

SHORT TAKES

Man carrying 19 bullets at IGI held

New Delhi: A Bengaluru-bound man has been apprehended by CISF personnel at the Delhi airport for allegedly carrying as many as 19 bullets in his baggage, official sources said on Monday. They said the traveller, identified as A.M. Karumbaiah, was intercepted with the ammunition on Sunday night when he was undergoing security checks at the Terminal-3 of the Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA). The passenger was scheduled to take an Air Vistara flight to Bengaluru, and a total of 19 bullets of 7.65 mm calibre were recovered from him, the sources said. As the passenger had no documents for carrying the live ammunition, the Central Industrial Security Force personnel offloaded him from the flight and handed him over to the Delhi Police for further probe, they said. He has been booked under various sections of the Arms Act.

Air 'very poor' across NCR cities

Noida: The average air quality in Ghaziabad, Noida, Greater Noida, Faridabad and Gurgaon was in the very poor category, which upon prolonged exposure may cause respiratory illness among people, according to data issued by a government agency on Monday. Pollutants PM 2.5 and PM 10 also remained in the air of the five immediate neighbours of Delhi, according to the air quality index (AQI) maintained by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). An AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good", 51 and 100 "satisfactory", 101 and 200 "moderate", 201 and 300 "poor", 301 and 400 "very poor", and 401 and 500 "severe". The average 24-hour AQI at 4 pm on Monday was 369 in Ghaziabad, 368 in Noida, 349 in Greater Noida, 353 in Faridabad and 306 in Gurgaon, according to CPCB's Sameer app. On Sunday, it was 416 in Ghaziabad, 416 in Noida, 402 in Greater Noida, 366 in Faridabad and 288 in Gurgaon. — PTI

Shallow fog in city, min temp 11.8°C

New Delhi: The national capital witnessed shallow fog on Monday morning with the minimum temperature settling at 11.8 degrees Celsius, a notch above the season's average, the Met office said. On Sunday, the minimum temperature was 8.6 degree Celsius. The minimum temperature recorded at Safdarjung Observatory here, considered the official reading of the city, was 11.8 degrees Celsius early morning, according to the India meteorological department. The weatherman said, shallow fog was observed in various pockets of Delhi. The Palam Observation station recorded a low of 13.4 degrees Celsius, according to IMD. — PTI

YOGI SAYS TAKE INITIATIVE TO CLEAN YAMUNA

Lucknow/Mathura: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday called upon the Delhi government to take some initiative to clean the Yamuna river on the lines of the Centre's Namami Gange campaign to clean the Ganga. "How we cleaned the river Ganga was watched by the entire world during the glorious Prayagraj Kumbh. The cleanliness of the river Ganga and the efficiency with which it was achieved came in for huge praise from international organisations like UNESCO," said Adityanath. "Similarly, anyone visiting Kanpur can see the cleanliness of the Ganga river there," he added. The chief minister said some efforts should have been made by the Delhi government to clean the Yamuna but lamented that nothing was done in this regard. "The Delhi government should at least take some initiative. The Centre's Jal Shakti Department can take care of it later," he said. The chief minister made the remarks while addressing Kumbh Poorv Vaisnav Baithak, 2021, an annual traditional meeting of saints before the Kumbh. As per the tradition, saints will now proceed to Haridwar Kumbh, a UP government statement said here in Lucknow after the chief minister's day-long visit to Mathura. — PTI

AAP calls Disha's arrest 'extrajudicial abduction'

'BJP govt has imposed state of emergency in country'

Arrest of Disha unprecedented attack on democracy: Kejriwal

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 15

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday called the arrest of climate activist Disha Ravi in the toolkit document case an unprecedented attack on democracy.

The 21-year-old activist was arrested on Saturday from Bengaluru for being allegedly involved in sharing the "toolkit" related to the farmer's protest on social media.

Greta Thunberg a toolkit related to farmer's protest against the Centre's three new agricultural laws, police said. The Delhi Police claimed that Ravi was an editor of the "toolkit Google doc" and "key conspirator" in the document's formulation and dissemination.

A graduate in Bachelor of Business Administration, Ravi is also one of the founding members of a group named "'Fridays For Future India'", police added.

Non-bailable warrants have been issued against

Arrest of 21 yr old Disha Ravi is an unprecedented attack on Democracy. Supporting our farmers is not a crime, Kejriwal tweeted.

Ravi, a graduate in Bachelor of Business Administration from a private college in Bengaluru, is also one of the founding members of a group named 'Fridays For Future India'.

The toolkit has been cited by some critics as a "proof" of her conspiracy to fuel protests in India.

advocate Nikita Jacob and activist Shantanu for their alleged involvement in preparing the document. They have also been alleged to be in direct touch with "pro-Khalistani elements".

Meanwhile, Social activists and environmentalists called for immediate release of climate activist Disha Ravi asking the government to stop targeting India's youth.

Activists and environmentalists have condemned the arrest.

Kavita Krishnan, the secretary of All India Progressive Women's Association, said people

like Ravi are India's best hope because they are concerned about not just themselves, but the future generations.

"We are not behaving like a democracy right now. If we are going to equate protest with conspiracy and organising protests as conspiracy, then you are not a democracy anymore," she said.

"They should immediately drop this case based upon absolutely flimsy, ridiculous and evil pretext. A toolkit is not sedition. It is not conspiracy, toolkit is for protest," she added.

Rights activist Shabnam Hashmi also questioned the basis of Ravi's arrest, saying anybody even doing a local campaign prepares a toolkit.

"We should look at the prime minister's campaign toolkit. We are crossing the limits of absurdity. We will become a laughing stock internationally," she said.

Sunita Narain, head of the Delhi-based centre for science and environment, also extended her support to the arrested activist.

"We know #climate-change is an existential threat. World desperately needs the passion and commitment of the youth and their loud and strong voice to shake it to more action #FreeDishaRavi," she tweeted. — PTI

'Nikita, Shantanu attended Zoom meet by pro-Khalistani outfit'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 15

Disha Ravi — the 22-year-old activist arrested in the Toolkit case — and two other wanted activists, held a Zoom meeting before the Republic Day to plan a social media buzz on the tractor rally, the Delhi Police said today. Criticised heavily by celebrities and opposition parties over Disha Ravi's arrest, the police met the media this afternoon regarding the case, filed after the Toolkit was shared by Swedish teen climate activist Greta Thunberg and helped draw global attention to the farmers' protest.

A Mumbai lawyer and a Beed engineer joined arrested climate activist Disha Ravi in creating a protest toolkit backing the farmers' agitation with the aim of "tarnishing the image of India" and collaborated with pro-Khalistani elements, Delhi Police officials said on Monday.

Non-bailable warrants have been issued against lawyer Nikita Jacob and engineer Shantanu, who are absconding. On January 11, 15 days ahead of the Republic Day violence in the national capital, the two attended a Zoom meeting organised

by pro-Khalistani group Poetic Justice Foundation, said joint commissioner of Police (Cyber) Prem Nath. The meeting decided the modalities to create the toolkit titled "Global Farmer Strike" and "Global Day of Action, 26 January". Nath said at a press conference.

Delhi Police has also got in touch with Google, on whose platform the toolkit document was created, and has posed several questions to the tech giant. "We have received some answers from Google," said police.

Delhi Police has identified Nikita Jacobs, Shantanu, Punit and Disha Ravi as the creators of the toolkit who also edited it after it was shared and subsequently deleted by Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg on her Twitter account.

The three were connected to the Canada-based pro-Khalistani group, Poetic Justice Foundation (PJF), whose founder is one Mo Dhalwal.

The senior Delhi Police officer said that several screenshots of the toolkit openly available on the internet were investigated and once the probe fetched enough information, the police got search warrants on February 9.

"On February 11, a special cell team reached Mumbai and conducted a search at Nikita Jacob's house. She was not available. Her electronic gadgets were examined," said Nath. The email account created by Shantanu is the owner of this toolkit document and all others are its editors, said the cop. We will visit Jacob's home again to question her, Nath added.

Since November 27, a large number of farmers have been protesting at the three borders of Delhi. During the tractor rally on January 26, 2021, large-scale violence was witnessed in Delhi. After the 26 January incident, a large number of incidences of circulation of fake news, manipulated or edited videos and misleading propaganda were witnessed on social media.

6 UP cops booked for extortion, one arrested in Noida

Noida (UP), Feb. 15: Six police personnel in Uttar Pradesh have been booked for alleged extortion and corruption and one of them has been arrested along with a private individual, the Noida police said on Monday.

"Constable Nitin Chaudhary and an individual, named Sonu, have been arrested today in connection with an extortion and corruption case," Central Noida Deputy Commissioner of Police Harish Chander said.

A sub-inspector and four more constables attached with the Cyber police station, which functions under the Cyber police headquarters in Lucknow, are on the run, a senior official said.

Mr Chander told reporters that the Noida police had on Sunday got a tip-off about "kidnapping" of some persons after which a local police team started investigating the matter.

"It came to light that some officials from the Cyber police station, which functions under the Cyber Police headquarters in Lucknow, were probing a case and had picked up three employees of the private company located in Noida's Sector 65, he said.

SIX POLICE personnel in Uttar Pradesh have been booked for alleged extortion and corruption and one of them has been arrested along with a private individual, the Noida police said on Monday.

A SUB-INSPECTOR and four more constables attached with the Cyber police station, which functions under the Cyber police headquarters in Lucknow, are on the run, a senior official said.

These people who were picked up were released by them in exchange of ₹2 lakh. But constable Nitin Chaudhary had again asked them for more money, the officer said.

Sonu had gone to collect money on Sunday when the police held him near the Noida Stadium.

DCP Chander said the remaining accused — four police constables and a sub-inspector — will be arrested soon. He said an FIR has been lodged at the local Phase 3 police station under Indian Penal Code sections 342 (wrongful confinement) and 386 (extortion), among others. Section 7 (public servant taking gratification) of the Prevention of Corruption Act has also been invoked in the case. — PTI

3 held for duping Kejriwal's daughter

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 15

Three men have been arrested for allegedly duping Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's daughter, police said on Monday.

Sajid (26), a resident of Nuh in Haryana, Kapil (18) and Manvinder Singh (25), hailing from Mathura — were arrested on the Bharatpur-Mathura border with the help of technical surveillance, police said.

However, the main accused identified as Waris (25) is still on the run, they said.

The chief minister's daughter was allegedly duped of Rs 34,000 by one of the four accused, who had approached her as a buyer on an e-commerce platform, where she had put up a sofa on sale.

"The three worked on commission basis for Waris. Manvinder got multiple bank accounts opened for Kapil and Sajid using fake documents, for which he received a commission. The cheated amount was transferred to Waris' account," the officer said. According to the police, the victim had put up a sofa for sale on an e-commerce platform.

She was approached by a man who showed interest in making the purchase.



Bharatiya Kisan Union spokesperson Rakesh Tikait teaches school children at farmers protest site at Ghazipur border in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

Kejriwal to address 'kisan mahapanchayat' on Feb. 28

New Delhi, Feb. 15: AAP national convener and Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal will address a "kisan mahapanchayat" at Meerut on February 28 in support of farmers protesting the Centre's new agri laws, the party said on Monday.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has strongly come out in favour of the farmers protesting the new



Arvind Kejriwal

farms laws. Kejriwal has visited Delhi's Singhu border, a major protest site, twice and expressed his support to the farm-

ers. "AAP National Convener @ArvindKejriwal to address a Kisan Mahapanchayat in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh on 28th February, 2021. Aam Aadmi Party has convened a Mahapanchayat to support the demands of the protesting farmers," the AAP said in a tweet. — PTI

DJB resolves water supply problem in city, says vice-chief

New Delhi, Feb. 15: Delhi Jal Board Vice Chairperson Raghav Chadha announced on Monday that it has overcome the problem of water supply in the city in the wake of the Uttarakhand flash floods.

Addressing the media, he said the Bhagirathi water treatment plant is now working at 100 per cent of its capacity and the Sonia Vihar facility at 80 per cent. "We treat the raw Ganges water which comes from the Upper Ganga Canal at Muradnagar and provides it to the citizens of Delhi. But due to the recent natural calamity in Uttarakhand, the quality of water had worsened. The water which we are getting is of very poor quality as it has a lot of dirt and other particles," he said.

He explained that the water quality is measured in nephelometric turbidity units (NTU), which is supposed to stay at 100. However, it had reached 8,000.

"To combat this situation, we have shut down the Sonia Vihar water treatment plant and also the Bhagirathi water treatment plant. These plants together provide around 250 MGD water per day," he said. — PTI

Delhi University reopens 4 more libraries for research scholars, faculty members

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 15

As part of its phased reopening amid coronavirus outbreak, the Delhi University will allow research scholars and faculty members to access four more libraries across its campuses.

After allowing access to the central library last week, the varsity reopened the Central Science Library, Ratan Tata Library, South Delhi Campus Library, and Faculty of Law Library for PhD/MPHil scholars and faculty members on Monday.

It announced that users will have to make prior registration to use the library facilities from 10 am to 4 pm on week days. "Library facilities under Delhi University Library System (DULS)

AFTER ALLOWING access to the central library last week, the varsity reopened the Central Science Library, Ratan Tata Library, South Delhi Campus Library, and Faculty of Law Library for PhD/MPHil scholars and faculty members on Monday

will be made operational in phases. In the first phase, only bona fide faculty members, PhD/MPHil scholars will be allowed to use library reading room facilities. The reading room facilities would be limited from 10 am to 4 pm during the week days i.e. Monday to Friday," the university said in a notice.

