eighteen Lakhs Only) and the earnest money deposit will be Rs. 1,80,000/- (Rupees One Lakh Eighty Thousand Only).

Description of immovable property

Encumbrance - NIL

Fiat No B1, First Floor, Rear RHS, Plot No. 37/2, Dishad Colony, Delhi

The detailed terms and condition of sale are provided in the official website of Can Fin Homes Ltd., ([www.canfinhomes.com](http://www.canfinhomes.com)). Please refer to the following link <https://www.canfinhomes.com/SearchAuction.aspx>

Date : 10/02/2021

Place : Pitampura

Sd/-, Authorised Officer Can Fin Homes Ltd.

POSTGRADUATE INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL EDUCATION & RESEARCH, CHANDIGARH						
E-Tender Notice No. PI(EP)/20-21/10				Phone No. 0172-2756469		
Tender applications are invited for purchase of various items against tender No. 1-20 from the Manufacturers or their sole authorized distributors/agents. The bidders can place their bids as per terms & conditions contained on <a href="https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app">https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app</a>						
Sr. No	Equipment/Item Name	Quantity	EMD	Bid submission date	Bid Opening Date	Deptt. Name
<b>Non Pre Bid cases</b>						
1	Intracranial Pressure Monitor	05 Nos.	80,000/-	22-02-2021	23-02-2021	Neurosurgery
2	CUSA	03 Nos.	2,40,000/-	-do-	-do-	Surgical Gastroenterology
3	MGI SP-960 Compatible Plastic Ware	As per technical specification	2,66,000/-	-do-	-do-	Virology
4	Pelvic Set with radiolucent retractor System consist of light pipe, suction and retractor fixation with K-wires	01No.	80,000/-	-do-	-do-	Orthopaedics
5	Radioactive Sources	As per technical specification	24,000/-	-do-	-do-	Nuclear Medicine
6	Paediatric Rigid Bronchoscopy Set	01 No.	60,000/-	-do-	-do-	Paed. Surgery
7	Viscoelastic Coagulation Testing Devices	01 No.	50,000/-	23-02-2021	24-02-2021	Anaesthesia
8	High Definition Video Bronchoscopy System with Image Recording	01 No.	60,000/-	-do-	-do-	Pediatrics
9	Foot Pressure Analyzer	01 No.	60,000/-	-do-	-do-	Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine
10	Magneto Therapy	01 No.	40,000/-	-do-	-do-	Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine
11	Integrated Non Invasive Hemodynamic System with 25 no. accessories	01 No.	64,000/-	-do-	-do-	Hepatology
12	Pediatric Cytoscopy Set with Ureterorenoscope	01 No.	70,000/-	-do-	-do-	Paed Surgery
13	Vision & Stereocopy testing instruments	As per technical specification	20,000/-	-do-	-do-	AEC
14	Yag Laser	01No.	44,000/-	24-02-2021	25-02-2021	AEC
<b>Pre Bid Cases</b>						
15	Infant Lung Function Testing System	01No.	1,40,000/-	-do-	-do-	Pediatrics
16	Wide Bore CT Simulator on Buy Back Basis	01No.	16,00,000/-	-do-	-do-	Radiotherapy
17	High Throughput Sequencer for exome sequencing	01No.	8,00,000/-	-do-	-do-	Pediatrics
18	Human Dexa Machine	01No.	4,40,000/-	-do-	-do-	Endocrinology
19	Laparoscopic Surgery Set	02 Nos.	4,00,000/-	-do-	-do-	Surgical Gastroenterology
20	3D Printing Station	01No.	1,50,000/-	-do-	-do-	OSD (RGC)
Tender List can also be downloaded from website <a href="http://www.pgimr.edu.in">www.pgimr.edu.in</a> and can be applied on website <a href="http://www.eprocure.gov.in">www.eprocure.gov.in</a> in place of Earnest Money Deposit/Bid Security only "Bid Security Declaration" may be submitted by the Bidders as per Rule 170(ii) of GPF 2017. The tenders shall be opened on the next date at 03:00 PM in the presence of the authorized intending tenderers. Tenders not submitted on the prescribed form, not accompanied with Bid Security Declaration shall be summarily rejected straightaway. The undersigned reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the tenders received without assigning any reason therefor. "PRE-BID CONFERENCE" WITH INTENDING BIDDERS FOR ITEM SR. No. 15 to 20 shall be held on 16-02-2021 from 04:00 P.M. ONWARDS IN THE PI(EP), OFFICE, PGIMER, CHANDIGARH. The intending bidder are free to join Pre bid Conference through video conference. For more details contact: 0172-2756469 at Procurement Branch (Import).						
NOTE 1. The terms and Conditions of the original Notice Inviting Tender (NIT) available on PGIMER Website will remain same. However on switching over to e-tendering on e-Procurement, the bids will be received in electronic form on e-Procurement website and no bid will be received in Physical form.						
NOTE 2. If any of the tender opening dates happens to be a holiday in PGIMER, Chandigarh, then the same shall be opened on next full working day.						
<b>Additional Terms and Conditions.</b>						
1. The Institute has adopted amended Notice Inviting Tenders (NIT) which is available on e-Procurement website ( <a href="https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app">https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app</a> ) and Website: <a href="http://www.pgimr.edu.in">www.pgimr.edu.in</a> . Therefore the bidders are requested to go through the Instructions Carefully before submitting bids.						
<b>PROFESSOR IN-CHARGE (EP)</b>						



## SHORT TAKES

IJU FLAYS ED  
RAIDS ON  
NEWSCCLICK

**Hyderabad/Chandigarh, Feb. 10:** The Indian Journalists Union (IJU) has condemned the Enforcement Directorate raids on the digital news platform Newsclick and described them as continuation of the government's ongoing efforts to silence the media critical of its policies.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, K. Sreenivas Reddy and Balwinder Singh Jammu President and Secretary General of IJU respectively said that five journalists have been arrested in the country in the first month of 2021 creating a record of sorts. They also recalled the recent sedition charges against senior journalists who were covering developments on the Republic Day.

The news portal Newsclick has been closely covering the ongoing farmers agitation against the farm laws. The raids by ED on a small news portal and the immediate allegation of ₹30 crore money laundering betray the designs of the government, the IJU leaders commented.

Raids by obliging central agencies and FIRs by puppet police in various states against journalists are a clear and brazen effort to silence the critical media by creating fear psychosis, the IJU leaders said. They demanded the government to desist from this kind of tactics and help foster a media friendly environment crucial to the sustenance of democracy.

93 ARRESTS IN 93  
SEDITION CASES  
IN 2019: GOVT

**New Delhi, Feb. 10:** As many as 93 cases of sedition were registered in different parts of the country in 2019 in which 96 people were arrested, the Rajya Sabha was informed on Wednesday.

Union minister of state for home G. Kishan Reddy said chargesheets were filed against 76 people while 29 were acquitted by the courts in 2019. The highest number of 22 sedition cases in 2019 was registered in Karnataka where 18 people were arrested, he said in a written reply to a question.

Reddy said 17 sedition cases were registered in Assam where 23 people were arrested.

A total of 11 sedition cases were registered in Jammu and Kashmir where 16 people were arrested. As many as 10 sedition cases were filed in Uttar Pradesh in which nine people were arrested, he said.

Replying to another question on whether any step has been taken to strengthen the sedition law (Section 124A of the IPC), the minister said the "amendment of laws is an ongoing process".

GUPKAR ALLIANCE  
WINS DDC CHIEF  
POLLS IN 2 REGIONS

**Srinagar, Feb. 10:** The People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) an amalgam of six political parties seeking restoration of the special Constitutional status of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir won the elections for the posts of chairpersons of the District Development Council (DDC) in two districts of the valley for which the polls were held on Wednesday, officials said.

In the third phase of the polls on Wednesday, the elections were conducted in two districts of the Kashmir valley — Ganderbal and Pulwama and the PAGD, which includes the National Conference (NC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), won at both the places.

While the NC won the post of the chairperson from Ganderbal, a PDP candidate was elected as chairperson in Pulwama, the officials said.

In Ganderbal district in central Kashmir, NC candidate Nuzhat Ishfaq was elected as the chairperson, while Bilal Ahmad Sheikh of PDP was elected as the vice-chairperson of the DDC Ganderbal, they said. Nuzhat is the wife of NC leader and former MLA Ganderbal Ishfaq Jabbar.

In the DDC polls for 14 seats in the district which took place in December last year, the NC had won seven seats while the PDP bagged four and three went to the kitty of independents.

In Pulwama district in south Kashmir, the PDP candidate Syed Bari Andrabi was elected as the chairperson, while the NC candidate Mukhtar Ahmad Bandh as his deputy, the officials said. The PDP had emerged as the single largest party in the district by bagging half of the total 14 seats.

— PTI



Women and children ride a tractor on their way to take part in farmers protest against farm laws at Singhu border in Sonapat district on Wednesday. — PTI

## Farmers to intensify stir, 'rail roko' on Feb. 18 for 4 hours

*Farmers not aiming power change at Centre: Tikait*

**SANJAY KAW**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 10

Days after "chakka jam", the protesting farmers' unions on Wednesday announced a four-hour nationwide "rail roko" (railway blockade) on February 18 to intensify their agitation against the three contentious agricultural laws.

The unions have also decided to make toll free movement of vehicles on highways in Rajasthan from Friday. Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) leader Darshan Pal said a series of events have been planned to intensify the agitation which has been going on for over two months at Delhi borders.

The SKM is an umbrella organization of 41 farmers' unions which has been negotiating with the Centre over the new farm laws. Just a month ago, farmers had stopped toll collection at Hanumanagar, Ganganagar and Bikaner in the state.

The unions have also decided to hold a candle march or "mashal juloos", accompanied by other activities, on Sunday across the country to remember the sacrifices of martyred soldiers in the Pulwama attack.

On February 16, the



Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra during the kisan mahapanchayat at Chilkana in Saharanpur district, Uttar Pradesh, on Wednesday. — PTI

farmers will observe the birth anniversary of peasant leader Chhotu Ram. Posters of Chhotu Ram were also seen on the tableaux during the farmers' tractor rally on January 26.