Visitors will have to take permission through e-mail to the librarian before visiting the library.

For the central library, all reading rooms on research floor and three rooms on the ground floor will be available for the visitors. At the Central Science Library, two reading rooms on the first floor will be made available to the visitors, it said.

The Ratan Tata Library at the Delhi School of Economics will make the reading hall at the ground floor and the peripheral section at first floor accessible to visitors.

While all the floors of the South Delhi Campus Library can be accessed by research scholars, the reading hall at the ground floor and first floor of the Faculty of Law Library will be available to visitors, the notice stated.

The library will also allow its members to bor-

row and return books and no "late return fine" would be charged for the period of the Covid-19 pandemic.

While it advised the staff handling books to wear gloves, visitors have also been instructed to carry gloves and hand sanitiser and maintain social distancing.

"The user/staff who does not adhere to the guidelines would face disciplinary action like cancellation of membership etc.," it said.

The Delhi University (DU) had announced reopening its campus and colleges from February 1 for final-year students who require access to facilities for practical purposes. Schools, colleges and universities across the country were closed in March last year to contain the spread of coronavirus.

141 new Covid-19 cases, +vity rate rises to 0.36%

New Delhi, Feb. 15: Delhi recorded 141 fresh Covid cases and two deaths on Monday, even as the positivity rate rose to 0.36 per cent, authorities said.

These 141 cases came out of the 39,065 tests conducted the previous day, according to the latest health bulletin issued by the Delhi government.

The infection tally in the city rose to 6,37,087 authorities said, adding the positivity rate was 0.36 per cent.

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

On February 9, no fatality from coronavirus infection was registered in the national capital, after a gap of nearly nine months.

Also, on February 5 and February 7, the fatality counts were two on both days, same as on February 2.

DELHI HAD recorded 96 coronavirus cases on January 27, the lowest in over nine months, and the first time the daily incidences count had stood below the 100-mark in that month

Delhi had recorded 96 coronavirus cases on January 27, the lowest in over nine months, and the first time the daily incidences count had stood below the 100-mark in that month.

On Sunday, Delhi had recorded 150 Covid cases and two deaths, while the positivity rate had stood at 0.26 per cent.

The active cases tally on Monday slightly rose to 1,036 from 1,031 the previous day, according to the bulletin.

The total number of tests conducted the previous day included 28,852 RT-PCR tests and 10,213 rapid antigen tests, the bulletin said. — PTI

IN BRIEF

6 killed as vehicle falls into J&K gorge

Bhaderwah/Jammu: Six people including three women were killed on Monday when their vehicle skidded off the road and plunged into a deep gorge in Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir, a senior police official said. Doda Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Mumtaz Ahmed said the accident occurred around 7.10 pm near Raggi Nallah, 20 km from Doda town. "The private vehicle, bearing a temporary registration number valid till March 4, was on way from Doda to Batote when its driver lost control and fell into the deep gorge," the SSP said. The police official said the rescue operation is still on. He said rescuers comprising police and local volunteers immediately swung into action and pulled out six bodies from the vehicle. Officials identified five of the deceased as Rakesh Kumar, his wife Mamta Devi and daughter Samrita Devi, Babli Devi (all residents of Ganika village) and Chander Rekha of Nagri village. The identity of the sixth victim, a toddler, is awaited, the officials said. — PTI

2 sisters crushed to death in Odisha

Bhubaneswar: Two little sisters were on Monday afternoon crushed under the wheels of a pickup van when they were sleeping under a flyover at Baji Chowk in Dhenkanal town. Another sibling of the duo sustained grievous injuries in the mishap. The deceased two were identified as Saina Sabar and Suhana Sabar. Reportedly, Santosh Sabar, a resident of Bihar, stays with his family under the flyover. Tragedy struck him when his two minor daughters were mowed down by a pickup van when they were in deep sleep at around 2 pm. Another child identified as Pami Sabar, who was having food at that time, was also hit by the vehicle. While Saina and Suhana died on the spot, Pami was rushed to a hospital here in critical condition. The driver of the vehicle fled the spot following the mishap.

10-yr-old tribal girl raped in MP district

Umaria, MP: A 10-year-old tribal girl was raped in a deserted school building in a village of Madhya Pradesh's Umaria district, the police said on Monday. The incident happened under Indwar police station limits post 10pm on Saturday, said deputy superintendent of police Arvind Tiwari. "A 28-year-old man abducted the girl from outside her home, took her to a deserted school building and raped her. She reached home at 5am on Sunday and told her family about the ordeal, after which a rape case was registered," he said. The accused has been booked under PcoSo Act and Indian Penal Code provisions and efforts are on to nab him, he added. — PTI

ODISHA HOUSE TO GO PAPERLESS FOR BUDGET SESSION

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 15

Taking a cue from Parliament of India, the Odisha Legislative Assembly (OLA) has decided to go paperless with the implementation of the "e-Vidhan project" from the upcoming Budget Session starting on February 18. According to OLA Speaker, Dr S.N. Patro, from the governor's address to the budget presentation, questions and the proceedings of the Assembly will be through National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA), Mr Patro said. The state budget for 2021-22 will be presented in the Assembly by finance minister Niranjan Pujari on February 22. NeVA aims at bringing all the legislatures of the country on a single platform, creating a massive data depository. Paperless Assembly or e-Assembly is a concept involving the use of electronic devices to facilitate proceedings in the House, the official said. It enables automation of the entire law-making process, tracking of documents and sharing of information. Assembly secretary Dasarathi Satapathy made a presentation on the "e-Vidhan" initiative during a review meeting.

Kerala journo gets bail to visit mother

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, FEB. 15

The Supreme Court on Monday granted a five-day interim bail to Kerala journalist Siddique Kappan to visit his bed-ridden ailing mother and directed the Uttar Pradesh police to take him to his mother's house in Kerala.

A bench, headed by Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde, and also comprising Justice A.S. Bopanna and Justice V. Ramasubramanian also directed that "the police may guard the house from outside, but shall not go inside the house, when the prisoner-Siddique Kappan visits his mother".

Passing an order granting five-day interim bail to Kappan, the court also addressed the "grave apprehensions" of the Uttar Pradesh government over the likelihood of Kappan using his release to have himself "paraded in the public and gather support for his activities

which are otherwise against the law".

Saddling Kappan with conditions during his interim release for five days, the court said that during his visit to meet his ailing mother he "shall not give any interview to any media including the social media" and "He shall not meet the members of the public."

However, the court said that Kappan will be "entitled to meet his relatives and doctors and anybody else in connection with his mother's health".

Directing the Kerala police to cooperate with the UP police, the court ordered that Kappan will be escorted by a team of UP police officers and it will be its (police) responsibility to ensure that Kappan travel to and from his mother's house.

The Kerala Union of Working Journalist had earlier moved the top court for the release of its Delhi-based secretary Kappan.

Modi to inaugurate key TN projects on Feb. 17

New Delhi, Feb. 15: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate key projects of the oil and gas sector in Tamil Nadu on February 17 via video conferencing.

His office said Modi will dedicate to the nation the Ramanathapuram Thoothukudi natural gas pipeline and gasoline desulphurisation unit at Chennai Petroleum Corporation Limited, Manali.

He will also lay the foundation stone of Cauvery Basin Refinery at Nagapattinam.

These projects will result in substantial

socio-economic benefits and will boost the country's march towards Urja Aatmanirbharta, the PMO said.

The Ramanathapuram-Thoothukudi section (143 km) of the Ennore-Thiruvallur-Bengaluru-Puducherry-Nagapattinam-Madurai-Tuticorin Natural Gas Pipeline has been laid at the cost of about Rs 700 crore.

It will help utilise gas from ONGC gas fields and deliver natural gas as feedstock to industries and other commercial customers. — PTI

6 women & 2 kids among 16 killed in Maha road accident

Modi, Uddhav express grief, announce ₹2L relief each to next of kin

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, FEB. 15

Sixteen labourers, including six women and two children, were killed after a truck overturned in Maharashtra's Jalgaon district on Monday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has expressed grief over the loss of lives while announcing an ex-gratia of ₹2 lakhs each to the next of kin of the deceased.

According to police, all the deceased were labourers from Abhoda, Kerala and Raver in the Jalgaon.

They died after their papaya-laden truck overturned shortly after midnight near a temple at

▲ **ACCORDING TO** police, all the deceased were labourers from Abhoda, Kerala and Raver in the Jalgaon. Five labourers have sustained serious injuries and are being treated at a rural hospital.

Kingaon village. The deceased included two children, aged three and five, and a 15-year-old girl. Five labourers have sustained serious injuries and are being treated at a rural hospital.

Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray offered his condolences terming the accident as "unfortunate". He announced an

aid of ₹2 lakh each to next to kin of the deceased from the chief minister's relief fund. The cost of treatment of injured people will also be borne by the state government, said the chief minister's office.

Mr Modi expressed grief at the loss of lives in a road accident and conveyed his condolences to the bereaved families. "Heart-wrenching truck accident in Jalgaon, Maharashtra. Condolences to the bereaved families. May the injured recover at the earliest," he said in a tweet posted by his office.

The Prime Minister's Office informed that Mr Modi has approved an ex-

gratia of ₹2 lakh each to the bereaved families, while the seriously injured will get ₹50,000 from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF), which is utilised to render immediate relief to families of those killed in natural calamities like floods, cyclones and earthquakes.

President Ram Nath Kovind tweeted, "Deeply distressed to learn that a truck carrying labourers, women and children overturned near Jalgaon in Maharashtra resulting in deaths of many. My thoughts and prayers are with their families and wish an early recovery for the injured."

Vij calls for 'extermination of seeds of anti-nationalism'

Chandigarh, Feb. 15: In a comment on the arrest of climate activist Disha Ravi, Haryana home minister Anil Vij on Monday urged "extermination from the roots" wherever seeds of anti-nationalism found.

The minister's remarks came two days after Disha Ravi was held by the Delhi police for allegedly sharing with climate activist Greta Thunberg the toolkit related to the farmers' protest against the Centre's farm laws.

The Delhi police had claimed that the 21-year-old activist was an editor of the "toolkit Google doc" and "key conspirator" in the document's formulation and dissemination.

In the document, vari-

DISHA CASE



Anil Vij

ous urgent actions, including creating a Twitter storm and protesting outside Indian embassies, were listed to support the protest.

Whoever harbours the seeds of anti-nationalism in their mind, that has to be destroyed from the roots (samool naash), be it #Disha_Ravi or anyone

else, Vij said in a one line tweet in Hindi.

Later, the minister posted a response from the Twitter after a complaint was filed regarding his tweet.

The response from Twitter read, "We have received a complaint regarding your account, @anilvijminister for the following content (Vij's particular tweet in Hindi (Desh virodh ka beej Whoever harbours the seed...)).

We have investigated the reported content and have found that it is not subject to removal under the Twitter Rules or German law. Accordingly, we have not taken any action as a result of this specific report, the response said. — PTI

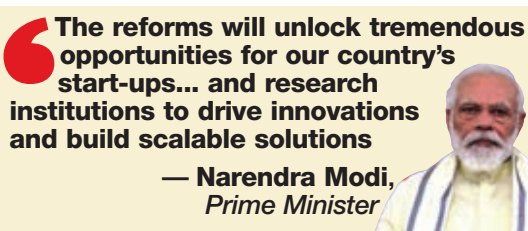
Centre announces major changes in mapping policy

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 15

The Centre on Monday announced major amendments in the country's mapping policy, which it said, will benefit Indian companies. The changes have been made in the policy keeping in mind the the government's Atmanirbhar Bharat vision.

Announcing this on Twitter, the Prime Minister said that the policy change is a massive step in the government's vision to make India self-reliant.

"Our government has taken a decision that will provide a huge impetus to Digital India. Liberalising policies governing the acquisition



tion and production of geospatial data is a massive step in our vision for an Aatmanirbhar Bharat," Mr Narendra Modi tweeted. "The reforms will unlock tremendous opportunities for our country's start-ups, private sector public sector and research institutions to drive innovations and build scalable solutions. This will also generate employment

and accelerate economic growth," the Prime Minister further said in subsequent tweet.

He also said that the country's farmers will benefit by leveraging the potential of geo-spatial and remote sensing data. "These reforms demonstrate our commitment to improving ease of doing business in India by deregulation," PM Modi said in another tweet on the matter.

17K poultry birds to be culled Guj

Tapi (Gujarat), Feb. 15:

Samples of poultry birds in Gujarat's Tapi district have tested positive for avian influenza following which the authorities have decided to cull around 17,000 birds as a precautionary measure, an official said on Monday.

The samples were collected from two poultry farms in Uchchhal taluka of Tapi located adjoining Navapur in Maharashtra's Nandurbar district from where bird flu cases have been reported, said deputy director of animal husbandry department of Tapi Akshay Shah.

These samples were sent to a laboratory in Bhopal and they have tested tested positive for bird flu, Dr Shah said.

The farms in Uchchhal from where the samples have tested positive are located within 1 km radius of four farms in Navapur from where avian influenza cases have

▲ **THE SAMPLES** were sent to a laboratory in Bhopal and they have tested tested positive for bird flu

been reported earlier, Shah said.

"Around 17,000 poultry birds in the affected area will be culled as a precautionary measure," he said.

A week ago, the Tapi district administration had banned entry and exit of poultry products from its border following confirmation of H5N8 (a strain of avian influenza) in Navapur. Areas falling within 1 to 10 km radius from the affected farms in Navapur were declared a surveillance zone.