The unions have announced a four-hour nationwide 'rail roko' (railway blockade) on February 18. "There will be a 'rail roko' across the country from 12 pm to 4 pm on February 18," the SKM said in the statement. Earlier this month, the farmers had observed a three-hour road blockade to press their demand for the repeal of the three laws and a legal guarantee on MSP.

Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait, who has now become the face of the agitation, meanwhile, asserted that the protesters were not aiming at any change in power at the Centre but a solution to their problems. "We do not aim to change in power (at the Centre). The government should do its work. We want it to repeal the farm laws and ensure law on MSP."

Addressing the protesters at Singhu border, Mr Tikait said that the agitation against the farm laws will stretch till the Centre addresses their issues. He said many of their leaders will tour different parts of the country to spread the movement. He also asserted that the unity of the SKM was intact and warned the government not to be in any illusion,

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If voted to  
power, Cong  
will scrap farm  
laws: Priyanka

**Lucknow, Feb. 10:** Attacking the Centre over the new farm laws, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Wednesday told a rally in western Uttar Pradesh that if voted to power her party would scrap them.

At a "kisan panchayat" organised by the party in Saharanpur, the Congress general secretary accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other BJP leaders of "insulting" farmers who are protesting against the laws. "The three laws are demonic. If voted to power, the Congress will scrap these laws," she said.

She said the party's fight will continue till the laws are scrapped.

The rally is the first in a series of such farmers' meetings planned by the Congress in western Uttar Pradesh, a year before the assembly elections in the state where the opposition party is struggling to revive itself.

The Congress leader was presented with a pair of ploughs at the meeting.

— PTI

China row: US backs India,  
says we'll stand with friends

**SRIDHAR  
KUMARASWAMI**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 10

Signalling a consistency in American foreign policy, the new Joe Biden Administration said on Wednesday that it is "concerned by Beijing's pattern of ongoing attempts to intimidate its neighbours" such as India, adding that the United States "would stand with (its) friends".

The US state department also described India as "one of the most important partners in the Indo-Pacific region" of the US, adding that it "welcomes India's emergence as a leading global power and its role as a net security provider in the region".

Describing its Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership with India as "both broad as well as multifaceted", the US expressed "confidence that the strong and upward trajectory of our partnership will, in fact, continue".

Asked about human rights issues, the US state department said that "this applies not only to India but to every partner of ours across the board" and that the US is "committed to supporting democratic values, including a free and open civil society and the strong rule of law".

Pointing out that it "regularly engages with the Government of India", the US said the "shared commitment to democratic value is the bedrock for the US-India relationship" which is "in keeping with India's own democratic values, its pluralistic values, and its history of tolerance".

Asked about the phone conversation late on Tuesday between US secretary of state Antony J. Blinken and external affairs minister S. Jaishankar, the US state department on Wednesday said that Mr Blinken expressed concern over the military coup and the importance of rule of law and the democratic process in Burma (Myanmar), adding that both foreign ministers "also discussed regional developments, including the value of US-India cooperation across the Indo-Pacific" and "looked forward to expanded regional cooperation, including through the Quad, and to address the challenges of Covid

Govt: Army responded  
to China's attempts

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 10

The government on Wednesday informed Parliament that since April-May last year, the Chinese Chinese military-made "several attempts to unilaterally alter the status quo along the Line of Actual Control (LAC)" in the western (Ladakh) sector and Indian armed forces "responded" to them "appropriately".

It added that the government would "continue discussions with the Chinese side to achieve the objective of disengagement from all friction points and full restoration of peace and tranquillity in the India-China Border Areas, diplomatic and military engagements with the Chinese side have continued. Six meetings of the working mechanism for consultation and coordination on India-China border affairs and nine meetings of the Senior commanders have been held so far. The government will continue discussions with the Chinese side to achieve the objective of disengagement from all friction points."

At a media briefing in Washington, US state department spokesperson Ned Price said, "Well, we're closely monitoring the situation. We note the ongoing talks between the governments of India and China, and we continue to support direct dialogue and a peaceful resolution of those border disputes. We are concerned by Beijing's pattern of ongoing attempts to intimidate its neighbours. As always, we'll stand with friends, we'll stand with partners, we'll stand with allies to advance our shared prosperity, security, and values in, in this case, the Indo-Pacific."

He added, "India is one of the most important partners in the Indo-Pacific region to us. We welcome India's emergence as a leading global power and its role as a net security provider in the region. We cooperate on a wide range of diplomatic and security issues, including defence, non-proliferation, regional

cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, counterterrorism, peacekeeping, the environment, health, education, technology, agriculture, space, and oceans."

Asked about human rights issues in India, the US State Department Spokesperson said, "Well, what I can say — and this applies not only to India but to every partner of ours across the board — we are committed to supporting democratic values, including a free and open civil society and the strong rule of law. We regularly engage with the Government of India — including, as you referenced and I alluded to, today — on our shared commitment to democratic values. We believe it's the bedrock for the US-India relationship. And it's actually in keeping, as you know, with India's own democratic values, its pluralistic values, and its history of tolerance. So we regularly engage with our Indian counterparts..."

Wilson moves HC  
over 'planted proof'

**SHAHAB ANSARI**  
MUMBAI, FEB. 10

**BHIMA KOREGAON**

Activist Rona Wilson on Wednesday filed a petition in the Bombay high court seeking dismissal of the case against him in connection with the 2018 Bhima Koregaon violence. His lawyer submitted a digital forensic report from a Massachusetts-based forensic firm Arsenal Digital which mentioned that a hacker hacked Rona Wilson's laptop and planted 10 letters right before Wilson's arrest.

Advocate Sudeep Pasbola on behalf of Rona filed the petition and also attached a digital forensic report from a Arsenal Digital that mentioned that a hacker hacked Rona Wilson's laptop and planted 10 letters right before Wilson's arrest.

Advocate Pasbola had approached the Arsenal Digital to examine the

electronic copy of his client's laptop.

These are the same letters which were first used by the Pune police and later by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) as evidence to show Rona's complicity in Bhima Koregaon case.

Relying on these letters the Pune police in the past had claimed that the arrested accused were planning to assassinate the Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

On January 1, 2018, the violence at Bhima Koregaon village in Pune district left one dead and injured several others, including 10 policemen.

Violence erupted after some people, pelted stones at cars heading towards the village for the commemoration of the 200 years of Bhima-Koregaon war on New Year's Day.

## Navy's largest war game



Ships take part in Indian Navy's largest war game — the biennial Theatre Level Operational Readiness Exercise (TROPEX 21) — which commenced in early January, in the Indian Ocean Region. The exercise will culminate by the third week of February. The exercise is taking place at a time China has been making increasing forays into the Indian Ocean region as part of its offensive military manoeuvre. — PTI

## Dickinsonia: Fossil of world's 'oldest animal' found in MP

**RABINDRA NATH  
CHOUDHURY**  
BHOPAL, FEB. 10

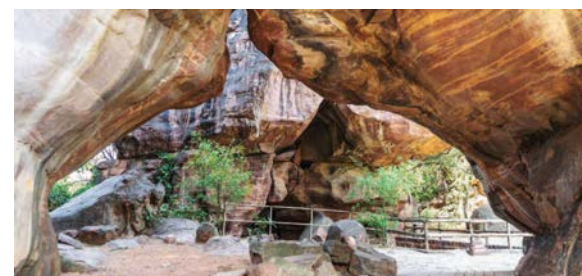
Fossils of Dickinsonia, world's "oldest animal" dating back to 570 million years, have been discovered in the Bhimbetka rock shelters, a UNESCO World Heritage site, nearly 40 km from here.

The fossils, resembling leaves of a tree, have accidentally been found by 2 geologists of Geological Survey of India (GSI) during sightseeing in the famous heritage site last year. The discovery has found

a place in the February edition of Gondwana Research, a prestigious international journal.

"The fossils were found on the roof of Auditorium Cave at Bhimbetka rock shelters," the paper published in the journal said.

The paper, titled "Dickinsonia Discovered in India and late Ediacaran Biogeography", added, "The fossils are identical with Dickinsonia tenuis from the Ediacara member of the Rawnsley Quartzite in South Australia, and like them also show deformation due to the lateral impinge-



Fossils were found in the roof of Auditorium Cave at Bhimbetka Rock Shelters, Madhya Pradesh.

ment, and alignment".

Highlighting the significance of the finding, the authors of the paper observed, "The discovery of Dickinsonia in India

allows assessment of biogeographic provinces and plate tectonic reconstructions for the late Ediacaran".

The paper was authored

jointly by Gregory J Rettallack, Neffra A. Mathews, Sharad Master, Ranjit G. Khaghar and Merajuddin Khan.

Dickinsonia, an extinct genus of a basal animal, is believed to be one of the key links between the early simple organisms and the evolution of life in the Cambrian period dating back to 541 million years.

The paper has claimed that it was the first of its kind discovery in India.

However, professor P.K. Kathal of department of applied geology, Centre of Advanced Study in Geology, Dr H.S. Gour

University in Sagar in Madhya Pradesh has contested the claim saying that an Ediacaran fossil Spriggina, a cousin of Dickinsonia family, was discovered first in Chauraiya locality of Damoh district in Madhya Pradesh in 2000.

"The first discovery of Ediacaran fossil named Spriggina was reported from 400 to 425 million years old rock by me along with Dr D.R. Patel, and Prof P O Alexander in 2000", he said.

Their works were published in a German science journal in 2000.



## THE ASIAN AGE

11 FEBRUARY 2021

## To save public money, start to disinvest fast

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman's announcement to privatise two public sector banks and a general insurance company marks a clear departure from a cautious approach adopted by the Narendra Modi government since 2014 over the disinvestment policy. This move reaffirms the government's intent, announced last year, to exit all non-strategic sectors.

Despite his stated belief in the concept of "less government and more governance", Prime Minister Narendra Modi had done very little in terms of reducing the government's ownership of companies. In fact, the Department of Public Enterprise's data shows that there are 339 CPSEs (excluding insurance companies) as on March 31, 2018, compared to 290 CPSEs on March 31, 2014.

Several attempts to sell state-owned companies that have become a burden on exchequer were skillfully scuttled by conditions framed by bureaucrats. If the political leadership becomes successful in implementing its plan, it could prevent taxpayer's money from being invested in running inefficient companies, and that money could be fruitfully used elsewhere.