Culling involves mass slaughter of domestic poultry birds, such as chickens and ducks, to contain the spread of bird flu. During the culling process, domestic birds in an infected area are slaughtered and their remains buried. — PTI

Bombay HC not to quash FIR against Sushant sister

Mumbai, Feb. 15: The Bombay high court on Monday refused to quash an FIR lodged against late actor Sushant Singh Rajput's sister Priyanka Singh for allegedly forging and fabricating a medical prescription for her brother.

A division bench of Justices S.S. Shinde and M.S. Karnik, however, quashed the FIR against Meetu Singh, another sister of Rajput.

The court said while there was prima facie evidence against Priyanka Singh, the case against Meetu Singh does not stand.

"We are of the considered opinion that the FIR against petitioner Meetu Singh does not survive," the bench said. "However, the FIR against petitioner Priyanka Singh is not quashed as we prima facie find that a case is made out," the Bombay high court said. — PTI

DELHI POLICE
SHANTI SEWA NYAYA

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DP/271/2021

IN BRIEF

TRAIN COACH FIRE:
KEY ACCUSED HELD
AFTER 19 YEARS

Ahmedabad: Almost 19 years after a mob torched a coach of Sabarmati Express at Godhra station in Panchmahal district of Gujarat which caused the death of 59 “karsevaks”, police has nabbed key accused, Rafiq Hussain Bhatuk, from Godhra town, an officer said on Monday. Bhatuk (51) was part of the “core group” of the accused persons involved in the entire conspiracy. He has been on the run for the last 19 years, said Panchmahal superintendent of police Leena Patil. Based on a specific tip-off, a team of the Godhra police raided a house in Signal Falia area located near the railway station on Sunday night and picked up Bhatuk, Patil told PTI. “Bhatuk was part of the core group of the accused who had hatched the entire conspiracy, incited mob and even arranged petrol to torch the train compartment. He fled to Delhi immediately after his name cropped up during investigation. He was facing murder and rioting charges among others,” Patil said. A total of 59 “karsevaks” were killed in the Godhra train burning incident on February 27, 2002, triggering the worst communal riots in the history of Gujarat. The SP said Bhatuk used to work as a labourer at Godhra railway station. — PTI

MORE FAST-TRACK
COURTS WILL BE
SET UP IN PUNJAB

Chandigarh: Nine more fast-track courts under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (PoCSO) Act will be set up in Punjab, the state government decided on Monday. The decision was taken in an inter-departmental meeting of the state government. The meeting decided on a slew of measures to strengthen investigation and prosecution machinery to handle criminal offences against women and children. Besides, Sexual Assault Response Teams in all districts of the state to deal with cases of sexual assault on women will also be set up, according to a government statement issued here. At the virtual meeting, Punjab chief secretary Vini Mahajan directed officials to clear the pendency of cases related to women and children from 2016 to 2020 through investigations on priority, the statement read. She also directed the officials to lay down Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to fast-track the investigation of sexual offences against women and children by specifying the roles and responsibilities of all departments with regard to such cases. She directed the Home department to expedite the establishment of nine other fast-track courts, for which approval has been granted by the government, in addition to the three such courts already operational in Ludhiana and Jalandhar. — PTI

SPURIOUS LIQUOR
CLAIMS 4 LIVES IN
MADHYA PRADESH

**RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY**
BHOPAL, FEB 15

Four people died after consuming ‘spurious’ liquor in Chhatrapur district, police said on Monday. The incident took place in the village of Paretha. According to the police, around 150 people had gathered at the place of one Shital Ahirwar (60) in the village for a party on February 9. Some of them procured liquor of brand “Dilse” from a liquor contractor hailing from Uttar Pradesh. Many of them who consumed the liquor were taken ill, according to the police. While Ahirwar’s son died on Friday, he succumbed on Saturday. Two more people, Tulsidas Brar and Laluram Ahirwar, died on Sunday night. “Viscera of the four deceased were sent for tests”, Chhatrapur district superintendent of police Sachin Sharma said. A team of district officials and police officers rushed to the village to ensure proper medical treatment of the affected people. The incident comes in the wake of the death of 24 people caused by spurious liquor in Morena district in Chambal division in the state last month.

PRIVACY POLICY:
SC ISSUES
NOTICE TO GOVT,
WHATSAPP & FB

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, FEB. 15

Holding that people’s privacy is more important than money, the Supreme Court on Monday issued notice to the Centre, WhatsApp and its parent company Facebook on a plea challenging its new privacy policy about which reservations have been voiced in certain sections.

“You may be a \$2-3 trillion company, but people’s privacy is more valuable and it is our duty to protect their privacy,” said a bench headed by Chief Justice Sharad A Bobde, noting that the people have grave concerns about privacy.

The Court was hearing a plea seeking to restrain WhatsApp from implementing its new privacy policy in India. The application has been moved by two college students — Karmanya Singh Sareen and Shreya Sethi in a matter pending before a Constitution bench wherein 2016 policy is under challenge.

The petition sought a direction to the web service platforms to apply the same privacy policy which is made applicable to the users in the European Union region.

Senior lawyer Shyam Divan, appearing for the petitioner, told the apex court that WhatsApp has in January “come up with a new privacy policy”.

“One set of privacy standards apply to Europe and a different set of standards apply to Indians. This happens when the Personal Data Protection Bill is pending,” Divan said while asserting “there is a huge differentiation between Europeans and Indians”.

Senior counsel Kapil Sibal, who appeared for WhatsApp, denied that the users’ data would be compromised by the new policy.

“This 2021 policy is applicable everywhere apart from Europe as it has a law. If India has a law, we will follow the same,” he said.

At this the CJJ asked him to put that on oath.

WhatsApp had earlier in January renewed its terms of service and privacy policy.

3 forest guards attacked
by timber mafia in MP

DC CORRESPONDENT
BHOPAL, FEB 15

Three forest guards were brutally attacked by timber mafia in a wildlife sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh, officials said on Monday.

The incident occurred inside Panna National Park on Saturday.

According to local sub-divisional officer (SDO)(forest) Dinesh Singh Gaur, the three forest guards, Chatrapal Lodhi, Swamideen Kushwaha and Govind Singh Yadav, spotted a gang of timber smugglers cutting trees in Vishramgang range under Panna National Park.



Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) spokesperson Rakesh Tikait at the Ghazipur border in New Delhi on Monday during the ongoing farmers’ agitation against the Centre’s new farm laws. — PTI

Assam is springboard of Act
East Policy, says Jaishankar

Minister asserts all-round development of state central to success of policy

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, FEB. 15

External affairs minister S. Jaishankar on Monday said that Assam is the springboard of India’s Act East Policy which aims at to create connectivity that will make the state more energetic, contributing and employed.

Asserting that all-round development of Assam is central to the success of the policy the minister told reporters that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is deeply committed to the development of Assam, and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)-aided projects in the state are examples of how international policies and partnerships can con-



tribute to the development of states.

The external affairs minister, accompanied by Japanese Ambassador to India Satoshi Suzuki, was here to review JICA-assisted projects in Assam.

Mr Jaishankar who also

addressed an event said, “The Act East Policy is an approach to create connectivity to and within Assam, beyond to the Northeast then to neighbouring Myanmar and Bangladesh but eventually push all the way by road, sea, air to Vietnam to Japan. In doing so, we must appreciate that this will not only service greater economic activity but as demonstrated in other parts of the world, actually be a driver of it. A more connected Assam will be a more energetic Assam, a more contributing Assam and a more employed Assam.”

He, however, reiterated that in order to bring in more investments to the region and to make the

Act East Policy a success, there was a need to create an enabling environment by ensuring better connectivity.

Asked about the impact of political developments in neighbouring Myanmar, which is an important component of the Act East Policy, he said, “These are early days and hopefully development projects will not be affected”.

The minister highlighted that Assam has long been the fulcrum of the north-east region, but as cooperation and connectivity expands beyond national politics, this potential can actually make it the centre of a hub that covers neighbours like Myanmar, Bangladesh and Bhutan.

ED summons Maha babu in PMLA case

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, FEB. 15

The ED has summoned a top Maharashtra bureaucrat in connection with its investigation in a money laundering case.

R.A. Rajeev, who is the commissioner of MMRDA (Mumbai Metropolitan Regional Development Authority), has been summoned by the ED in the money laundering case, which is related to securi-

ty service providing firm Tops Group and Shiv Sena MLA Pratap Sarnaik.

Tops Security Agency and some other companies had allegedly got contracts from the MMRDA between 2014-2017 and again from 2017 to 2020.

The ED is investigating Mr Sarnaik and Rahul Nanda, who is the promoter of Tops Group under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002 in the case. Mr

Sarnaik’s two sons — Vihang and Purvesh — are also under the scanner of the agency. Mr Nanda remains in the UK and has not yet been questioned by agency.

The ED has already arrested Amit Chandole, a close aide of Mr Sarnaik, and had questioned his brother-in-law Yogesh Chandegala and close aide Sanket More. ED officials had also arrested M Sasidharan, who was

managing director of Tops Group in the case. The ED is probing alleged suspicious dealings of Mr Sarnaik, Mr Chandole, Tops Group and its promoter, all of whom have denied the allegations.

Last year in November, ED officials conducted raids at office and residence of Mr Sarnaik in Thane, following which his son Vihang was brought to the ED office and questioned.

Kanhaiya meets Nitish aide,
sets tongues wagging in NDA

Patna, Feb. 15: Many eyebrows were raised in Bihar on Monday as news broke of a meeting between CPI’s rising star Kanhaiya Kumar and Ashok Choudhary, a minister and key aide of chief minister Nitish Kumar.

A fiery former JNU student leader, Kanhaiya has been soft toward Nitish Kumar despite their parties rarely getting on the same page on most issues. Kanhaiya met Mr Choudhary on Sunday.

During his failed bid for the Lok Sabha in 2019, the former student leader had avoided attacking Mr Kumar. Mr Kumar had come out in support of Kanhaiya when the JNU

controversy erupted in 2016. The JD(U) was then not a part of the NDA. The two retained the soft spot for each other even after Nitish Kumar returned to the NDA in 2017.

Mr Choudhary had headed the state unit of the JD(U) during the Assembly polls and played an instrumental role recently in enlisting the support of the sole BSP MLA Zama Khan and Independent legislator Sumit Singh, both of whom were inducted into the Cabinet last week.

He had also caused jitters in the LJP, an ally turned adversary, by inviting its sole MLA Raj Kumar Singh to his resi-

DYFI worker,
hurt in police
lathicharge, dies

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, FEB. 15

A DYFI worker Moidul Islam Moidya (31), who was critically wounded allegedly in the police lathicharge during last week’s Nabanna rally of the Left parties’ youth wings demanding jobs, succumbed to injuries at a private nursing home, prompting the CPI(M), it’s ally Congress and the BJP in the Opposition to accuse the Mamata Banerjee government of his “murder.”

The auto-rickshaw driver from Kotoipur in Bankura was the breadwinner of his family.

On February 11 he participated in the DYFI-SFI march which turned violent as the rallyists and police clashed with each other. With deep injuries Moidul was rescued from Esplanade. He was rushed to a clinic from where he was later shifted to a private nursing home run by CPI(M) leader and doctor Fuad Halim.

Dr Halim said, “On February 13 morning, Moidul was admitted after his medical tests showed development of an acute kidney failure. It happens only when muscles get hit continuously to become wounded and it’s internal protein comes out and blocks the kidney through blood. He had massive muscle injuries from the lathicharge by the police.”

CPI(M) MLA Sujana Chakraborty claimed, “A bright youth was murdered and turned into a corpse.”

Leader of the Opposition Abdul Mannan alleged, “It is a brutal murder which reflects unlimited atrocities of an autocratic government.”

State BJP president Dilip Ghosh said, “This is unfortunate. Trinamul Congress government has lost its control over everything.”

Wondering if Mr Chakraborty talked of getting her call about the DYFI worker’s death first, the chief minister however said, “Any death is sad and unfortunate. Post mortem report will reveal the cause of death. But the police was neither informed nor complained about it. Family of the deceased was not informed also though the

MAA KITCHEN:
DIDI LAUNCHES
MEALS FOR ₹5

AGE CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, FEB. 15

In what appears to be yet another attempt by her to outclass the BJP with sops for the voters in poll-bound West Bengal, chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday launched a scheme ‘Maa Kitchen’ offering daily meal at ₹5 to the poor.

The menu includes rice, daal, vegetables and egg (one piece) curry in a plate available on a first come first served basis from 1 pm to 3 pm.

Kickstarting the project from Nabanna, Ms Banerjee informed that her government would bear a subsidy of ₹15 per plate in the initiative which would be run by self-help groups and would expand across the state.

Two outlets have been started in South Kolkata.

“It is a unique idea which was announced in the state budget. I will go to taste the food one day. This programme is aimed for the common people. It will create a service set-up,” Ms Banerjee said about the concept which is the brainchild of election strategist of the ruling Trinamul Congress: Prashant Kishor. The move resembles to Amma Kitchens’ launched by late AIADMK leader J Jayalalithaa in Tamil Nadu.

youth was admitted to a hospital two days ago. He might have had a kidney or any other ailment before his death.”

“Any hospital is mandated to share information with the local police station in such cases. But it was not done. I told Mr Chakraborty that I am ready to provide a job and financial assistance to the family of the deceased,” she added. Post-mortem report, however, indicated of assault only on the legs of the deceased, according to the police.