**It is time for the government to move on and exit all sectors where private companies are strong. If there are no buyers, the government should give handsome compensation to employees and shut industries.**

The core issue at the heart of the demand for privatisation is not so much about the propriety of the government's role in businesses as it is about the uselessness of such presence. When the Jawaharlal Nehru government decided to set up large state-owned industries, it was more a need of the hour than an ideological statement because private industrialists had no financial muscle to bankroll such massive projects. This approach was also in tune with the recommendations made by the country's eight top industrialists of the day, which was referred to as the 1945 Bombay Plan.

Though Indira Gandhi's decision to nationalise banks was dictated by her political agenda, it brought about confidence among people in the safety of their money deposited in banks. From the year 1934, when the Reserve Bank of India was established to the time of bank nationalisation in 1969, over 1,500 banks had failed in the country, eroding people's faith in the banking sector. An implied sovereign guarantee to people's money in banks resulted in the greater formalisation of public savings which helped in creating capital for entrepreneurs.

While the earlier government's intervention in critical sectors had helped the country in creating a strong industrial base, whereupon a new India was built, it is time for the government to move on and exit all sectors where private companies are strong. If there are no buyers, the government should give handsome compensation to employees and shut industries.

To protect itself from allegations of selling family silver and also to create the base for future high-tech industries, the government should chip in to create the ecosystem required for semiconductor fab factories or high-tech medical equipment companies or aircraft manufacturing using the Maruti model, where the government invests money and the private partner brings in the technology. If the government succumbs to pressure to continue with the status quo to please a few lakhs of PSU employees, it would be a great disservice to crores of Indians of the present and future generations.

## Modi &amp; Azad: Civility back

Not often in the recent past has Parliament been invaded by an outbreak of civility. But when it did, as in extremely emotional speeches by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Rajya Sabha Opposition Leader Ghulam Nabi Azad of the Congress, it augured well for a sense of dignity and decorum to be ushered back into India's increasingly polarised polity. Before a Prime Ministerial image makeover, Modi was stateliness personified, as in his opening speech as PM to both Houses of Parliament. Since then, in a fractured political scene, he has been seen more in confrontational mode, attacking opponents in India and when he goes abroad and in the House too when he mocked Sonia Gandhi and her son Rahul.

The spirit of give and take seemed to have evaporated in Parliament with many sessions lost to the "in the Well" attitude of the Opposition ranged against the intransigence of the Treasury benches when it came to lending an ear to diverse points of view. Civil debates on national issues have been few and far between but the ruling BJP is not the only party guilty of reducing Parliament into a non-functional laggard. This could change, much as it should, during the debate on the farmers' stir and into the future when political parties on sharply divergent ideological paths can be expected to only drift further apart thanks to the compulsions of poll politics and the seeming need for harsh language at the hustings.

Clever interpretations of acronyms appear to be the current fad as politicians attack each other, which is why such fulsome praise of opponents, which Mr Modi and Mr Azad showered on each other on the eve of the former Kashmir CM retiring from Parliament, is to be seen as a breakthrough. Brushing aside cynical views of the use of words of praise being opportunistic and rare, we must wish that civility stays in Parliament where government and Opposition members meet most often and in debates that make the legislature one of the pillars of democracy. Politicians of all hues would do well to remember that cordiality costs nothing and that the nation and the Constitution always come first.

## THE ASIAN AGE

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Dilip Cherian  
Dilli Ka Babu

## NGT hauls up Kerala govt for ignoring 'legacy waste' directive

Kerala's chief secretary Vishwas Mehta came under fire from the National Green Tribunal (NGT) over the continued ineffective solid waste management in Kochi.

According to sources, the tribunal made scathing remarks against the state government while criticising the affidavit filed by Mr Mehta and threatened to prosecute officers responsible for ensuring that parameters of environmental safety are met. The tribunal lamented that the chief secretary's affidavit did not show any effective action being taken on the ground, despite several directives issued in the past two years.

The tribunal, quoting a report by the State Pollution Control Board, noted that the municipal authorities in Kochi were continuing unauthorised operations and were

yet to start work for bio-mining.

The directive came while the tribunal was hearing a case seeking direction to take effective steps for infrastructure development for collection, storage, segregation and disposal of tonnes of waste, termed legacy waste, that has accumulated over the years in Kochi's Brahmapuram area.

Ironically, the adverse comments came at a time when the state government claims that it is strictly following the "green protocol" and chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan declared more than 11,000 government offices and public sector undertakings as "green" on Republic Day!

## NITISH TO WEED OUT HOME DEADWOOD

The Nitish Kumar government in Bihar is moving ahead with its announcement last year of retiring

identified "inefficient" employees. The state home department headed by the chief minister has set up high-level committees to implement the order.

According to sources, a committee headed by additional chief secretary of the home department Amir Subhani will deal with Group A employees of the department. The panel also includes special secretary Vikash Vaibhav, among others. The other committee will be headed by secretary of the home department, K. Senthil Kumar, and include joint secretary Bimlesh Kumar Jha, among other senior officials. It has been tasked with identifying the deadwood from among Group B, C and D employees. Both committees will meet every year in June and December to consider the proposals to retire identified officers. Further, the department has instructed all

offices and directorates under it to set up such panels at their level.

Previously, in 2017, the state government had announced to compulsorily retire non-performing education department officials, school headmasters and teachers after disappointing Matric and intermediate exams. But the decision was not followed through, say sources. Will it be any different this time?

## RETURN OF THE PRIDIGAL?

Is Shah Faesal, the former IAS officer from Jammu and Kashmir, contemplating a return to the civil service that he had quit in protest against "unabated killings" in Kashmir? A tweet by the ex-babu, who was the first Kashmiri to top the civil service exam, in response to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Mann Ki Baat" program seems to hint at a change of mind, say some observers. In his tweet,

Mr Faesal praised the PM's radio programme and wrote that "communication can build solidarities..."

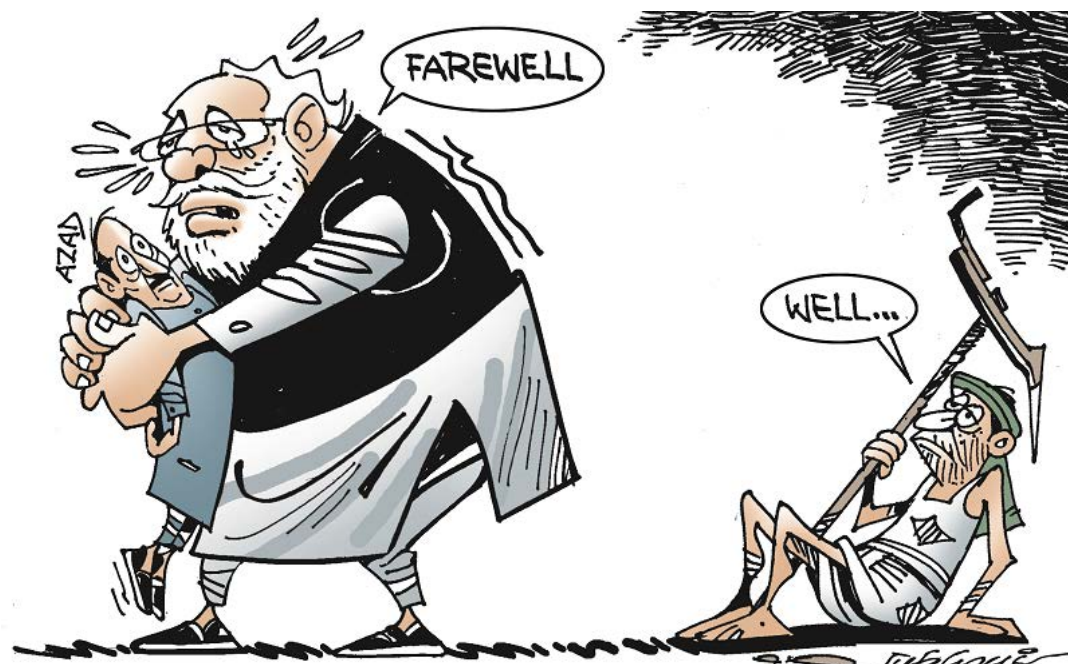
The buzz around Mr Faesal's plans has only grown, especially when he quit Jammu and Kashmir People's Movement, the political party he had set up barely a few months later.

Interestingly, his resignation as an IAS officer in January 2019 has been kept in abeyance all this while. The government has not accepted it, pending the investigation into some of his social media posts.

That it was never accepted means that the door is still open for him to rejoin the IAS. Watch this space for updates!

Share a babu experience! Follow [@dilipthecherian](https://twitter.com/dilipthecherian) on Twitter. Let's multiply the effect.

Subhani



## The siege within: India and the 'foreign hand'



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

Can tweets by international pop star Rihanna, teenage climate activist Greta Thunberg and other global celebrities in support of India's protesting farmers destabilise this country of over 1.3 billion people?

Or should we look within? Is foreign meddling the real threat facing us or is India's real challenge the deepening domestic polarisation on just about every front?

Successive governments in India have pointed at the "foreign hand" in times of crisis. I entered journalism in the 1980s when one regularly heard of the invisible "foreign hand" that was out to dismember our country. In many of her public speeches, then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi spoke of the dark spectre of foreign forces out to destabilise India.

Rajiv Gandhi, who came to power in 1984 with a huge majority after his mother's assassination, also talked of the "invisible" foreign hand trying to derail India's development.

Back then, there was no Twitter or social media or troll armies, and no virtual slugfests. But on government-run Doordarshan and All India Radio and in sections of the print media, there was no escaping allusions to these dark, powerful and invisible forces out to get us.

Cut to the New India. The "foreign hand" is back. The ruling BJP sees comments from global celebrities in support of the ongoing farmers' protests as part of a deep conspiracy against the country. Prime Minister Narendra Modi says India has been seeing increased FDI but there is a new FDI that has emerged — "Foreign Destructive Ideology". Mr Modi says India needs to be protected against it.

Is the world really out to get us? Or should we get used to the fact that in a networked glob-

alised world, nothing is local anymore? As protests erupted across the United States following George Floyd's death at the hands of the police on the streets of Minneapolis, the Black Lives Matter movement resonated around the world. Support for BLM led to demonstrations in a number of countries. In a more recent example, the coup in Myanmar has been denounced by individuals around the world, including in India.

There is really no way we can prevent the rest of the world from taking interest in our domestic affairs, especially if we wish to be at the high table of the international community. If we so eagerly lap up foreign praise, can we afford to be so prickly about the foreign gaze when the comments are adverse? If Indians rejoice at going up the World Bank's ease of doing business 2020 survey, they can't totally shrug off slipping in the Economist Intelligence Unit's 2020 Democracy Index's global rankings.

The problems will not go away simply if foreigners stop talking about it. And as for us, stopping and reversing the current trend of polarisation is vital, for the simple reason that no country or society can make real progress if social cohesion starts eroding.

Leaving aside the foreign gaze for a moment and looking within, we cannot but help notice a deeply polarised and fractured nation, with deepening domestic political divisions. That is the real challenge, and that challenge cannot be surmounted by simply choking protests or forcibly shutting up views that clash with those of the government of the day. There must be a dialogue. The government must stop its storm troopers — from ministers to those on the streets — from state-mandated and actions that polarise further. Else,

social cohesion will become even more fragile.

The Global Risks Report 2021 brought out by the World Economic Forum lists "social cohesion erosion" among the highest-likelihood and highest-impact long-term risks facing our pandemic-battered world. "As public health gaps, digital inequality, educational disparities and unemployment — risks that result from a complex combination of existing inequalities and the impact of the pandemic — affect vulnerable groups the most, they may further fray social cohesion," it says.

Too many people have little left to lose. The global recession, the report notes, is now expected to force as many as 150 million more people into extreme poverty, increasing the total to 9.4 per cent of the world's population. This setback in the global development agenda will heighten vulnerability to future shocks and threaten the erosion or collapse of states, it warns.

Our government also admits that the economic shock caused by the ongoing pandemic is severe. It is now hoping for a V-shaped economic recovery. No such recovery will be possible without the vibrant pluralistic democracy that is key to India's power. If democracy is our calling card, we must also listen to critical views and voices without feeling the need to link them with ulterior motives. Getting prickly about criticism will only worry the whole world even more.

"There is a debate about the potential impact of American concerns about the state of democracy and liberal-

ism in India on the US-India relationship," pointed out Tanvi Madan, director of the India Project and senior fellow at globally renowned think tank Brookings, in a January 2021 essay titled "Democracy and the US-India relationship".

"Often commentators argue there will either be no effect because of India's utility for the US or major impact because of the incoming Biden administration's emphasis on values," Madan added. "The answer is likely to lie somewhere in between. A pragmatic Biden team will likely recognise that India will be key to their objectives vis-a-vis issues like the Indo-Pacific and China, climate change and global health security."

"However, questions about India's trajectory as a pluralistic democracy could directly or indirectly affect the pace and tone of the relationship — especially if they are accompanied by doubts about India's capabilities, economic growth and policies, and willingness to play a balancing role versus China."

India's handling of the ongoing farmers' protests has taken a lot of sheen off the country's image, coming as it does on the back of many other illiberal measures. This is unfortunate for many reasons, including the fact that India is getting a few things right even in these fraught, polarised times. Take India's vaccine diplomacy. India has supplied low-cost coronavirus vaccines to many countries across the world. "With the US and Europe preoccupied with Covid-19 and many nations looking to India for a Covid-19 antidote, Delhi can score valuable points," as G. Parthasarathy, a former diplomat, noted in a recent commentary.

The bottom line: we must get our act together. At the end, a country does not rise or fall because of the foreigner's gaze but because of what its insiders do or fail to do.

*The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at [patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com](mailto:patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com).*

## LETTERS

## NEW SLAVE DYNASTY?

The return of V.K. Sasikala to active politics in Tamil Nadu carries portends to the polity there. Staging a grand roadshow on her release from jail, Ms Sasikala could well be the pretender to the AIADMK throne. She has already set the cat among pigeons both inside and outside AIADMK. Should the AIADMK under the present leadership do well in the Assembly elections despite Ms Sasikala, Tamil Nadu could find its future politics no more driven by dynasts. But a poor show by it could mark the beginnings of a slave dynasty led by her.

R. Narayanan  
Mumbai

## GOODBYE COVID-19

IT IS HEARTENING that the figures of Covid-19 related deaths have steadily turned south of late. The Union health ministry reported no fatalities in the past 24 hours in 15 states and Union territories, and the death count was less than five in another 18 states and UTs. For two weeks on the trot, the case fatality ratio had stayed below one per cent, which was the government's original target when it was battling the rising epidemic. Thirty-three out of 36 states and UTs have fewer than 5,000 active cases. Is this the beginning of the end for the pandemic?

N.J. Ravi Chander  
Bengaluru

## UNDUE HARASSMENT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Pay heed to ex-judge's plea". Registering of a flurry of FIRs for so-called offences against perpetrators (read dissenters) has become commonplace. This said, it is befuddling on following counts. First, for the common man, registering an FIR is a Herculean task, even if it is for a ghastly crime, such as murder. Second, a mechanism has to be put in place wherein multiple FIRs are automatically bundled together. Doing so is not left at the mercy of the judiciary who have been selective in this regard. In the court's eyes one is innocent until proven guilty, hence they do deserve undue harassment.

Deepak Singhal  
Noida

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: [asianage.letters@gmail.com](mailto:asianage.letters@gmail.com).



## SHORT TAKES

TIANWEN-1  
PROBE ENTERS  
MARS ORBIT

Beijing, Feb. 10: China says its Tianwen-1 spacecraft has entered orbit around Mars on a mission to land a rover and collect data on underground water and possible signs of ancient life.

The arrival of the orbiter-rover combo in orbit on Wednesday evening Beijing time makes it the second spacecraft in two days to reach the red planet. An orbiter from the United Arab Emirates led the way on Tuesday.

Next week, the US will try to land its Perseverance rover on the Martian surface. Only the U.S. has successfully touched down on Mars — eight times beginning with two Viking missions.

KPMG BOSS  
SORRY FOR  
'MOANING' JIBE

London, Feb. 10: The UK chairman of global accountancy firm KPMG has apologised for telling staff to stop moaning about working conditions during the Coronavirus pandemic.

"I am sorry for the words I used, which did not reflect what I believe in, and I have apologised to my colleagues," UK chair Bill Michael said in a statement.

"Looking after the wellbeing of our people and creating a culture where everyone can thrive is of critical importance to me and is at the heart of everything we do as a firm," he added.

The *Financial Times* reported that during a virtual meeting on Monday, members of KPMG's financial services consulting team told Michael about their concerns over potential cuts to pay and the ranking of individuals' performance. Michael told staff to "stop moaning" and to stop "playing the victim card", according to the FT which cited employees.

KPMG, along with Deloitte, EY and PWC, form Britain's so-called Big Four accountants that are set for a shake up.

UN PRESSES EU  
OVER RISING  
MIGRANT CASES

Brussels, Feb. 10: UN agencies are pressing the European Union to end the growing practices of denying migrants their right to apply for asylum, collectively expelling them and using violence against people trying to enter the bloc without authorisation.

Border pushbacks and collective expulsions are illegal under international refugee treaties, which allow people fearing for their safety to apply for protection.

Greece and even the EU's border and coast guard agency Frontex are among those accused of pushbacks or complicity in them. They deny using such methods.

The International Organisation for Migration said Wednesday that it continues to receive documented reports of human rights violations against migrants and refugees, including children, involving countries that are part of the 27-nation bloc.

POLICE BUST  
GANG HIJACKING  
CELEB PHONES

London, Feb. 10: Police have arrested 10 people in the UK, Belgium and Malta for allegedly hijacking mobile phones belonging to US celebrities including internet influencers, sports stars and musicians to steal personal information and millions in cryptocurrency, authorities said.

The European Union police agency Europol said Wednesday that the gang is believed to have stolen more than \$100 million in cryptocurrencies by using so-called SIM swap attacks.

These attacks involve deactivating a victim's mobile phone SIM card, either by tricking the phone company or using a corrupt insider, so that the number can be transferred to another card under the gang's control.

The arrests were the result of a joint investigation by UK, US, Canadian, Belgian and Maltese police, Europol said. Europol didn't specify the nationalities of those caught in the sweep, but the UK's National Crime Agency said a day earlier that eight men were arrested in England and Scotland.

Two others were arrested previously in Belgium and Malta, Europol said.

Plane set ablaze  
in Huthi attack  
on Saudi airport

Riyadh, Feb. 10: A civilian plane was engulfed in flames Wednesday after Yemen's Huthi rebels launched a drone strike on an airport in southern Saudi Arabia, days after the US moved to delist the insurgents as terrorists.

Saudi authorities did not immediately report any casualties from the attack, claimed by the Huthis, the latest in a series of rebel assaults on the kingdom despite a renewed American push to de-escalate the six-year conflict.

"A cowardly criminal terrorist attack launched against

Abha International Airport in Saudi Arabia by the Huthi militia," state-run Al-Ekhabariya television quoted the Riyadh-led military coalition battling the rebels as saying.

"A fire that engulfed a passenger plane due to the Huthi attack on Abha Airport is under control," it added.

The coalition did not say how the attack was carried out, but earlier in the day reported that it

had intercepted two "booby trapped" drones in the south.

The Iran-backed Huthis, who control much of northern Yemen, said they had struck Abha airport with four drones. Yahya Sarie, spokesman for the Huthis' armed wing, claimed the airport was used to launch attacks on Yemen.

But the coalition insisted that targeting the airport constituted "a war crime" and "put the lives of civilian passengers in danger", according to the official Saudi Press Agency.

The rebels appear to be stepping up attacks on the kingdom and on Riyadh-backed Yemeni forces after the United States moved last week to lift a short-lived designation of the Huthis as a terrorist group.

The Huthis have resumed an offensive to seize the Yemeni government's last northern stronghold of Marib, according to a government source, with dozens of casualties on both sides. — AFP

Military raids Suu  
Kyi's party offices

Yangon, Feb. 10: Myanmar's military raided the Yangon headquarters of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi's party late Tuesday, officials said, as the United States joined the UN in "strongly" condemning violence against protesters demanding a return to democracy.

The latest assault on Myanmar's civilian leadership came as anger at last week's coup and the detention of Suu Kyi by the generals has driven hundreds of thousands of people into the streets, defying a junta ban on rallies. "The military dictator raided and destroyed NLD headquarters at around 9:30 pm," the National League for Democracy announced on its Facebook page.