Agitated over his death, some DYFI cadres heckled a cop and torn apart his uniform during a protest in the city.

Deployment of
ITBP across
entire LAC
strengthened

■ Continued from Page 1 process in Ladakh, the Chinese PLA could create problems in some other areas along the border. We have thus deployed additional ITBP troops in Arunachal, Sikkim, and higher and remote areas of Uttarakhand and Himachal. Our security forces are alert and we will not let the PLA create any more mischief,” a senior MHA official remarked.

Both Indian and Chinese security forces agreed on a withdrawal formula in the Ladakh region after prolonged negotiation lasting several months. The Indian security forces, however, are on “very high alert” all along the India-China border. The sources said all ITBP sector commanders are getting daily reports from its advance and remote checkpoints on the Chinese activity in their respective zones. A detailed analysis is then sent to the home ministry.

Both the ITBP and Army had made elaborate arrangements by stocking up on rations, essential commodities, tents, warm clothes to maintain high level surveillance during the harsh winter season. “The same level of alertness is being maintained that was noticed during the winter season. We have created good infrastructure which will be improved further during the summer,” the official added.

Warrant for 2 more over toolkit, HC hearing today

■ Continued from Page 1 high court. The Opposition parties, meanwhile, accused the Centre of “murdering democracy” by using force against a 21-year-old activist, and said the voice of India cannot be silenced, while the BJP defended the action, saying a crime was a crime no matter at what age. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi led the Opposition offensive after Disha Ravi’s arrest, saying the country will not be silenced. “Your lips are free to speak. Say that the truth is still alive. They are scared, not the country,” he said in a tweet in Hindi. “India will not be silenced,” he added.

Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal said: “Arrest of 21-year-old Disha Ravi is an unprecedented attack on democracy. Supporting farmers is not a crime.”

From the BJP side, Union minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat tweeted: “If age is the criteria then Param Veer Chakra Second Lt Arun Khetarpal, martyred at 21, is who I am proud of. Not some, toolkit propagandists.”

Kavita Krishnan, secretary of All India Progressive Women’s Association, said people like Ms Ravi are India’s best hope as they are concerned over not just themselves, but future genera-

tions. “We are not behaving like a democracy right now. If we are going to equate protest with conspiracy and organising protests as conspiracy, then you are not a democracy any more,” she said.

“They should immediately drop this case based upon absolutely flimsy, ridiculous and evil pretexts. A toolkit is not sedition, it is not conspiracy, a toolkit is for protest,” she added.

Rights activist Shabnam Hashmi also questioned the basis of Ms Ravi’s arrest, saying anybody even doing a local campaign prepares a toolkit. “We should look at the Prime Minister’s cam-

paign toolkit. We are crossing the limits of absurdity. We will become a laughingstock internationally,” she said.

At a press conference on Monday, meanwhile, the Delhi police said it was in touch with Google, on whose platform the toolkit document was created, and had posed several questions to the tech giant. “We have received some answers from Google,” the police said.

A senior Delhi police officer said several screenshots of the toolkit openly available on the Internet were investigated, and once it got enough information, the police got search warrants on

February 9. “On February 11, a special cell team reached Mumbai and conducted a search at Nikita Jacob’s house. She was not available, but her electronic gadgets were examined,” the officer said.

The email ID created by Shantanu Muluk was the owner of this toolkit document and all the others were its editors, the officer added.

The police said that after Greta Thunberg shared the “toolkit” on Twitter, Disha Ravi asked the Swedish activist to delete her post, fearing action under the stringent Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). It said that Ms Thunberg

deleted the tweet at Ms Ravi’s request and later shared an edited version of the document. The police also claimed the edits were made by Ms Ravi.

Police sources said Ms Ravi wrote to Ms Thunberg on WhatsApp, saying: “Okay can you not tweet the toolkit at all. Can we just not say anything at all for a while. I am gonna talk to lawyers. I am sorry but our names are on it and we can literally get UAPA against us.” Ms Ravi allegedly made the request fearing registration of a case under the stringent UAPA as her name was mentioned in the toolkit, the police sources claimed.

THE ASIAN AGE

16 FEBRUARY 2021

21-year activist's arrest is a blot on India's democracy

While it's in the fitness of things to expect the judicial system to speak up to protect a citizen against the State's over-reach and high-handedness, it is no surprise that civil society across the country should be furious over the arrest of the 21-year-old Bengaluru climate activist Disha Ravi by the Delhi police over the weekend.

In a Kafkaesque act, a Delhi police team swooped on Ms Ravi at her home in the southern metropolis, whisked her to Delhi without even informing her parents, and produced her before a magistrate without the benefit of counsel, a legal requirement. The activist was charged with being part of a conspiracy with "Khalistan" proponents and is being held for sedition and causing disaffection against the State.

Ms Ravi appears to be a supporter of the ongoing farmers' agitation in the country. In support of this and to oppose the high-handed police action over it, global celebrities, including teenaged Swedish environment activist Greta Thunberg, sent out tweets, unleashing a ferocious campaign, much to the discomfort of the government. FIRs were filed against Ms Thunberg and others for sedition. In the government's eyes, she is guilty of spreading the idea of a "toolkit" to back the farmers' agitation.

In order to understand the maliciousness, indeed the enormity, of what the Indian State has done by arresting Ms Ravi (and two others), making itself a laughingstock among democracies, it is important to be aware that this so-called "toolkit" is not a handbook of terrorism.

In fact it's no more than guidelines on ways to propagate the farmers' cause through the social media, and is a common expression among activists of all kinds. Indeed, it's no more than what the Hindutva brigade, including the ruling party, have been doing. The difference is that the causes of the climate activists and the Hindutva group are vastly different, with the latter identifying with vile ones like the so-called "love jihad", false propaganda of cow killing against Muslims and dalits, spreading fabrications against their political opponents, and disseminating hate against all voices that call for social harmony and sanity.

Ms Ravi's "crime" is that she edited two lines of Ms Thunberg's "toolkit". It is for this that the Delhi police is calling her an "editor" of the "toolkit". Since an outfit called the Poetic Justice Foundation, which apparently supports the idea of "Khalistan", a woolly-headed thought in the minds of some persons of Indian origin in the West, also backs the farmers' cause, all supporters of Indian farmers are being mischievously sought to be equated with "Khalistan" supporters. The practice of such sleight-of-hand by the government is clearly meant to discredit the farmers' agitation. This is a sign of the government running out of ideas about how to contain it. It is not inconceivable that the ground is also being prepared to play the State violence card against the farmers and their leaders, and Ms Thunberg or Ms Ravi, and others like them, are just collateral damage.

But taking unlawful actions against a young woman barely out of her teens can backfire. To many ordinary people, it seems that the Delhi police, which directly operates under the Union home ministry, is degenerating into becoming the praetorian guard of the government in power.

Trump escapes conviction

Former US President Donald Trump may have escaped conviction by the Senate, but history will judge him culpable for the attack on democracy. Only seven Republican Senators voted to convict, like 10 Congressmen had done in the House of Representatives vote to impeach him for the second time. The action of 43 other Republican senators to vote against his conviction wasn't due just to partisanship. Self-preservation was their primary motive, petrified as they were by the prospect of a backlash by the Trump loyalists of a party that has been hijacked by the far right and swears blind loyalty to a President who subverted hoary democratic norms that embroilers American history.

The impeachment managers had built a compelling narrative in the House and laid before the Senate a body of irrefutable video evidence of the armed insurrection on January 6 that Mr Trump may have helped unleash through his bizarre hold on a highly motivated section of conservatives. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell chastised Mr Trump in a telling comment after the vote but hid behind a fig leaf of technicality in the presumed illegality of putting on trial an ex-President. The law may still get Mr Trump for his big lies on the election result, his overt canvassing of officials to overturn the popular verdict and his open embrace of retaliatory violence in egging on supporters.

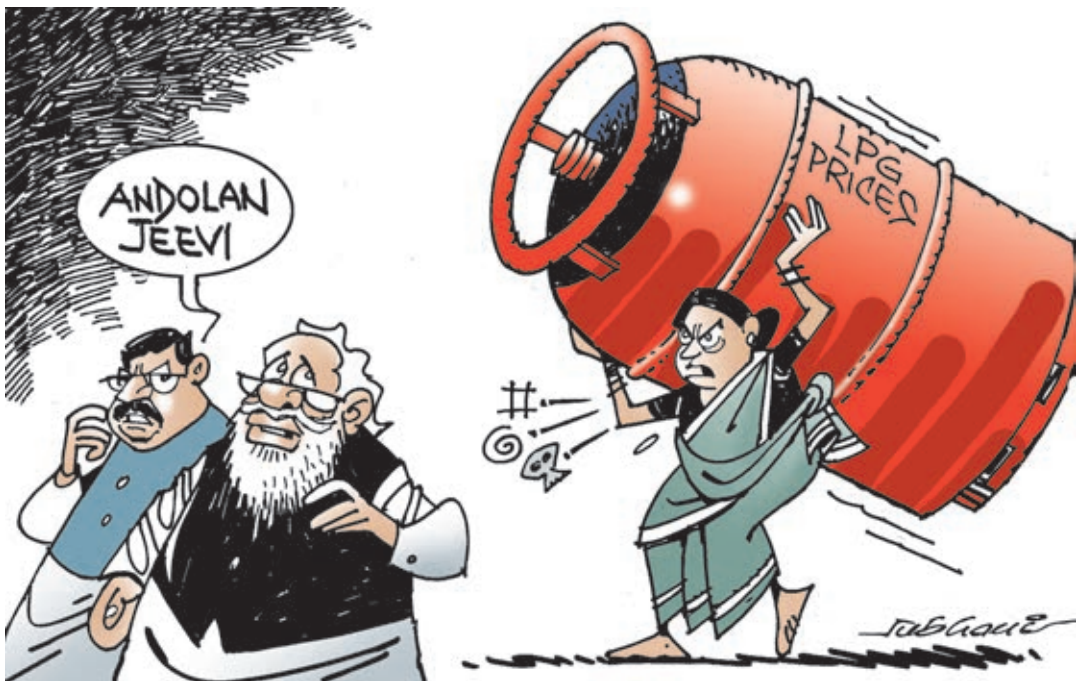
Evidence has it that Mr Trump did little to act as legislators in the joint session of Congress at Capitol Hill and his own vice-president, Mike Pence, were scared for their lives. It is a comment on the popular vote in today's America that Mr Trump drew 76 million votes, the most after Joe Biden. Truth may have caught up with Mr Trump already. It is also reflected in the world's highest death toll as the President abdicated his responsibility in dealing with the coronavirus as he stood for re-election. What we have to fear is the Trump legacy of alternative facts, conspiracy theories and brazen thuggery. Democracy may have to face many more battles for survival against Trumpism.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani



How PM can win hearts, keep bills, end protests



Sriram Karri

A political stalemate deadlocked in a seeming binary is dangerous. It is erroneous, an optical illusion, which often arises out of a bankruptcy of ideas premised in possibilities, leaves both sides strongly entrenched in a zero-sum game. The binary has left its predictable trail of bitterness on both sides of the current battlelines.

Hail George W. Bush, the modern proponent of the equation: You are with us or against us! But this is actually from a more ancient play-book.

It was the general-aristocrat from Athens who would famously terrorise opponents and convert every debate into a seesaw for testing loyalties as he would thunder: Whose side are you one? Cleon, clearly, in 430 BC, was ready for Twitter trolling.

You are either with the farmers, a monolith, with one voice and demand, or with the government — says the modern commandment — no debate or amendment. This law limiting our positions and possibilities for a resolution to a mere binary isn't going away.

What follows is stereotyped playing the player, not the ball. You are a Khalistani anarchist, anti-Indian, out to destroy India's sovereignty at the behest of a neo-international cabal or a puppet of a fascist Hindutva government, out to pledge the farmers' destiny to a corporate crony club.

Even Arundhati Roy, who famously opposed Mr Bush's binary of having to choose between a "malevolent mullah or a mad Mickey Mouse" in the war against terror early in the new millen-

nium, sees no third option now.

There are several hostages to the etched in stone binary: the first is truth. The second is India's farmers' future. The third is the start of a resolution and solution, which can never be ours unless we set aside the mistaken notion that in the pitched battle on Delhi's borders, only one of the two — protesting farmers or the Narendra Modi government — can win. One must step down, after defeat, to ensure the other side wins.

But there is another possibility — the farmers can ensure Mr Modi wins, and the PM can strive to make the protesting farmers triumph — without either side having to make a moral compromise.

Let's begin with the position of common belief, since we lost sight of it: there is an accumulating agrarian crisis in India, marked by smaller landholdings, an unabatingly steep agflation (inflation of agri inputs like the price of seeds, fertilisers, urea, pesticides), transmission losses and unviable costs of financing (most farmers don't get bank loans, private money rates are backbreaking), self-defeating subsidies (loan waivers not applicable to most small farmers and landless tenant farmers), the impact of climate change in a largely rain-fed agri-sector, and unviable farmers (even rich farmers don't have cash to pay for health, education).

With the acknowledgment of a common problem comes an alignment of purpose — to solve the problem, reducing farmers' costs, reducing overall costs of production, eliminating waste, and increasing farmer incomes without making

food too expensive for a nation of over 1.3 billion.

A benevolent surgical strike on farmers' hearts

Enough commentary has flowed through editorials, columns, feisty television debates and vituperous social media exchanges about the transformed nature of the agitation. Not just Sikhs from Punjab but Jats, predominantly BJP voters and building blocks of Hindutva, are now resolved to stay put on the ground till the bills are withdrawn.

After Republic Day and the tearful breakdown of Rakesh Tikait, the bills have been reduced to a backdrop, an excuse. The protests are no longer primarily about fears around the potential reduction or doing away with minimum support prices (MSPs), or ending of the mandi system, or the visceral paranoia around corporates getting legal backing to do contract farming or store grain — it is now about hurt farmers set against the hubris of the government.

If the farmers were not emotionally hurt, their pride not invested in staying put on the ground, they would have been convinced by Narendra Modi's defence in Parliament of the three bills. Mr Modi has put the cart ahead of the horse in trying to logically convince people who are plain angry and see the government as arrogant. The resolution can only begin by appealing to the hearts of the Jat farmer protesters with an act to show that the government is not arrogant.

In the next many days, on any day and at any hour of his choosing, Mr Modi should just walk into a protest site and spend several hours. Let him make some rotis at

In the next many days, on any day of his choosing, Mr Modi should just walk into a protest site and spend several hours.

the langar, let him listen and to the ladies cutting vegetables, sit on the ground with the leaders as they pass the hookah. Ask them if they are comfortable, if they have everything they need for now. Let him break bread with them, the ice will break on its own.

Yes, that's all it might end up taking to end these protests. Just that. Mr Modi is capable of magic with some sections of people and the protesting Jat and Sikh farmers are part of that section. Once they are no longer angry, and his humble arrival at the protest site will convince them that neither he nor his government is actually arrogant, the stalemate will lead to a thaw.

It is then that Mr Modi can explain that the existing policies have failed the farmer for 50 years and expecting a different result with the same policies would be an Einsteinian measure of insanity. The BJP can talk about how corporate and cooperative procurement of milk have enriched farmers in the dairy sector; and how this policy wishes to replicate the same success for grain.

Prime Minister Modi in their midst will be a visual story for all farmers, the soothing touch needed, the surgical strike on their hearts. It will calm farmers in all protest sites and those elsewhere simmering with anger with a new belief in his leadership, and that his government cares for farmers everywhere. Before he leaves the protest site, having told the world he was there himself, he can throw in a final gesture of affection by asking for some jalebis and rotis to be packed for his dinner — the entire gamut of security and Covid-19 precautions set aside — and he will leave with their hearts.

A little haggling, a little willingness to give in on an odd thing here or there; and the farmers will be happy to leave, with the optics of victory, their pride intact, and return home, their heads held high.

LETTERS

DIVIDED AMERICA

Former US President Donald Trump's acquittal by the US Senate has set a dangerous precedent — of an autocrat violating his oath but escaping the consequences. Mr Trump put out a stream of lies after losing the polls and openly incited supporters to go on the rampage in the Capitol, endangering the lives of his own vice-president, legislators and scores of police officers. The failure to convict shows how divided America still is.

N. Sadhasiva Reddy
Bengaluru

VIOLATION OF RULES

DESPITE THERE being a categorical Bar Council of India rule saying judges should not socialise with advocates, there seems to be no compliance. Official tea parties in court premises follow protocol, but parties at five-star hotels do create a potential avenue for advocates to exert undue influence on judges. Recently, there were concerns raised about bias in the judiciary, and such parties further jeopardise its credibility.

Aires Rodrigues
Ribander, Goa

PUNISH JAYWALKERS

IT IS shocking to learn from a World Bank report that, with just one per cent of the world's vehicles, India has 11 per cent of global road accident deaths, the highest for any country. One person dies every four minutes in a traffic accident in India. Roads are indeed "more dangerous than the Covid-19 pandemic", as transport minister Nitin Gadkari rightly said. We badly need encroachment-free pavements, driving schools and strict law enforcement. Drunken driving and jaywalking must be discouraged at all costs.

Bidyut K. Chatterjee
Faridabad

B'WOOD VITIATED

NOT ONLY cricket but Bollywood, India's main film industry, too, has been vitiated by politics. This year, besides late S.P. Balasubrahmanyam, not a single film personality was honoured with Padma awards. Only those close to the present government are deemed worthy. Lata Mangeshkar was awarded the Bharat Ratna decades ago, but the great Mohammed Rafi was ignored.

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to N.J. Ravi Chander (Feb. 13). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Aakar Patel



Vital areas in kids' health left ignored in Budget 2021

The Union Budget delivered earlier this month was praised for two things. First, that it was spending money in the right place: capital expenditure, which would create value over the long term. And second, that it was transparent. The deficit is three times what it should be, but at least the government has accepted it. Perhaps these two things are enough to make it a good Budget, though one doesn't know. There has not really been any Budget I can remember that made any difference to most people's lives, except perhaps one, and that was in 1991.

However, it is clear the Budget has ignored something that was really urgent. The National Family Health Survey 2019-20, conducted by the government, revealed some terrible numbers.

On four key metrics which represent the nutritional status of children, states recorded a significant fall in 2019-20 compared to the levels in 2015-16. In states like Gujarat, Maharashtra and West Bengal, the share of anaemic and wasted (low weight for height) children was significantly higher than the levels recorded 15 years earlier in 2005-06.

This indicated a reversal of progress that had been hard to win. Even in states such as Kerala, which continued to lead in these indicators, the levels recorded in 2019-20 were poorer than the 2015-16 figures.

The survey put out data for 22 states and Union territories and an analysis of 10 major states was conducted. Anaemia among children was higher in all the 10 states in 2019-20 compared to 2015-16. In Gujarat, Himachal, Maharashtra and West Bengal, a higher percentage of children were anaemic in 2019-20 than were in 2005-06. The percentage of wasted (low weight for height) children was higher in half of the 10 states. In Assam, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra and West Bengal, a higher percentage of children were wasted in 2019-20 compared to 2005-06. In 7 of the 10 states analysed, a higher percentage of children were underweight (low weight for age) in 2019-20 compared to 2015-16.

Stunting (low height for age) was higher in six out of the 10 states compared to 2015-16. The study also found that the incidence of diarrhoea had increased in half the states, including Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka and West

Bengal. In Bihar it was up from 10.4 per cent in 2015-16 to 13.7 per cent in 2019-20. This is the reality of the situation. We can debate what has caused this and that can wait for another day. The problem is that the Budget that was presented by Nirmala Sitharaman did not acknowledge and therefore didn't accommodate this problem. The mid-day meal scheme, on which crores of children depended for their one good meal of the day, found its budget cut from ₹13,400 crore in FY 2021 to ₹11,500 crore in 2022. This was lower in nominal terms than what it had been seven years earlier. Inflation adjusted, it was 38 per cent lower. The Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), meant to provide pre-school children with food, education, primary health-care, immunisation, health checkups and referral services to children under six and their mothers, was also lower in nominal terms, at ₹16,888 crore in FY 2022 versus ₹18,691 crore in 2014-15. The programme, running rural anganwadis or creches, is meant to improve the nutritional and health status of children "to lay the foundation for proper psychological, physical and social development of the child", to "reduce the incidence of

mortality, morbidity, malnutrition and school dropouts", and "to enhance the capability of the mother to look after the normal health and nutritional needs of the child through proper nutrition and health education".

Inflation adjusted, this figure was 36 per cent lower for 2022 than it had been the year Prime Minister Narendra Modi took over.

Poshan Abhiyan, the flagship programme meant to improve nutritional outcomes by 2022, was also damaged. The government had released only 46 per cent of the annual outlay by October 31, and for 2022 the budget was cut by 27 per cent.

The drinking water and sanitation department saw its budget officially rise from ₹21,000 crore to ₹60,030 crore, but of that ₹50,000 crore was for the "Central road and infrastructure fund", suggesting a fudge to avoid embarrassing questions. The numbers seemed deliberately made hard to compare with previous spends. ICDS was clubbed with Poshan Abhiyan, the Scheme for Adolescent Girls and the National Creche Scheme, and the whole thing was called Saksham. Its budget for 2022 was less than the previous year's

budget for ICDS alone. The Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, the Centre's maternity benefit programme, was clubbed with the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme for girls' education, the Mahila Shakti Kendra and other general gender budgeting, and the whole thing was called Samarthya. It received ₹2,522 crore for 2022, less than the ₹2,858 crore allocated in 2021.

The allocation for Ayushman Bharat (dubbed "Modicare" by Amit Shah) was the same for 2022, ₹6,400 crore, as it was for the year before. There was no provision for minimum wage and health insurance for the Anganwadi and Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers, the individuals whom Mr Modi had called "Covid warriors".

The numbers are not going to improve themselves. They will need external intervention from the government, but that has not happened in this Budget. Whether it was wise on an issue that concerns crores of our children we will not know till the government conducts the next survey.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

SHORT TAKES

RUSSIAN CARGO SHIP LAUNCHED TO ISS

Moscow, Feb. 15: An unmanned Russian cargo ship launched successfully Monday with a load of supplies for the International Space Station.

The Progress MS-16 cargo ship blasted off as scheduled at 09:45 am (0445GMT) from the Russia-leased Baikonur launch facility in Kazakhstan and reached a designated orbit en route to the station.

It is carrying water, propellant and other supplies and is set to dock at the space outpost Wednesday.

The space outpost is operated by NASA's Kate Rubins, Michael Hopkins, Victor Glover and Shannon Walker. Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency astronaut Soichi Noguchi and Russian Space Agency Roscosmos' Sergey Ryzhikov and Sergey Kud-Sverchikov.

NICKI MINAJ'S FATHER KILLED IN HIT-AND-RUN

New York, Feb. 15: The father of rapper Nicki Minaj has died after being struck by a hit-and-run driver near New York City, police said Sunday.

Robert Maraj, 64, was walking on a road in Mineola, Long Island at 6:15 pm (2315 GMT) on Friday when he was hit, Nassau County Police Department said in a statement.

The driver left the scene of the accident, and Maraj was taken to hospital, where he was pronounced dead on Saturday. "The investigation is ongoing," police added.

The statement did not specify Maraj's relationship to Minaj, but a police spokesman confirmed he was her father.

Minaj, 38, was born in Trinidad and Tobago and raised in the Queens borough of New York City.

The rapper has been nominated for 10 Grammy awards during her career.

SUSPECT HELD IN NYC SUBWAY STABBINGS

New York, Feb. 15: A 21-year-old Brooklyn man was arrested in the fatal stabbings of two people on New York City subway trains, police said Sunday.

Rigoberto Lopez was taken into custody Saturday night and was formally arrested Sunday on charges of murder and attempted murder, police said. One of the victims was discovered dead on a train in Queens late Friday with several stab wounds to his neck and torso, police said. Two hours later, a 44-year-old woman was found stabbed to death in a subway car in upper Manhattan. Two nonfatal attacks — one involving a 67-year-old man and the other involving a 43-year-old man — also occurred in upper Manhattan.

Authorities believe all four victims were homeless. Police said they believe Lopez may have committed all of the attacks. It wasn't clear if he had an attorney who could speak for him. Police leaders said they would deploy an additional 500 officers into the subway system to guard against future assaults.

LANDSLIDE IN INDONESIA: 10 DIE, 9 MISSING

Nganjuk (Indonesia), Feb. 15: Torrential rains triggered a landslide on Indonesia's main island of Java that killed at least 10 people, with rescuers digging desperately with their bare hands and farm tools on Monday to locate nine missing people.

Dozens of soldiers, police and volunteers took part in the search in the village of Selopuro in East Java's Nganjuk district, National Disaster Mitigation Agency spokesperson Raditya Jati said.

The mud that rolled down from surrounding hills late Sunday struck at least eight houses, injuring 14 people and leaving 21 people buried under tons of mud. Two were rescued on Sunday.

Rescuers on Monday found bodies buried under as much as 6 metres (10 feet) of mud and were searching for the nine people still missing, Nganjuk district chief Novi Rahman Hidayat said. Heavy equipment arrived later to help in the search.

Overnight rains caused rivers to burst their banks in other districts of the province on Monday, sending nearly 1 metre (about 3 feet) of muddy water into some residential areas and forcing hundreds of people to flee from their submerged homes, Jati said.

Myanmar rattled by army movements, Net shutdown

People around the country flout orders to protest military's seizure of power

Yangon, Feb. 15: Sightings of armored personnel carriers in Myanmar's biggest city and an internet shutdown raised political tensions late Sunday, after vast numbers of people around the country flouted orders against demonstrations to protest the military's seizure of power.

Public concern has already been heightened for the past few nights by what many charge is the military's manipulation of criminals released from prison to carry out nighttime violence and stir up panic. Ambassadors from the United States and Canada and 12 European nations called on Myanmar's security forces to refrain from violence against those protesting the overthrow of their legitimate government. They condemned the arrests of political leaders and activists as well as the military's interference with communications.

"We support the people of Myanmar in their quest for democracy, freedom, peace, and prosperity, they said in a joint statement issued late Sunday night. The world is watching.

The military seized power on Feb. 1, detaining the country's elected leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, and members of her government and preventing recently elected lawmakers from opening a new session of Parliament.

The junta, led by Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, said it was forced to step in because the government failed to properly investigate allegations of fraud in last year's election, which Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party won in a landslide. The state election commission



Protesters raise their hands with clenched fists during an anti-coup rally in front of the Myanmar Economic Bank in Mandalay, Myanmar on Monday. — AP

found no evidence to support the allegations.

There was no official word about why armored personnel carriers traversed the streets of Yangon in broad daylight Sunday, making their way through busy traffic. As night fell, there were videos and other reports on social media of the movement of trucks packed with soldiers, and in the central city of Mandalay as well.