The party's short statement gave no further details.

The raid came after demonstrations erupted for a fourth straight day Tuesday, with police using water cannon in several cities, firing rubber bullets at protesters in the capital Naypyidaw and deploying tear gas in Mandalay.

The rallies came despite a warning from the junta

● THE UNITED STATES, which has led global censure of the coup, on Tuesday renewed its call for freedom of expression in Myanmar — and for the generals to step down.

that it would take action against demonstrations that threatened "stability", and a new ban on gatherings of more than five people.

The United States, which has led global censure of the coup, on Tuesday renewed its call for freedom of expression in Myanmar — and for the generals to step down.

"We strongly condemn violence against demonstrators," US State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters, adding that people in Myanmar "have rights to peaceful assembly." "We repeat our calls for the military to relinquish power; restore democratically elected government; release those detained and lift all telecommunications restrictions and to refrain from violence," he said.

Price has previously said US requests to speak to Suu Kyi had been denied. — AFP

US shows military  
muscle in Norway

Oslo, Feb. 10: The United States is deploying long-range B-1 bombers to Norway to train in the strategically important High North in a new show of force unseen in the region since the Cold War.

"High North, low tensions" goes an old saying, describing the relatively calm security situation and diplomatic relations in the Arctic for decades.

But mounting tensions between the West and Russia, particularly since the 2014 Crimea crisis, has led both sides to beef up their militaries even in the remote High North, an area believed to be rich in natural resources and where the

ice melt has opened up new shipping routes.

This month, long-range B-1 bombers capable of carrying large amounts of air-to-ground weaponry will arrive at Norway's Orland air base for several weeks of training missions with the Scandinavian country's air force, which guards NATO's northern border.

"This deployment comes in the context of global military activities in the High North, which have increased significantly in recent years, both from the West and Russia," noted Kristian Atlund, a researcher at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment.

— AFP

US keen to learn Covid origin  
to stop future catastrophes

Worst affected by pandemic, America wants China, WHO to be transparent

Washington, Feb. 10: It is imperative that the world learns as much as possible about the earliest days of the Covid-19 pandemic so that the world can understand its origins and prevent future biological catastrophes, the US has said after international experts investigating the origins of the disease have dismissed as unlikely a theory that the virus came from a laboratory in China.

The US, which is the worst affected country from the pandemic, is looking forward to receiving the report and the data from the investigation by the World Health Organisation's (WHO) team of experts into the origins of the Covid-19 in China's Wuhan city.

The WHO experts arrived in China last month for the long-awaited probe into the origins of the deadly coronavirus pandemic. On Tuesday, the team dismissed that the virus could have leaked from a Chinese lab, a theory strongly supported by former US president Donald Trump.

The team members said that the deadly virus was most likely to have transmitted from an animal to humans. "Broadly speaking, we have expressed our concerns regarding the need for full transparency and access from China and the WHO to all information regarding the earliest days of the pandemic," State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters on Tuesday at his daily news conference. "It's imperative that the world learns as much as possible about the earliest days of the Covid-19 pandemic so that we can understand its origins and so, importantly, we can prevent future biological catastrophes," Price said.

"I think the jury is still out. Clearly, the Chinese, at least heretofore, had not offered the requisite transparency that we need and that just as importantly, again, the international community needs so that we can prevent these sorts of pandemics from ever happening again.

This goes back to one of the very first actions that President Joe Biden took as president when he re-engaged with the WHO," Price said. China reported the first Covid-19 case in the central Chinese city of



People wear face masks to help curb the spread of the Coronavirus and go shopping for the upcoming Chinese New Year celebrations at the Dihua Street market in Taipei, Taiwan, on Wednesday.

— AP

WHO slams US Covid intel  
as curbs tightened in Europe

Wuhan, Feb. 10: A WHO expert sent to China to probe the coronavirus hit out at US intelligence on Covid-19 as his team headed home with few answers about the origin of a pandemic that was forcing more clampdowns in some of the hardest-hit parts of the world.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel was set to seek an extension of strict virus curbs, as the European Commission chief addressed the stumbling vaccination rollout on the continent — which accounts for a third of the 2.3 million Covid-19 deaths worldwide.

The Coronavirus has infected close to 107 mil-

lion people, devastating the global economy, and questions over the handling of the initial outbreak in central China have sparked an intense diplomatic row between Washington and Beijing.

The WHO mission to the ground zero city of Wuhan wrapped up on Tuesday without any concrete answers, with Washington again expressing scepticism about China's transparency and cooperation.

But WHO team member Peter Daszak tweeted: "Please don't rely too much on US intel: increasingly disengaged under Trump & frankly wrong on many aspects." He said they worked "flat out

under the most politically charged environment possible".

China had repeatedly delayed the WHO trip, and bristled at accusations of a lack of transparency.

Beijing warned Washington not to "politicise" the mission after the White House demanded a "robust" probe.

State Department spokesman Ned Price said Tuesday that the United States supports the investigation. But when asked if China had fully cooperated with the WHO, he said: "The jury's still out." The WHO team did not identify which animal transferred the Coronavirus to humans. — AFP

Wuhan and since then the disease has snowballed into a pandemic, affecting 1,06,880,652 people with 2,339,991 deaths globally.

According to Johns Hopkins Coronavirus tracker, the US alone has reported 27,189,188 cases

and 4,68,103 deaths from the deadly virus.

Trump had repeatedly blamed China for covering up and not sharing information about the virus with the world, leading to a strain in relation between the two countries.

However, China has refuted the allegations. While denying that Coronavirus originated in Wuhan, China points to reports from Italy, Spain and the US about its prevalence to pre-dating its emergence in Wuhan. — PTI

Democrats set to detail case at  
Trump 2nd impeachment trial

Washington, Feb. 10: Democratic lawmakers prosecuting Donald Trump are set to detail their case against him Wednesday at his impeachment trial, in a longshot bid to convince skeptical Republican senators they should convict the former president.

Trump's second impeachment trial opened on Tuesday with Democrats showing harrowing video footage of his supporters' January 6 assault on the US Capitol, where they smashed down doors, broke into the Senate chamber and led riots that left five people dead.

Trump faces a single charge of inciting the insurrection after he told enraged Republican supporters near the White House to "fight like hell." Securing a conviction is highly unlikely, as



US Senator Josh Hawley talks with reporters as he leaves the Capitol after the first day of former US President Donald Trump's second impeachment trial in Washington, DC.

— AFP

the Democrats would need 17 Republican senators to vote with them to make a two-thirds majority.

So far, only six Republicans have agreed that the trial is even constitutional in the first place.

Following Tuesday's opening statements from

Democratic "impeachment managers" and Trump's lawyers, both sides will flesh out their cases starting Wednesday, with the Democrats going first.

Under impeachment rules, each side is allowed up to 16 hours over two

days to present their case, starting at noon (1700 GMT).

Senators will also be given a total of four hours for questioning.

On Tuesday, senators voted 56-44 in favour of the constitutionality of the historic trial, rejecting a bid by Trump's lawyers to throw it out on grounds that a former president cannot be tried by lawmakers.

Earlier, both sides presented their opening cases, with Democrats arguing that Trump broke his oath in a naked bid to retain power after losing the November election to Joe Biden. Refusing to accept his defeat, Trump spread lies about vote rigging and repeatedly pressured officials, including then vice president Mike Pence, to try and stop the transfer of power. — AFP

## ADVANCED | TECH Scientists believe this could help farmers to prepare earlier for unexpected events

## New model to predict Indian monsoon

London, Feb. 10: Scientists, including those of Indian-origin, have developed a new system which they say can provide farmers in India early forecasts of expected variations in the monsoon season, an advance which may help reduce crop losses.

The researchers, including those from the European Centre for Medium-range Weather

Forecasts (ECMWF) in the UK, used their long-term global weather forecasting system to predict when the summer monsoon will start, and how much rainfall it will bring.

In the study, published in the journal *Climate Dynamics*, they noted that the model provided accurate forecasts a month in advance for the timing of the monsoon in India's

major agricultural regions.

The scientists believe providing this information to farmers could help them prepare earlier for unexpected heavy rainfall or extended dry periods, both of which regularly destroy crops in India.

According to the researchers, the Indian monsoon brings around 80 per cent of India's annual

rainfall with even small variations in the timing of its arrival potentially having a huge impact on agriculture.

"Accurately predicting these year-to-year variations is challenging, but could be the difference between prosperity or poverty for many families," said study co-author Amulya Chevuturi from the University of Reading

in the UK.

"The forecasting accuracy we identified in India's main agricultural regions provides a clear opportunity for this system to make a positive difference to people's lives," Chevuturi said in a statement.

He believes a month's warning of a drought or deluge is a valuable time to understand the likely

impact on water availability and for the farmers to make provisions to reduce the threat to food supplies.

"Better forecasts save lives, and this kind of in-depth global analysis is only possible when the best scientists and leading research institutes work together for the benefit of the whole planet," Chevuturi added. — PTI

EU LAWMAKERS  
OK \$815 BILLION  
RECOVERY PLAN

Brussels, Feb. 10: European lawmakers on Wednesday approved a 672.5 billion euro (\$815 billion) recovery package of loans and grants to help member states recover faster from the coronavirus pandemic.

The regulation for the Recovery and Resilience Facility was adopted with 582 votes in favour, 40 against and 69 abstentions. The RRF is the central pillar of the bloc's 750 billion euro (\$910 billion) recovery plan that was adopted by EU leaders last year.

"In the long-term, this money is going to bring about change and progress to meet our digital and climate goals," said Eider Gardiazabal Rubial, a lawmaker closely involved in the negotiations.

"We will ensure that the measures will alleviate poverty and unemployment, and will take into account the gender dimension of this crisis. Our health systems will also become more resilient." — AP

UN: N. KOREA  
STOLE \$300M  
TO FUND NUKES

Seoul, Feb. 10: North Korea has stolen more than \$300 million worth of cryptocurrencies through cyberattacks in recent months to support its banned nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, a confidential UN report said.

Compiled by a panel of experts monitoring sanctions on Pyongyang, the report said the country's "total theft of virtual assets from 2019 to November 2020 is valued at approximately \$316.4 million", citing a UN member state.

Financial institutions and exchanges were hacked to generate revenue for Pyongyang's nuclear and missile development, said the report, which was seen by AFP.

The North is known to operate an army of thousands of well-trained hackers who have attacked firms, institutions and researchers in South Korea and elsewhere.

It has also been accused of exploiting its cyber capabilities for financial gain.

The North is under multiple sets of international sanctions over its banned nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes, which have made rapid progress under leader Kim Jong Un.

A summit between Kim and then-US president Donald Trump in Hanoi in February 2019 broke down over sanctions relief and what Pyongyang would be willing to give up in return. — AFP



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	51,309.39	-0.04
Nifty 50	15,106.50	-0.02
S&P 500*	3,904.56	-0.17
Dollar (₹)	72.83	0.08
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.67	-0.24
Euro (₹)	88.31	-0.07
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,576▼38	0.07
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	61.47	0.62
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.010	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.145	-0.012

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

Bol net up 412% to ₹540 cr on low provisioning

Bank of India (BoI) reported a 412 per cent jump in standalone profit after tax at Rs 541 crore in December quarter against Rs 106 crore a year ago on improvement in asset quality and lower provisions. Consolidated net profit came to Rs 610.37 crore against Rs 138.20 crore. Net interest income declined 9 per cent to Rs 3,740 crore from Rs 4,118 crore. Domestic net interest margins declined to 2.81 per cent from 3.45 per cent.

Non-basmati rice exports more than double



Exports of non-basmati rice more than doubled to Rs 22,856 crore during April-December 2020-21 against Rs 10,268 crore in the year-ago period. "The exports of non-basmati witnessed a growth of 122.61 per cent in rupee term and 111.81 per cent dollar terms," the commerce ministry said in a statement. India exports non-basmati rice to Nepal, Benin, UAE, Somalia, Guinea, US, among others.

SBI crosses ₹5-L cr mark in home loan biz

State Bank of India said it has crossed the Rs 5 lakh crore mark in its home loan business. The real estate and housing business (REHBU) unit of the bank has grown five times in the last 10 years with an asset under management (AUM) of Rs 89,000 crore in 2011 to Rs 5 lakh crore in 2021. "This extraordinary feat is a testament to customers' continuous trust in the bank," the bank's chairman Dinesh Khara said.

Maersk profit soars nearly six-fold for 2020

Danish shipping giant AP Moller-Maersk posted a near six-fold increase in net profit for 2020, as demand during the pandemic rebounded strongly from an initial slump, sending freight rates soaring. A shortage of containers in Asia during the pandemic has led to a surge in freight rates. For the full-year 2020, Maersk recorded a net profit of \$2.9 billion (2.4 billion euros) in its ongoing operations.

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Over 27.86 tonnes of metal purchased Gold bond demand rises 4-fold in FY21

SANGEETHA G with agency inputs CHENNAI, FEB. 10

Despite rising prices of the yellow metal, sovereign gold bonds issued in FY21 till January, investors purchased a total of 27.86 tonnes. This marks a more than four-fold increase in purchases against 6.13 tonnes bought by investors in FY20. This fiscal has accounted for close to half of the total purchases made since the launch of gold bonds in 2015.

In these six years, investors have purchased a total of 58.8 tonnes of gold through the primary market in the form of bonds. Each of the 10 issues of gold bonds in FY21 saw investors purchasing more than one tonne of gold. In the fourth series, investors bought more than four tonnes and in the fifth series, more than six tonnes. Prior to FY21, only once had the aggregate purchases moved up beyond one tonne in a series.

The issue price of gold bonds remained above Rs 4,500 per gm for all the series in FY21. The issue price was the highest in the fifth series at Rs 5,334 per gm and the same series saw the largest purchase at 6.3 tonnes. This shows that higher prices were not a deterrent for gold bond buyers. In fact, the demand was higher when prices



went up. According to Somasundaram P. R., managing director, India, World Gold Council, several investors bet on the bullish trend in gold during the pandemic. "While there are pockets of distress due to Covid-19, there are pockets of surplus as well. People who have uninterrupted income have not spent much during the lockdown time on vacations and luxuries and they are left with investible surplus," he pointed out. This surplus found its way into select investment instruments, including gold, he added.

Increased investor appetite for gold had reflected in the demand for gold ETFs as well. Gold ETFs largely saw inflows during most of the months in FY21. Despite the lockdown in the June quarter, investment demand managed to stay just 11 per cent lower in 2020 compared with a 42 per cent drop in jewellery demand.

Last month, investors put in Rs 625 crore in gold

exchange traded funds (ETFs), which was 45 per cent higher than the preceding month. The inflow pushed the asset base of gold funds by 22 per cent to Rs 14,481 crore at the end of January from Rs 14,174 crore at the end of December, data from the Association of Mutual Funds in India showed.

Himanshu Srivastava, associate director manager research, Morningstar India said the gold prices have come-off its all-time highs touched in August last year. The month of January also saw fair bit of correction in its prices.

"This, along with expectation that gold may do well going ahead provided a good buying opportunity to investors, which resulted in net inflows for the category in January."

According to him, gold functions as a strategic asset in an investor's portfolio, given its ability to act as an effective diversifier and alleviate losses during tough market conditions.

NITI AAYOG STUDY TO ASSESS IMPACT OF SUPREME COURT, NGT DECISIONS

New Delhi, Feb. 10: Government think-tank Niti Aayog has commissioned a study to assess the "unintended" economic impact of select decisions of the Supreme Court and the National Green Tribunal and to review if the stated objective behind the judicial pronouncements was met, according to a project brief document.

Jaipur-based CUTS International has been asked to examine the apex court rulings in halting consultation of Mopa Airport in Goa, stopping iron ore mining in Goa, and shutting Sterlite Copper's Tuticorin plant in Tamil Nadu.

CUTS International director Amol Kulkarni confirmed receiving the mandate.

"This study will ex-post examine the unintended economic consequences of key judicial/ quasi judicial decisions and review if the objective of the judicial decision was met," according to the CUTS International project brief document.

To highlight the economic impact, five cases have been selected, of which three were decided by the Supreme Court and two by the NGT.

"Judicial decisions have far-reaching economic impacts which are often not taken into account at the time of decision making. Some of the recent judgments/orders... indicate that the economic impact analysis of judicial decisions is yet to gain broader acceptance." —PTI

Sebi fines NSE, former chiefs in co-location case

New Delhi, Feb. 10: In the high profile co-location case, markets regulator Sebi on Wednesday imposed a penalty of Rs 1 crore on the NSE for failing to provide a level-playing field for trading members subscribing to its tick-by-tick (TBT) data feed system.

In addition, the regulator levied a fine of Rs 25 lakh each on NSE's former managing directors and chief executive officers Chitra Ramakrishna and Ravi Narain.

Alleged lapses in high-frequency trading offered through NSE's co-location facility came under the scanner of the watchdog after a complaint was filed in 2015.

The National Stock Exchange of India co-location facility allows stock brokers to take on rent specific racks and co-locate their servers and systems within the exchange premises.

The primary objective



Chitra Ramakrishna



Ravi Narain

of co-location services of the NSE is to reduce latency for connectivity to the exchange's trading systems for Direct Market Access, algo trading and Smart Order Routing.

In its 96-page order, the Sebi said unequal access was apparent at different stages of the technology process and the NSE as a stock exchange failed to ensure a level-playing field for trading members subscribing to its TBT data feed system.

TBT data feed provides

information about every change in the order book.

According to the regulator, many trading members had repeatedly resorted to accessing the secondary server without any checks and balances and actions on the part of the first-level regulator except for certain emails or advisories.

The NSE flouted the principles underlying the conduct of business of a stock exchange, pertaining to fair and equitable access to information, it said. —PTI

Hyderabad to get 1.5 GW solar plant

S. UMAMAHESHWAR HYDERABAD, FEB. 10

Secunderabad-based solar equipment maker Premier Energies said it would set up a new manufacturing facility at E-City on the outskirts of Hyderabad.

Speaking to reporters on Wednesday, Chiranjeev Saluja, the managing director of Premier Energies, said the green-field factory would be built with an investment of Rs 483 crore

and would produce 1.5 gigawatt of solar photovoltaic cells and modules.

The plant would be spread across 25 acres and is expected to be commissioned in the next two months. The current manufacturing capacity of the company is 500 megawatt.

"The new manufacturing unit will produce MCCE textured multi-crystalline cells as well as Mono PERC cells. The new plant facilities are designed to pro-

duce the latest generation products by incorporating Monocrystalline PERC technology. This technological change, along with the increase of wafer size to 182 mm and 210 mm, will drive the industry towards a greener society.

"With the increased adoption of automation and robotics, our new factory will be on par with some of the leading companies in Asia, Europe, and the US," Mr Saluja said.

AMUNDI CEO STEPS DOWN AT HEIGHT OF SUCCESS



Yves Perrier

LUCCA DE PAOLI FEB. 10

Amundi SA chief executive officer Yves Perrier is stepping down after more than a decade atop the firm he helped build into the largest asset manager in Europe.

Perrier, 67, will become chairman of the French firm he has led since its creation in a 2010 merger of the asset-management arms of banking giants Credit Agricole SA and Societe Generale SA, according to an earnings statement on Wednesday. He'll be succeeded as CEO by his deputy Valerie Baudson, who heads Amundi's exchange-traded fund business as well as its thematic investing unit.

Amundi has more than doubled its assets under management on Perrier's watch to 1.73 trillion euros (\$2.1 trillion). —Bloomberg

Ikea aims to triple jobs via social entrepreneurship

HANNA HOIKKALA FEB. 10

Sweden's Ikea wants to triple the number of jobs created in vulnerable communities by 2025 by scaling up its social entrepreneurship business.

Having collaborated with social entrepreneurs since 2012, the furniture giant has provided work for about 30,000 people, impacting almost 150,000 family members. It now wants to reach 95,000 jobs by working with existing and new partners.

The initiative supports marginalised groups and women in vulnerable communities, helping them make products such as hand-woven cushion covers, baskets and carpets. Ikea supplies them with materials including cotton and banana fibre, and provides expertise ranging from design and production to improving working conditions. The aim is to promote financial independence and life-changing opportunities.