An order that appears to be from the Ministry of Transport and Communications told mobile phone service providers to shut down internet connections from 1 a.m. to 9 a.m. Monday. — AP

Suu Kyi detention extended

Yangon, Feb. 15: Myanmar's military leaders have extended their detention of deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi, whose remand was set to expire Monday and whose freedom is a key demand of the crowds of people continuing to protest this month's military coup.

Suu Kyi will now be remanded until February 17, when she will likely appear in court by video-conference, according to Khin Maung Zaw, a lawyer asked by Suu Kyi's party to represent her.

The Nobel laureate remains under house arrest on a minor charge of possessing unregistered imported walkie-talkies.

Suu Kyi's extended detention is likely to further inflame tensions between the military, which seized power during a Feb. 1 coup, and the protesters who have taken to the streets of cities across the Southeast Asian nation seeking the return of the government they elected.

Protesters continued to gather across Myanmar on Monday following a

night in which authorities cut the country's internet access and increased the security presence in major cities seeking to curtail demonstrations.

Thousands of engineers marched on the streets of Mandalay, the country's second-largest city, chanting and holding signs that read: Free our leader, Who stands with justice? and Stop arresting people illegally at midnight.

In Yangon, the country's most populous city, fewer protesters gathered on Monday. — AP

POWER CUT AS SNOW, ICE BLANKET TEXAS

Dallas, Feb. 15: A winter storm dropping snow and ice also sent temperatures plunging across the southern Plains, prompting a power emergency in Texas a day after conditions cancelled flights and impacted traffic across large swaths of the US.

Rotating power outages were initiated by the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, or ERCOT, early Monday morning, meaning thousands went without electricity for short periods as temperatures fell into the teens near Dallas and 20s (about minus 5 degrees Celsius) around Houston.

"We urge Texans to put safety first," the council tweeted as it urged residents to reduce electricity use.

ERCOT manages the flow of electric power in the state. "Traffic lights and other infrastructure may be temporarily without power," ERCOT said. Officials in Houston had warned people to prepare for outages and hazardous roads — conditions similar to what residents might see in the wake of a Category 5 hurricane.

Nearly 120 crashes, including a 10-car pileup on I-45, were reported Sunday, Houston Fire Chief Samuel Peña tweeted.

— AP

Virus: Tougher travel rules come into force in Britain

London, Feb. 15: The UK's tougher new travel rules to contain the spread of Covid-19 variants came into effect from Monday, involving compulsory hotel quarantines for anyone returning to England from one of the 33 high-risk "red list" countries. Those arriving will have to pre-book and pay £1,750 to spend 10 days quarantining in government-sanctioned hotels, covering the cost of the hotel, transport and two separate tests post-arrival.

Extremely serious breaches of the new norms could result in a 10-year jail term and fines of up to £10,000. Those who have not visited a "red list" country, such as India, must still quarantine for 10 days at home and complete two mandatory Covid-19 tests on the second and eighth day after arriving. "With the emergence of new variants, we must go further. The rules coming into force today will bolster the quarantine system and provide another layer of security against new variants at the border," said UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock.

"These new measures are important to protect our vaccination programme, which has now seen 15 million people vaccinated, we all work towards restoring normal life," he said. Starting Monday, any UK or Irish resident

Briton breaks S'pore quarantine order

Singapore, Feb. 15: A British citizen pleaded guilty on Monday to violating a coronavirus quarantine order in Singapore by visiting his fiancée several times in another hotel room. They are to appear in court for sentencing on February 26, and face a possible sentence of up to six years in jail and a fine of 10,000 Singapore dollars (\$7,500) on each charge. Skea Nigel left his room at The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore hotel on three occasions in September, according to the charge sheets. He was not wearing a mask.

Nigel climbed an emergency stairwell and entered a room that his Singaporean fiancée had booked. The two spent nine hours together. Most travellers have to stay in an assigned hotel room or at home for 14 days after arriving in Singapore under Coronavirus quarantine rules. They receive meals and regularly record their temperatures.

— AP

who has been in a high-risk destination on the UK's red list — comprising 33 hotspots with Covid-19 variants in circulation — will have to enter England through a designated port and have pre-booked a quarantine package to stay at one of the government's "Managed Quarantine Facilities".

Non-residents are currently not part of the essential-only travel rules of

the Coronavirus lockdown. The government said it has tough measures already in place requiring all travellers into the UK, from any location, to provide proof of a negative Covid-19 test taken no more than three days before departure and non-UK residents from the 33 red list countries are already banned from entering Britain. — PTI



Shah Mahmood Qureshi

CLASH IN S. ASIA COULD THREATEN STABILITY: SMQ

Islamabad/Karachi, Feb. 15: Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said on Monday that any military conflict in South Asia could endanger stability in a region that is critical for global trade flows and security.

Addressing the 9th International Maritime Conference (IMC 21) in Karachi, Qureshi also said that the Indian Ocean offers promising potential for mutual cooperation and collaboration.

"The international community needs to be cognizant of the fact that any military conflict in South Asia could endanger stability in a region that is critical for global trade flows and security," he said.

The foreign minister also alleged that India has nuclearised the Indian Ocean and was continuing to induct advanced weapons systems and naval delivery platforms. He said Pakistan is an important stakeholder in the Indian Ocean security framework. — PTI

Israeli hit kills 9 fighters in Syria

Beirut, Feb. 15: Israel fired several missiles early on Monday targeting areas near the Syrian capital, Damascus, Syria's state news agency reported. An opposition war-monitoring group said the strikes killed nine Iran-backed fighters.

The SANA news agency claimed that Syrian air defences shot down most of the missiles, which it said were fired from Syria's Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor with a network of activists on the ground, said the strikes hit positions of the Syrian army's Fourth Division in the mountains near the highway that

links Damascus with the Lebanese capital of Beirut. It said another strike hit Syrian army positions in Kisweh, just south of Damascus.

The Observatory said that of the nine Iran-backed fighters killed, seven were near the Damascus-Beirut highway and two in Kisweh. Weapons depots were also struck in both areas, it added.

Syria's foreign ministry filed a complaint with the UN Security Council and called on the international community to condemn Israel and prevent it from carrying out such attacks in the future. Israel has launched hundreds of strikes against Iran-linked military targets in Syria over the years. — AP

Meghan again in the family way

London, Feb. 15: Britain's Prince Harry and his wife Meghan Markle are expecting their second child, their spokesman said in a Valentine's Day announcement on Sunday. The couple released a black and white image of them under a tree, all smiles, with Markle, 39, showing signs of pregnancy.

"We can confirm that Archie is going to be a big brother," the spokesman said, referring to the couple's son. "The Duke and Duchess of Sussex are overjoyed to be expecting their second child." Meghan and Harry, 36, who is Queen Elizabeth II's grandson, quit frontline royal duties in March last year and now live in California. The news follows Markle's disclosure in *The New York Times* in November that she had suffered a miscarriage in July.

A Buckingham Palace spokesman said: "Her Majesty, Duke of Edinburgh, Prince of Wales and the entire family are delighted and wish them well." Misan Harriman, a friend of the couple who took the photograph they released, wrote on Twitter: "Meg, I was there at your wedding to witness this love story begin, and

my friend, I am honoured to capture it grow." The couple's departure last year — dubbed "Megxit" by the British press — was a far cry from 2018, when they married in a ceremony at Windsor Castle watched around the world. The mood soured as reports circulated about a rift between Harry and his brother Prince William, second in line to the throne.

Since leaving, they have launched several legal cases against news outlets alleging invasion of privacy — including one that ended on Thursday with a victory against Associated Newspapers in the UK. The cases have attracted criticism from some, as the couple are also launching themselves into the public eye with high-profile commercial projects. Last year they launched a non-profit organisation, Archewell, after giving up a "Sussex Royal" brand as part of the terms of their departure from frontline royal duties. They have started other ventures, including signing a deal with Spotify to produce podcasts that tell "uplifting and entertaining stories". — PTI

Oz: Google near media pay deals

Canberra, Feb. 15: Google and Facebook were close to striking "significant commercial deals" to pay Australian media for news ahead of Australia creating world-first laws that would force the digital giants to finance journalism, a minister said Monday. Parliament is scheduled to consider the draft laws on Tuesday after a Senate committee last week recommended no changes to the proposed regulations that Google and Facebook have condemned as unwelcome.

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg, one of ministers responsible for the legislation, said he had discussions at the weekend with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Sundar Pichai, chief executive of Alphabet Inc. and its subsidiary Google. Frydenberg had also spoken with Australian news media executives. "We've made real progress, I think, in

the last 48 to 72 hours and I think we're going to see some significant commercial deals which could be of real benefit to the domestic media landscape and see journalists rewarded financially for generating original content, as it should be, and this is a world-leading reform," Frydenberg told Nine Network television.

"No other country has stepped in like we have. It's been a difficult process. It's still ongoing, so let's not get ahead of ourselves. But the discussions to date have been very promising indeed," Frydenberg added. Frydenberg later told Australian Broadcasting Corp. deals were "very close." Google and Facebook did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Google has ramped up its campaign against the proposed law, telling the Senate committee that scrutinised the draft. — AP

4-LEGGED | INHABITANT

Ex-PM David Cameron recruited the cat to deal with rats seen near his official residence

UK's chief mouser celebrates 10 years on the prowl

London, Feb. 15: Larry the cat, a four-legged inhabitant of London's 10 Downing St., is marking a decade as Britain's mouse-catcher in chief on Monday. The tabby cat was recruited by then-Prime Minister David Cameron to deal with a pack of rats seen scuttling close to the British leader's official residence, and entered Downing Street on Feb. 15, 2011. The former stray, adopted from London's Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, was given the title Chief Mouser to the Cabinet Office, an unofficial pest control post.

— AP

He was the first cat to hold the rat-catching portfolio since the retirement of Humphrey in 1997, and has loyally served three prime ministers. But it seems like yesterday that Larry was just another cat — as opposed to a media superstar — said Lindsey Quinlan, the head of cattery of Battersea.

"Throughout his time at Number 10, Larry has proven himself to not only be a brilliant ambassador for Battersea but also demon-

strated to millions of people around the world how incredible rescue cats are," she said. "His rags to riches tale is yet more proof of why all animals deserve a second chance — one minute they may be an overlooked stray on the streets, the next they could become one of the nation's beloved political figures, with fans around the world."

Larry, who has met a number of world leaders, has been largely unfriendly to men but took a liking to former US President Barack Obama. When former President Donald Trump visited in 2019, Larry took a nap under his car. His grip on the public im-

agination is clear — and political leaders know better than to ignore that popularity. The tomcat was a sentimental topic of conversation in Cameron's final appearance in Parliament as prime minister when he said he wanted to quash a rumour that — perish the thought — he didn't like Larry. And just to prove it, he whipped out evidence: A picture of Larry lying on his lap. "He belongs to the house and the staff love him very much — as do I," he said at the time, explaining why

he wasn't taking Larry with him after leaving office. After the December 2019 election, rumours swirled that Larry might be headed for retirement with the news that the new prime minister, Boris Johnson, was a dog man. However, despite the prime minister moving Jack Russell cross Dilyn into Downing Street, Larry remained in office. Reports of his rodent-killing abilities vary. Larry became known for his occasional scraps with neighbouring cats — espe-

cially Palmerston, chief mouser to the Foreign Office across the street — and fondness for sleep. Palmerston has retired to the country, so things have been a bit quieter of late.

These days Larry, now 14, is often seen by photographers patrolling his turf. Visitors to the building can sometimes find him napping on a ledge above a radiator or sleeping on a floor, where dignitaries occasionally have to step over him. At the heart of government, he specialises in power naps. — AP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	52,154.13	1.18
Nifty 50	15,314.70	1.00
S&P 500*	3,934.83	0.47
Dollar (₹)	72.68	0.09
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.02	-0.69
Euro (₹)	88.19	-0.12
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,826▼19	0.04
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	63.13	1.12
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.022	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.210	0.00

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Exports rise 6% in Jan; trade deficit narrows

Growing for the second consecutive month, the country's exports rose 6.16 per cent year-on-year to \$27.45 billion in January following healthy growth in pharma and engineering sectors. Commerce ministry data showed trade deficit narrowed to \$14.54 billion from \$15.3 billion a year ago. The deficit was \$15.44 billion in December. Imports in January 2021 rose 2 per cent to \$42 billion.

WPI inflation rises to 2.03%, food prices ease



The wholesale price-based inflation rose sharply to 2.03 per cent in January on costlier non-food manufactured items and experts are projecting further uptick in the rate of price rise in the next few months. The WPI inflation was 1.22 per cent in December 2020 and 3.52 per cent in January last year. Food inflation in January stood at (-) 2.8 per cent, against (-) 1.11 per cent in the previous month.

RBI sets up panel on urban coop banks

The Reserve Bank set up a committee to draw a vision document for strengthening urban cooperative banks and exploring the potential of consolidation in the sector. The committee, to be headed by former RBI deputy governor N. S. Vishwanathan, will suggest effective measures for faster rehabilitation and resolution of UCBs and also assess their potential for consolidation in the sector.

IT industry to grow by 2.3% in FY21: Nasscom

The Indian IT industry revenues are set to grow by 2.3 per cent to \$194 billion in FY21 and the exports will go up by 1.9 per cent to \$150 billion, industry lobby Nasscom said. The industry remained a net hirer in the fiscal year, with 1.38 lakh new jobs added to take overall employment to 44.7 lakh. "We have emerged more resilient and more relevant from the crisis," the body's president Debjani Ghosh said.