The handcrafted products, which also include plant pots and tool bags, are then sold in Ikea ware-



SOCIAL STARTUP NETWORK LAUNCHED

Hyderabad, Feb. 10: Telangana chief secretary Somesh Kumar on Wednesday launched Telangana Social Startup Network (TSSN), an initiative with a notion to build a solid ecosystem for social startups as an all-inclusive and cohesive body. The goal of the body is to create 5,000 startups in the state in the next five years, a release said.

The network was launched at the Social Impact Confluence organised by the Telangana State Innovation Cell and AIC-IIT Hyderabad.

One major activity, as a part of the ecosystem, would be devising a Social Innovation Policy to streamline the process social startups' establishment, public procurement and the like. —PTI

houses and online. Its partners include social entrepreneur Rangсутra in India and the Jordan River Foundation, which employs female refugees. Both make cushion covers.

"I'm very proud of what we've accomplished, but I know that we can do much more," said Vaishali Misra, who runs the Ikea Social Entrepreneurs Initiative. —Bloomberg

NEW CEO TO CUT 8,000 JOBS AS HEINEKEN FEELS PANDEMIC EFFECT



PHILIP BLENKINSOP BRUSSELS, FEB. 10

Heineken NV plans to cut about 8,000 jobs, the Dutch beer group said on Wednesday, seeking to restore operating margins to pre-pandemic levels after a sharp decline in profit because of coronavirus restrictions.

The world's second-largest brewer, which makes Europe's top selling lager Heineken as well as Tiger and Sol, said it would save 2 billion euros (\$2.4 billion) over the three years to 2023 under CEO Dolf van den Brink's "EverGreen" plan.

Savings will be achieved by redesigning its organisation, reducing the complexity and number of its products and identifying its least effective spending, Heineken said.

The review of its operations will result in about 8,000 job losses—equating to 9 per cent of its workforce at the end of 2019—and a related 420 million euro charge. Personnel expenses will be cut by about 350 million euros, it added.

The brewer said ongoing restrictions on social gatherings and hospitality venues meant 2021 revenue, operating profit and operating profit margin would be below levels in 2019.

It expects market conditions to improve gradually in 2021 and more into 2022, with a slow recovery in European bars and restaurants, less than 30 per cent of which were open at the end of January.

The operating profit margin before one-offs should rise to 17 per cent by 2023, the company said, versus 12.3 per cent last year and 16.8 per cent in 2019.

—Reuters

IN OVERDRIVE

Made-in-India tyres get a fillip from import restrictions

Bridgestone running 3 shifts to meet demand

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, FEB. 10

Bridgestone, the world's second largest tyre maker, which reached the pre-Covid sales level last year, is running on full three shifts at its two factories in Indore and Pune.

The Indian arm of the Japanese tyre manufacturer said in the October-December 2020 quarter it had clocked a sales growth of 15 per cent.

Bridgestone, which is among the top three passenger car tyre makers in India, competes with market leader MRF, Appollo, JK and Ceat, among others.

"The worst is behind us and we are betting big growth for our brand as

well as the tyre industry in the country," Parag Satpute, managing director at Bridgestone India told Financial Chronicle. The company produces 41,000 passenger vehicle tyres and 2,000 tyres for medium and heavy trucks and buses daily. It has invested Rs 2,000 crore over the five year between 2017 and 2021.

He said even during the Covid pandemic its off-the-road, or OTR, business of supplying tyres for the mining and construction business remained steady.

"This momentum of growth is continued in January and February of the first quarter of this calendar year," Satpute pointed out, adding that



both replacement market and retail were growing.

He said both its factories in Pune and Indore, employing more than 3,000, were running on three shifts to cater to growing demands.

He said since all tyres were placed in restricted category by the central government since June

2020, banning import of any tyres from China and other countries, it had given fillip to made-in-India tyres.

"Our passenger vehicle tyre business is growing fastest as the replacement tyre market is seeing strong growth after imports were banned," Satpute said. "In fact, normally returned in our business last September."

Satpute said as agriculture was least affected during Covid pandemic, rural economy grew faster, fuelling vehicle growth in tier-II and III towns and cities. "Now there is more growth here which is higher than the Metros," he said, adding that it would likely grow faster than the

urban market.

Bridgestone has launched its first concept store, Bridgestone Select+. With these concept stores, the firm aims to create higher engagement with consumers at tyre services.

Starting with Pune, Bridgestone plans to introduce these stores in multiple cities by the end of this year.

The process is enabled through an interactive digital kiosk where customers can pick between Bridgestone's array of choices. The store also offers customer demonstrations to understand the impact that each of the tyre services provides and helps customers get the best out of their tyres, he added.



## SHORT TAKES

## Footballers axed for sexual abuse

**Buenos Aires:** Argentina's top flight football team Velez Sarsfield suspended two players charged with sexual abuse of a woman during a party at the end of 2020. Striker Thiago Almada, a young prospect of the club, and defender Miguel Brizuela were charged by prosecutors specialised in gender violence in San Isidro, north of Buenos Aires, where the accuser made the complaint. The accuser said she was sexually abused by several people during a party at the house of Martin Lucero, who also plays for Velez. The celebration was illegal because it had more than the 10 guests allowed by local authorities amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Velez said in a statement that the players were set apart from its squad after the charges became public. The club has a protocol against gender violence in its statutes. — AP

## Pistons pack off Brooklyn 122-111

**Los Angeles:** Steve Nash tore into his depleted Brooklyn Nets side Tuesday as their losing streak continued with defeat to the lowly Detroit Pistons. The Nets — with Kevin Durant absent due to Covid-19 protocols — once again put in another abject defensive display as the Pistons, bottom of the Eastern Conference, romped to a 122-111 home win. It marked the seventh straight game that the Nets have shipped 120 points or more, an unwanted new record for a franchise with designs on becoming an NBA powerhouse following the signing of James Harden last month. The Pistons dominated from the outset, racing into a 38-26 lead in the first quarter and never relinquishing their grip on the contest thereafter. A downcast Nash questioned his players' mentality following the loss. — AFP

## Star runner Gudaf scripts new record

**Lviv, France:** Gudaf Tsegay broke the women's world record for the indoor 1500 metres on Tuesday after posting a time of three minutes, 53.09 seconds during a meeting in Liviv. Ethiopian Tsegay beat by more than two seconds the previous record set by her compatriot Genzebe Dibaba in Karlsruhe in 2014. American Grant Holloway ran the second fastest time ever in the men's 60m hurdles, registering 7.32sec to leave him trailing only Colin Jackson's world record of 7.30sec from 1994. "I'm not really surprised. I worked to do that. I've got to keep this dynamic and stay under 7.40 consistently," said Holloway, the reigning 110m hurdles world champion. Getnet Wale of Ethiopia fell 0.08sec short of the men's 3000m indoor world record, his time of 7min 24.98sec just shy of Daniel Komen's mark from 1998. — AFP

## Poor pilot decision behind Kobe death

**Los Angeles:** As helicopter pilot Ara Zobayan encountered a cloud bank and decided to try to climb out of it, he was likely worried about getting his star client, Kobe Bryant, his daughter and six others to a girls basketball tournament, federal safety investigators said. That decision cost them all their lives, the National Transportation Safety Board said on Tuesday. It primarily blamed Zobayan for a series of poor decisions that led him to fly blindly into a wall of clouds where he became so disoriented he thought he was climbing when the craft was plunging toward a Southern California hillside. Zobayan, an experienced pilot, ignored his training, violated flight rules by flying into conditions where he couldn't see and failed to take alternate measures. — AP

## Live on

## TV

## TENNIS

**Australian Open:** First round matches from 5.30 am on Sony Six, from 1.30 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

## CRICKET

**Pakistan vs South Africa:** First T20 from 6.30 pm on Sony Ten 1, HD

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## Serena shimmers

## Advances to Oz Open 3rd round; Djoker on a roll

**Melbourne, Feb. 10:** Serena Williams strolled into the third round of the Australian Open on Wednesday but former US Open champion Bianca Andreescu's emotional comeback from 15 months out ended at the hands of Taiwanese veteran Hsieh Su-wei.

Williams, 39, continued her quest to equal Margaret Court's all-time mark of 24 Grand Slams with a 6-3, 6-0 romp past 99th-ranked Serbian Nina Stojanovic in just 69 minutes on Rod Laver Arena. "I wasn't thinking as much in the second (set), as I was in the first," said Williams, who hit 27 winners in her 101st Australian Open match while again sporting her unique, one-legged catsuit inspired by track legend 'Flo-Jo'.

But eighth seed Andreescu, playing her first tournament since October 2019 after a serious knee injury, could never cope with Hsieh's quirky range of shots and lost 6-3, 6-2 in one hour 23 minutes.

Kvitova, the former Wimbledon champion and Melbourne runner-up in 2019, committed 44 unforced errors in her 6-4, 1-6, 6-1 defeat to Romania's Sorana Cirstea.

But seventh seed Aryna Sabalenka was little troubled in going through 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 against Russia's Daria Kasatkina.

In the men's draw, eighth seed Diego Schwartzmann of Argentina wasted little time in reaching the last 32, brushing aside Frenchman Alexandre Muller 6-2, 6-0, 6-3 in an hour and 32 minutes on 1573 Arena.

Later Novak Djokovic will look to continue his Melbourne Park "love affair" and march towards a record-extending ninth title against young American Frances Tiafoe.

Djokovic demolished France's Jeremy Chardy 6-3, 6-1, 6-2 on Monday as the year's first Grand Slam kicked off three weeks late because of the Coronavirus pandemic.

US Open champion Naomi Osaka will headline the evening session against France's former world number four Caroline Garcia, with the Japanese star seeking her second Australian Open title in three years.

Germany's volatile US Open finalist Alexander Zverev will close out the



**Above:** Serena Williams of United States makes a forehand return to Serbia's Nina Stojanovic during their second round match at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne on Wednesday. Serena won 6-3, 6-0.

**Below:** Poland's Iga Swiatek reacts after winning second round match against Italy's Camila Giorgi at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne on Wednesday. Swiatek won in straight sets 6-2, 6-4. — AP



night session against America's Maxime Cressy. The fifth seed is known for a short fuse and it showed on Monday as he smashed a racquet during a 6-7 (8/10), 7-6 (7/5), 6-3, 6-2 win against another Marcos Giron.

The tantrum-prone Nick Kyrgios could also provide fireworks out on his favourite John Cain Arena against France's 29th seed Ugo Humbert.

Austrian third seed Dominic Thiem, last year's runner-up to Djokovic, is the highlight in the afternoon session on Margaret Court Arena against Germany's 70th-ranked Dominik Koepfer.

Women's second seed Simona Halep appeared to have overcome a lower back injury in 6-2, 6-1 romp past wildcard Lizette Cabrera on Monday and faces another

## SELECTED RESULTS

**Men's singles second round:** Novak Djokovic (SRB x1) bt Frances Tiafoe (USA) 6-3, 6-7 (3/7), 7-6 (7/2), 6-3; Dominic Thiem (AUT x3) bt Dominik Koepfer (GER) 6-4, 6-0, 6-2; Nick Kyrgios (AUS) bt Ugo Humbert (FRA x29) 5-7, 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-4; Alexander Zverev (GER x6) bt Maxime Cressy (USA) 7-5, 6-4, 6-3; Diego Schwartzman (ARG x8) bt Alexandre Muller (FRA) 6-2, 6-0, 6-3; Taylor Fritz (USA x27) bt Reilly Opelka (USA) 4-6, 7-6 (8/6), 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/5), 6-2; Marton Fucsovics (HUN) bt Stanislas Wawrinka (SUI x17) 7-5, 6-1, 4-6, 2-6, 7-6 (11/9); Milos Raonic (CAN x14) bt Corentin Moutet (FRA) 6-7 (1/7), 6-1, 6-1, 6-4; Pedro Martinez (ESP) bt Emil Ruusuvuori (FIN) 1-6, 6-3, 6-2, 7-6 (7/5); Dusan Lajovic (SRB x23) bt Alexander Bublik (KAZ) 6-4, 7-6 (7/4), 4-6, 6-3; Adrian Mannarino (FRA x32) bt Miomir Kecmanovic (SRB) 6-1, 6-2, 6-4; Grigor Dimitrov (BUL x18) bt Alex Bolt (AUS) 7-6 (7/1), 6-1, 6-2; Pablo Carreno-Busta (ESP x15) bt Jiri Vesely (CZE) 6-3, 7-6 (7/3), 2-6, 6-4; Denis Shapovalov (CAN x11) bt Bernard Tomic (AUS) 6-1, 6-3, 6-2; Felix Auger-Aliassime (CAN x20) bt James Duckworth (AUS) 6-4, 6-1, 6-2; Aslan Karatsev (RUS) bt Egor Gerasimov (BLR) 6-0, 6-1, 6-0

**Women's singles second round:** Serena Williams (USA x10) bt Nina Stojanovic (SRB) 6-3, 6-0; Simona Halep (ROM x2) bt Ajla Tomljanovic (AUS) 4-6, 6-4, 7-5; Hsieh Su-wei (TPE) bt Bianca Andreescu (CAN x8) 6-3, 6-2; Garbine Muguruzza (ESP x14) bt Liudmila Samsonova (RUS) 6-3, 6-1; Naomi Osaka (JPN x3) bt Caroline Garcia (FRA) 6-2, 6-3; Sara Errani (ITA) bt Venus Williams (USA) 6-1, 6-0; Marketa Vondrousova (CZE x19) bt Rebecca Marino (CAN) 6-1, 7-5; Iga Swiatek (POL x15) bt Camila Giorgi (ITA) 6-2, 6-4; Sorana Cirstea (ROM) bt Petra Kvitova (CZE x9) 6-4, 1-6, 6-1; Zarina Diyas (KAZ) bt Bernarda Pera (USA) 6-4, 3-6, 6-3; Ons Jabeur (TUN x27) bt Anna Karolina Schmiedlova (SVK) 6-3, 6-2; Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x7) bt Darya Kasatkina (RUS) 7-6 (7/5), 6-3; Ann Li (USA) bt Alize Cornet (FRA) 6-2, 7-6 (8/6); Anastasia Potapova (RUS) bt Tmesa Babos (HUN) 6-2, 6-4; Fiona Ferro (FRA) bt Elena Rybakina (KAZ x17) 6-4, 6-4; Veronika Kudermetova (RUS x32) bt Varvara Gracheva (RUS) 5-7, 6-2, 6-2.

Australian, Ajla Tomljanovic, in the night session.

## BOPANNA-BEN LOSE IN FIRST ROUND

India endured a second successive disappointing result at the Australian Open with Rohan Bopanna and Ben McLachlan bowing out after a close opening-round defeat to Ji Sung Nam and Min-Kyu Song in

the men's doubles event, here on Wednesday.

Bopanna and his Japanese partner lost 4-6 6-7(0) to the Korean wild card pair in one hour and 17 minutes.

Not having enough court time due to hard quarantine seemed to have an effect on Bopanna's sharpness. McLachlan, on his part, struggled to negotiate volleys and that hurt them. — Agencies

## BANGAR IS RCB BATting CONSULTANT

**Bengaluru, Feb. 10:** Former India batsman Sanjay Bangar was on Wednesday appointed as the batting consultant of Indian Premier League side Royal Challengers Bangalore ahead of the upcoming season.

Bangar served as the batting coach of the Indian men's senior team for five years from 2014 when Ravi Shastri took over as team director. He continued in the role till the 2019 World Cup before being replaced by Vikram Rathour.

"We are delighted to welcome Sanjay Bangar to the RCB Family as a batting consultant for #IPL2021! Welcome aboard, Coach!" the RCB said in a tweet.

## KRUNAL TO LEAD BARODA

India all-rounder Krunal Pandya will lead the Baroda squad in the Vijay Hazare Trophy beginning February 20.

Krunal had led Baroda initially in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy but then had to leave the tournament's bio-bubble midway due to his father's demise.

Baroda have picked a 22-member squad for the domestic 50-over championship.

Meanwhile, India batsman Shreyas Iyer was on Wednesday named as captain of the Mumbai team for the Vijay Hazare Trophy .

— PTI

## Man U pip West Ham, in quarters

**London, Feb. 10:** Ole Gunnar Solskjaer warned "wasteful" Manchester United to be "more clinical" after they edged into the FA Cup quarterfinals with a hard-fought 1-0 win against West Ham on Tuesday.

Solskjaer's side were well below their best in a scrappy fifth round tie at freezing, snow-dusted Old Trafford.

But a fine finish from Scotland midfielder Scott McTominay ensured United advanced to the last eight for a seventh successive season.

United last won the FA Cup in 2016 and McTominay's third goal in three games kept them in the hunt to lift the trophy for the 13th time.

After the frustration of the late Everton equaliser that dented their Premier League title challenge on Saturday, this was an essential result to lift the mood at United.

It was hardly an eye-catching performance however, with United labouring against defensive West Ham until McTominay and Bruno Fernandes were intro-

## THE RESULTS

<b>Manchester United</b> (McTominay 97)	<b>1</b>
<b>West Ham</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Bournemouth</b> (Surridge 21, Stanislas 88-pen)	<b>2</b>
<b>Burnley</b>	<b>0</b>

duced as second half substitutes.

Meanwhile, Burnley suffered a surprise exit as second tier Bournemouth won 2-0. Sean Dyche's side fell behind to Sam Surridge's first half goal and Junior Stanislas finished them off with a late penalty.

While the loss was embarrassing, it will be forgotten if Dyche ensures Burnley retain their Premier League status.

Burnley are currently 17th in the Premier League, sitting eight points clear of the relegation zone. It could have been an even more chastening night for Burnley, who initially included the ineligible Erik Pieters in the team before being alerted to the issue by Bournemouth's media chief. — AFP



Scott McTominay (left) of Manchester United jumps for a header with West Ham's Tomas Soucek during their English FA Cup match at Old Trafford in Manchester on Tuesday. Manchester United won 1-0. — AP

## Benzema, Mendy floor Getafe 2-0

**Madrid, Feb. 10:** A depleted Real Madrid moved to within five points of La Liga leaders Atletico Madrid on Tuesday by beating struggling Getafe 2-0.

Madrid were without nine first team players, prompting Zinedine Zidane to adopt a 3-5-2 formation which he admitted they had not practised, with Marcelo and the 20-year-old Marvin Park as wing-backs.

Karim Benzema and Ferland Mendy scored the goals at Valdebebas, with Mendy's finish teed up by his fellow left-back Marcelo, who revelled in his new role.

Madrid's victory puts them in sight of city rivals Atletico even if Diego Simeone's side have played two games fewer.

"We have to believe in ourselves, we have to fight. There is a lot of the league left, a lot in front of us," said Zidane. Atletico had slipped up for the first time in nine league matches on Monday night, a late equaliser conceded in a 2-2 draw with Celta Vigo giving Madrid and Barcelona

a ray of hope in the title race.

And while the trophy remains very much in Atletico's hands, Madrid can only hope to increase the pressure by building some momentum themselves, especially with a Champions League tie against Atalanta around the corner.

## JUVENTUS IN ITALIAN CUP FINAL

Juventus are in the final of the Italian Cup after a goal-less draw with rivals Inter Milan on Tuesday put them through 2-1 on aggregate.

Juventus will face one of Napoli or Atalanta, who are locked at 0-0 ahead of Wednesday's second leg in Bergamo, in May's final in Rome after comfortably holding Inter in a disciplined display at the Allianz Stadium.

Inter barely troubled Juve goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon despite the return of Romelu Lukaku and Achraf Hakimi, while Cristiano Ronaldo was twice denied by fine Samir Handanovic saves at the other end. — AFP

## LYON CONTINUE WINNING STREAK, ROUT AJACCIO

**Paris, Feb. 10:** Lyon posted its fifth consecutive win in all competitions with a 5-1 thrashing of second-division Ajaccio in the French Cup.

As top-flight teams entered the competition in the round of 64, Reims immediately stumbled and bowed out of the tournament with a 4-3 home loss to Valenciennes.

Currently second in the French league, Lyon prolonged its excellent run of form with a fine display of attacking soccer. Striker Memphis Depay put the hosts in front after 10 minutes and his teammates, Slimani, Cornet and Cherki, added three more goals before the interval. Houssein Aouar added a second-half penalty before Riad Nouri scored a consolation goal in the final minute. Also, Lorient progressed with a hard-fought 2-1 win over Paris FC. — AP