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JLR to spend \$3.5 bn annually on electrification Jaguar cars to become all-electric from 2025

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, FEB. 15

Tata Motors-owned British luxury car maker Jaguar Land Rover, or JLR, plans to make its coveted Jaguar brand to be an 'all-electric luxury brand' to rival Tesla from 2025. The move will see Jaguar completely axe the petrol engines that made its name within the next four years.

JLR will invest about 2.5 billion pounds (\$3.5 billion) annually into electrification and related connected technologies, the company said on Monday.

It plans to introduce six fully electric Land Rover variants in the next five years and aims to electrify all its models by 2030, it said.

JLR's new chief executive officer Thierry Bollore made the announcement on Monday, with the new 'Reimagine' strategy also committing to retaining its production facilities in the UK. Bollore said Land Rover will phase out diesel engines from 2026 and invest more heavily in hydrogen fuel cell technology.

JLR said it will have prototypes using hydrogen fuel cells on Britain's roads within the next year, as part of a long-range investment plan.

JLR has introduced plug-in hybrid variants of models, including the Range Rover Sport and new Defender, but its only fully electric vehicle is the I-Pace SUV, which it started selling in 2018.



RENAULT KIGER STARTS AT ₹5.45 L

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, FEB. 15

French car giant Renault has introduced its all-new Kiger, compact SUV at Rs 5.45 lakh at pan-India showroom, disrupting the growing B-SUV segment in Asia's third biggest car market.

Renault's first compact SUV is sold in four trim levels and four engine-gearbox combinations in the Rs 5.45 lakh to Rs 9.55 lakh range.

Renault's aggressive pricing means that the new Kiger undercuts all its compact SUV rivals. Apart from its Nissan sibling, the Magnite, the Renault Kiger rivals

other sub-4m SUVs like the Hyundai Venue, Kia Sonet, Mahindra XUV300, Tata Nexon, Ford EcoSport, Maruti Suzuki Vitara Brezza and Toyota Urban Cruiser.

"With this outstanding pricing, Renault Kiger is surely set to radically alter the dynamics in the B-SUV segment," Venkatram Mamillapalle, country CEO & MD at Renault India, said.

Renault Kiger is designed with collaboration of France and India teams. It is developed and produced in India, for Indian customers first, before it is taken globally.

Car companies the world over are following zero-emission strategies to meet tough carbon dioxide emission targets in Europe and China.

Jaguar Land Rover is one of the hardest hit by the downturn in demand for

diesel vehicles in recent years.

Its range of models across both brands relied heavily on diesel engines, which have seen sales tumble in the years since the German Volkswagen emissions cheating scandal rattled the industry in 2015.

TESLA EYES PLANT NEAR BENGALURU

SARITHA RAI FEB. 15

Tesla Inc is closing in on an agreement to make electric vehicles in India, opening up a new growth front after founder Elon Musk set up plants in the US and China. Tesla has picked Karnataka for its first plant, the state's chief minister said over the weekend. The automaker has been negotiating with local officials for six months and is considering car assembly in the suburbs of Bengaluru, people familiar with the matter said. Tesla is conducting due diligence for office real estate in the region and plans to set up an R&D facility. Tesla has focused on Bengaluru because it's shaping up to be a hub for electric vehicles and aerospace manufacturing talent, they said. —Bloomberg

ted the industry in 2015. Ballore was drafted into JLR last July.

JLR said it was a "on a path towards" a double-digit operating profit and positive cash flow, and aims to achieve positive cash without debt by 2025.

Financials push Sensex above 52K

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, FEB. 15

Resumption of business activity close to the pre-pandemic level and positive global cues, macro data and earnings season triggered more than one per cent gains for market benchmarks Sensex and Nifty-50.

The Sensex crossed 52000 for the first time, closing with 610 points, or 1.18 per cent, higher at 52154.13. The Nifty-50 closed at 15314.70, up 151.40 points, or 1 per cent.

"The Nomura India Business Resumption Index picked up to 98.1 (provisional) for the week ending



14 February from 95.9 the preceding week, which suggests business activity is now only around 2 points below pre-pandemic levels, said the Japanese brokerage. Inflation and IIP data released last week were also encouraging for the market.

"After a brief pause last week, the market resumed upward momentum on the back of global optimism and encouraging macro

numbers. Monday's move was mainly propelled by the financial space as the top seven contributors in Nifty were from this space only," an analyst said.

Even in the Sensex pack top nine gainers were from the financial space.

The Nifty Bank Index gained 3.32 per cent. The top gainers included Axis Bank (6.21 per cent) and ICICI Bank (4.17 per cent).

Realty, Telecom and Healthcare stocks also made sound gains.

Foreign portfolio investors were net buyers of equities by Rs 1,234.15 crore while the domestic institutions were net sellers by Rs 1,048.55 crore.

GULF EXODUS: S&P WARNS OF RISKS AHEAD

FARAH ELBAHRAWY FEB. 15

S&P Global Ratings said Gulf Arab economies suffered population losses as a result of an "exodus" of expatriate workers, warning the outflow could complicate their diversification in the long run.

The population across the Gulf Cooperation Council may have declined

by 4 per cent last year, according to a report on Monday.

The share of foreigners relative to citizens is set to drop through 2023 "because of subdued non-oil sector growth and workforce nationalisation policies," S&P credit analysts led by Zahabia Gupta said.

"GCC countries' productivity, income levels, and economic diversification

may stagnate in the long term without significant investment in the human capital of the national population and improvements in labour market flexibility," they said. The six nations comprising the GCC—Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman—are fully dependent on foreign workers in industries. —Bloomberg

Babus out? Govt mulls new panel to speed privatisation

SIDDHARTHA SINGH FEB. 15

India is considering setting up a body comprising independent experts that will take over the role of privatising state-run companies once the government decides to divest, according to people with knowledge of the matter.

The panel will replace bureaucrats, who currently manage privatisation, as well as minority stake sales, the people said asking not to be identified because the discussions

are private. The proposal is at an early stage and a final decision hasn't been taken, they said.

An external panel will help accelerate the asset sale process and bypass red tape, according to the people. India still hasn't manage to find a buyer for debt-ridden Air India Ltd even after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cabinet approved the sale in 2017.

A finance ministry spokesman declined to comment.

The government earlier this month said it will

keep a "bare minimum presence" by running companies in atomic energy, space & defence; transport & telecommunications; power, oil & coal; banking & financial services, according to the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management.

India plans to raise 1.75 lakh crore (\$24 billion) selling stakes in state-run firms next fiscal, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said while presenting the budget.

—Bloomberg

Smartphone sales clock record growth in Q4

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 15

The fourth quarter of year 2020 saw record sales of smartphones in India at 45 million units.

However, for the year as a whole, the smartphone market de-grew 1.7 per cent—the first decline after several years of run-away growth. But the online channel continued to grow even during the pandemic-hit year.

According to global market intelligence firm IDC, the October-December quarter posted record fourth-quarter smartphone shipments of 45 million devices, growing 21 per cent over the same quarter in 2019.

A total of 150 million smartphone units were sold in 2020, which was 1.7 per cent less than what was sold in 2019. Stay-at-home mandates, remote

work, remote education, travel restrictions and manufacturing shutdowns led to a sluggish H120, which saw a 26 per cent decline over the same period in 2019.

However, H2'20 recovered with 19 per cent growth as markets reopened gradually. Lockdowns and restrictions rendered an urgent need for devices supporting activities such as entertainment, work from home, and remote learning, resulting in more devices per household, and leading to a resurgence in demand for consumer devices including smartphones, consumer notebooks, and tablets in 2020.

The online channel outpaced the overall market, growing by 12 per cent annually, with a 48 per cent market share in 2020. The segment clocked a record 51 per cent share in

4Q20.

Further, the market saw 5G smartphone shipments crossing 3 million in 2020, with Chinese OEMs rolling out aggressively-priced devices. But adoption was limited due to higher prices and the lack of a 5G network.

Xiaomi continued to lead the smartphone market in volume terms with a market share of 27 per cent. But the brand registered a 6 per cent drop in sales.

Samsung held 20 per cent market, but sales declined by 4 per cent. Online channel registered strong 65 per cent growth, while the offline channel shipments declined by 28 per cent.

Vivo in the third slot with 18 per cent market share, recorded growth of 12 per cent. Realme too grew by 19 per cent and held a market share of 13 per cent.

HUL expects Covid-hit products to rebound



New Delhi, Feb. 15: FMCG major Hindustan Unilever expects its "Covid impacted" product categories, such as ice-cream and vending solutions, to rebound strongly in 2021 with increase in mobility.

In an investor presentation, the company said categories such as skin care and colour cosmetics, which slowed down last year, will also rebound.

"These categories remain structurally attractive for us," HUL said in its presentation.

On the other hand, the company said "Covid obsessive" categories such as hand sanitisers and hand wash, which saw a sharp surge during the pandemic, are expected to normalise this year. The hand sanitiser category surged 16 times in 2020 compared to 2019, while the hand wash category grew 1.5 times.

Categories such as hand, body and face care, classified as "Covid resistant" items are expected "to normalise with increase in mobility in 2021."

From a peak decline of 73 per cent in the second quarter of the calendar year 2020 during the lockdown, these have recovered with the gradual unlocking that the country went through, to a decline of 51 per cent in the third quarter and 30 per cent in the fourth quarter.

Similarly, the company said "Covid impacted" categories, which include ice cream, food solutions business and vending business are also expected "to rebound strongly in 2021 with increase in mobility". —PTI

MILK-FREE | CHOCOLATE

Demand for plant-based food growing

Going Vegan: Nestle plans rice-based KitKat

CORINNE GRETLER FEB. 15

Nestle SA is adding its first vegan milk chocolate to its products as the world's biggest food company expands beyond meat alternatives.

The Swiss food giant will start offering plant-based KitKat bars this year, called KitKat V, according to Alexander von Maillot, head of Nestle's confectionery business. The product will be for sale online and at selected stores in a handful of markets including the UK as a test run before a possible wider rollout.

The bar, which uses a rice-based formula as a milk substitute, took about two years to devel-



op. The main challenge in making alternatives to milk chocolate is ensuring it blends well with cocoa and sugar for a creamy texture. Other substitutes, such as soy or almond formulas, can create off-notes, von Maillot said.

While there are quite a few small labels that make vegan milk chocolate, most

of the popular brands haven't yet joined in on the trend. Lindt & Spruengli AG, better known for its Easter bunnies wrapped in golden foil, has started selling oat milk-based chocolate bars under its Hello label. Mars Inc has introduced a vegan version of its Galaxy bars in the UK. Mondelez International Inc's Cadbury has also

announced plans to make plant-based milk chocolate.

"Demand for plant-based food is growing everywhere," von Maillot said in a phone interview. "KitKat was a logical choice, as it's by far the biggest brand and a global brand."

Confectionery is one of Nestle's last categories to join the plant-based trend. Nestle Purina last year introduced a blended pet food line, adding insects and plant protein from fava beans and millet to the meat protein.

Nestle introduced sausage substitutes last year and also makes plant-based mince and non-dairy ice cream and coffee products.

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Rahul climbs to 2nd spot in T20

Dubai: India's K.L. Rahul moved up a place to second, while his captain Virat Kohli retained the seventh spot in the latest ICC men's T20I rankings for batsmen released on Monday. With 816 rating points, Rahul is behind leader Dawid Malan (915) of England, while Kohli has 697 points in his kitty. Australia white-ball skipper Aaron Finch (808) also improved a rung to be placed third while Pakistan captain Babar Azam (801) slipped to fourth place. Rahul and Kohli are the only two Indians to feature in the top-10 among batsmen. No Indian also featured in the top-10 among bowlers and all-rounders in the latest T20I rankings. Among bowlers, South Africa spinner Tabraiz Shamsi grabbed a career-best second position while Pakistan wicketkeeper-batsman Mohammad Rizwan has raced to 42nd place after standout performances in a series against Proteas. — *PTI*

Lukaku shines as Inter go atop

Rome: Romelu Lukaku scored twice to reach 300 career goals as Inter Milan moved above AC Milan to the top of Serie A with an impressive 3-1 home win over Lazio on Sunday. Lukaku's brace came in the first half as Inter made the most of their city rivals' surprising 2-0 loss at Spezia on Saturday. Inter, bidding for a first Scudetto since winning the treble under Jose Mourinho in 2010, are now one point clear of AC Milan. The stage is set for a mouthwatering Milan derby at the San Siro next Sunday. "He (Lukaku) came back firing on all cylinders tonight and we need this Romelu. We need this determination and passion from everyone in the team," Inter coach Antonio Conte said. Earlier, Roma beat Udinese 3-0 to climb back to third. — *AFP*

Pahadi Billas lift Kho Kho C'ship

New Delhi: Maharashtra's Pratik Walikar continued his spectacular show at the Super League Kho Kho tournament as Pahadi Billas lifted the trophy with a convincing six-point win over Panthers in the final here on Monday. In the summit clash played at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium, skipper Walikar dished out a solid all-round performance and guided his side to a 31-25 win. The 25-year-old all-rounder, who also played as a Wazir for the team and has been consistent throughout the tournament, again proved his mettle as he defended for one minute and 50 seconds and then chased down 11 points for his team. The winners and runners-up team in the men's event received ₹2 lakh and ₹1.50 lakh prize money respectively. While the third and fourth ranked teams bagged ₹50 thousand each. The women's teams received ₹30 thousand each.

Jokic on target as Nuggets dominate

Washington: Nikola Jokic scored a triple double of 23 points, 16 rebounds and 10 assists to lead the Denver Nuggets to a one-sided 122-105 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers, who lost Anthony Davis when he aggravated an Achilles injury on Sunday. Canada's Jamal Murray scored 25 points, Zeke Nnaji had 16 and Facundo Campazzo tallied 15 for the Nuggets in the battle between the two teams that met in the Western Conference finals last season. Jokic recorded his sixth triple double of the season. — *AFP*

Live on TV

TENNIS
Australian Open: Quarterfinals from 5.30 am, from 1.30 pm on on Sony Six, Sony Ten 2, HD
CRICKET
India vs England: Second Test, Day Four, from 9.20 am on Star Sports 1
FOOTBALL
Indian Super League: Hyderabad FC vs Kerala Blasters from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

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A-SHHHHH!

Ashwin silences pitch critics with batting masterclass

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR
CHENNAI, FEB. 15

It was midway through the morning session. There was a sudden flurry of activity in the India dressing room. Having been reduced to 106 for six, India's second essay was expected to fold soon. When R. Ashwin, at No. 8, walked in to join his skipper Virat Kohli in the middle, the Chepauk crowd greeted their local hero with a rapturous welcome. Over the next few hours, the cheers only grew louder. The roar reached a crescendo when Ashwin celebrated his fifth Test century, punching the air and driving his arms aloft towards the spectators.

It was a carnival at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium, post-tea, with chants of 'Ashwin...Ash-win' reverberating through the stands. His scintillating knock — 106 off 148 balls — not only brought India on the verge of restoring parity in the four-match series against England, but also silenced those who had criticised the pitch.

Set a target of 482, England were in a shambles at 53 for three in 19 overs at stumps. India have two more days to bag the remaining wickets and achieve what will be a roaring comeback.

A day after taking a five-for to bowl England out cheaply, Ashwin delivered a masterclass on batting on turning tracks. It was the third time in his career that Ashwin bagged a five-wicket haul and scored a ton in the same match. Only the legendary England all-rounder Ian Botham has done it more (five times). The intention was clear from the minute Ashwin took the guard. He swept off-spinner Moeen Ali for a boundary towards midwicket in the second ball he faced. After a couple deliveries, he played reverse-sweep for another boundary. He then pulled, cut and even swatted forehand to punish the bowlers. England were also guilty of giving three reprieves to Ashwin, who was dropped on 28, 56 and 70. The partnership between Ashwin and Kohli — 96 runs off 177



R. Ashwin in action against England on the third day of their second Test in Chennai on Monday. — *BCCI*

balls — pushed India's lead past 400. It was one of those rare days when Kohli's well-compiled half-century — 62 off 149 — became a mere footnote. Kohli fell to Ali for the second time this match. The skipper was not too pleased with Nitin Menon's lbw call even after the third-umpire upheld the decision. The way Ashwin nursed the tail-enders Ishant Sharma and Mohammed Siraj en route to his century was entertaining. A straight punch past mid-on off Stuart Broad and a slog-sweep off Ali had the crowd on its feet.

Earlier in the morning, it took Kohli 20 balls to get off the mark after he walked in following Cheteshwar Pujara's bizarre dismissal in the opening over of the day. Rohit Sharma's departure, after being stumped while stretching to defend a Jack Leach delivery, reduced India to 55 for three. Rishabh Pant who tried to take on Leach perished soon. Ajinkya Rahane's back-to-back boundaries off Ali eased some pressure. But he eventually fell to the off-spinner, giving a simple catch to a short-leg fielder.

SCORECARD

India 1st Innings: 329
England 1st Innings: 134
India 2nd Innings (overnight 54/1): Rohit Sharma st Foakes b Leach 26, Shubman Gill lbw b Leach 14, Cheteshwar Pujara run out (Ollie Pope/Foakes) 7, Virat Kohli lbw b Moeen 62, Rishabh Pant st Foakes b Leach 8, Ajinkya Rahane c Ollie Pope b Moeen 10, Axar Patel lbw b Moeen 7, Ravichandran Ashwin b Olly Stone 106, Kuldeep Yadav lbw b Moeen 3, Ishant Sharma c Olly Stone b Jack Leach 7, Mohammed Siraj not out 16. Extras (b-5, lb-15) 20. **Total (all out in 85.5 overs) 286.**
FoW: 1-42, 2-55, 3-55, 4-65, 5-86, 6-106, 7-202, 8-210, 9-237, 10-286.
Bowling: Olly Stone 6.5-1-21-1, Jack Leach 33-6-100-4, Moeen Ali 32-7-98-4, Joe Root 4-0-15-0, Stuart Broad 9-3-25-0, Daniel Lawrence 1-0-7-0.
England 2nd Innings: Rory Burns c Kohli b Ashwin 25, Dom Sibley lbw b Patel 3, Dan Lawrence batting 19, Jack Leach c Rohit Sharma b Patel 0, Joe Root batting 2. Extras (b-4) 4. **Total: (for 3 wickets, in 19 overs) 53.**
FoW: 1-17, 2-49, 3-50.
Bowling: Ishant Sharma 2-1-6-0, Axar Patel 9-3-15-2, Ravichandran Ashwin 8-1-28-1.

When Ashwin was dropped from team for playing sweep

AGE CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 15

R. Ashwin who swept his way to a brilliant century in the second Test against England on Monday revealed that he was once dropped from a team for playing that cross-batted shot. "After the last Test, we were thinking of how to counter Jack Leach (left-arm spinner) and bringing sweep to the game. The last time I was sweeping was probably when I was 19 years old. I got dropped from the side for playing a couple sweep shots, and

maybe never played a sweep in the last 13-14 years," informed Ashwin who became the second Indian after Kapil Dev to score a 1,000-plus and 100-plus wicket against England. Ashwin credited India batting coach Vikram Rathour for his recent improvement. "I've been practicing that shot (sweep) for the last 10 days under the supervision of Rathour. I am really thankful that the plan has been really paid off. Rathour has been very helpful in trying to explore new options. He

is someone who has helped me to go out there and express myself." After Kohli's dismissal, Ashwin had to protect his tailenders Ishant Sharma and Mohammed Siraj to complete his century. He forged a 27-run stand with Ishant, while Siraj and Ashwin put on 49 runs for the final wicket.

When Ashwin reached his triple-figure score, Siraj was more jubilant at the other end. "It was exciting to see how excited he was when I got my hundred and that says a few things about how the dressing room is."

Man Utd falter, Auba wins it for Arsenal

London, Feb. 15: Manchester United's faltering Premier League title challenge suffered another blow in a 1-1 draw at struggling West Brom, while Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang hit a hat-trick in Arsenal's 4-2 win against Leeds on Sunday. United have dropped points in five of their last seven league games to allow Manchester City to pull seven points clear, with a game in hand. A point was enough to nudge Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men back above Leicester into second on goal difference. But that was of little consolation to United against a West Brom side

that had conceded 24 goals in taking just one point from their previous seven home games. At the Emirates Stadium, Aubameyang scored his first ever Premier League hat-trick to get the Gunners back on track after two successive defeats and three games without a win. Aubameyang has endured a difficult season marred by poor form and his mother's illness, which prompted him to take a leave of absence recently. "The hat-trick means a lot. It's been a tough time for me," Aubameyang said. Everton missed the chance to move level with

THE RESULTS				
PREMIER LEAGUE		SPANISH LEAGUE		
Southampton (Ings 25)	1		Getafe	0
Wolves (Neves 53-pen, Neto 66)	2		Real Sociedad (Isak 30)	1
West Brom (Diagne 2)	1		Real Madrid (Benzema 12, Kroos 42)	2
Manchester United (Fernandes 44)	1		Valencia	0
Arsenal (Aubameyang 13, 41-pen, 47, Bellerin 45)	4		Levante Osasuna (Budimir 74)	0
Leeds (Struijk 58, Costa 69)	2		Villarreal (Gerard 65-pen)	1
Everton	0		Real Betis (Fekir 45, Emerson Aparecido 52)	2
Fulham	0			

neighbours Liverpool in fourth as they were well beaten 2-0 by Fulham. Wolves moved 12 points clear of the drop zone

after coming from behind for a 2-1 win that extended Southampton's six-game losing streak in the league.

DEPLETED MADRID WIN AGAIN
Real Madrid are celebrating another win — and lamenting yet another injury. Real continued their recent good form with a 2-0 win over Valencia in the La Liga, but coach Zinedine Zidane saw his already depleted squad lose another player due to injury. Dani Carvajal got hurt before halftime in what had been his return to action after being sidelined since the beginning of the year. "There are too many injuries. I'm worried because when you lose a player, it upsets you," Zidane said. — *Agencies*

Nadal closes in on Slams record

Melbourne, Feb. 15: Rafael Nadal outclassed Fabio Fognini to close in on the all-time Grand Slam titles record on Monday as Ashleigh Barty ramped up hopes of becoming the Australian Open's first home winner in 43 years. Nadal said his lower-back stiffness was continuing to improve after his 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 against the flamboyant Italian, which set up a quarter-final against Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas.

Fognini had registered a five-set win over Nadal at the 2015 US Open, but the Spaniard cantered to victory after recovering from 2-4 down in the second set.

Nadal is now into his 43rd Grand Slam quarter-final, staying on course for a title match with eight-time winner Novak Djokovic who battled through an abdominal injury to reach the last eight on Sunday.

Next up for Nadal is world number six Tsitsipas, who went through on a walkover after Italy's Matteo Berrettini pulled out with an abdominal strain.

As the action continued in front of empty stands, top-ranked Barty beat big-hitting American Shelby Rogers in impressive fashion to reach the last eight.

Barty won 6-3, 6-4 to go into the quarter-finals without dropping a set as she bids to become the first Australian champion since Chris O'Neil in 1978.

The former French Open champion next plays Karolina Muchova, who came through two tight sets to beat Belgium's Elise Mertens 7-6 (7/5), 7-5.

RESULTS

Men's singles fourth round: Andrey Rublev (RUS x7) bt Casper Ruud (NOR x24) 6-2, 7-6 (7/5), 0-0 retired; Daniil Medvedev (RUS x4) bt Mackenzie McDonald (USA) 6-4, 6-2, 6-3; Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x5) bt Matteo Berrettini (ITA x9) walkover; Rafael Nadal (ESP x2) bt Fabio Fognini (ITA x16) 6-3, 6-4, 6-2.
Women's singles fourth round: Ashleigh Barty (AUS x1) bt Shelby Rogers (USA) 6-3, 6-4; Karolina Muchova (CZE x25) bt Elise Mertens (BEL x18) 7-6 (7/5), 7-5; Jennifer Brady (USA x22) bt Donna Vekic (CRO x28) 6-1, 7-5; Jessica Pegula (USA) bt Elina Svitolina (UKR x5) 6-4, 3-6, 6-3.

RUSSIANS ARE COMING

Earlier, unseeded American Jessica Pegula reached her maiden Grand Slam quarter-final with victory over Elina Svitolina, her first over a top-10 player.

Pegula, whose billionaire father owns the Buffalo Bills NFL team, overcame fifth seed Svitolina 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 to set up a meeting with fellow American Jennifer Brady, a 6-1, 7-5 winner against Croatia's Donna Vekic.

Elsewhere, fourth seed Daniil Medvedev and seventh seed Andrey Rublev both won to ensure an all-Russian quarter-final.

Medvedev blew away American world number 192 Mackenzie McDonald 6-4, 6-2, 6-3 to extend his winning streak to 18 matches.

Rublev, who is also unbeaten this year, went through when Norway's Casper Ruud retired after losing the first two sets.

— *AFP*



Spain's Rafael Nadal en route to his 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 win over Fabio Fognini of Italy in their Australian Open fourth round match in Melbourne on Monday. — *AFP*

FIR against Yuvraj over remarks against Chahal

Hisar (Haryana), Feb. 15: The Haryana Police has filed an FIR against former India cricketer Yuvraj Singh over his alleged casteist remarks against Yuzvendra Chahal during an Instagram chat last year, officials said on Monday.

It was during one of the Instagram live sessions with Indian vice-captain Rohit Sharma that Singh made the offensive comment about Chahal, while talking about his regular social media posts.

Singh (39) had apologised for the remarks, saying he "unintentionally" hurt public sentiments.

"An FIR has been filed against Yuvraj Singh based on a complaint by lawyer Rajat Kalsan at the Hansi Police Station," Hansi Superintendent of Police, Nikita Gahlaut said on Monday.

She said the case was lodged on Sunday under various provisions of IPC and the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

Kalsan had filed the police complaint last year.

Kalsan had alleged that Singh's comment had hurt the sentiments of the Dalit community, stating that a large number of people had watched the video on social media. — *PTI*

TEAM INDIA MAKE SOLID DEBUT AT ASIAN LE MANS

Dubai, Feb. 15: Racing Team India took their first step to become the first all-Indian squad at the 24 Hours of Le Mans with a solid debut at the opening weekend of the Asian Le Mans Series in Dubai.

The JK Tyres-backed team's ORECA 07 LMP2 car, driven by Narain Karthikeyan, Arjun Maini and Naveen Rao, with technical support from reigning ALMS champions Algarve Pro Racing, finished fifth and fourth in the two four-hour races held at the Dubai Autodrome on Saturday and Sunday respectively.

The team's car showed promising pace throughout the weekend. But their challenge was hampered by racing incidents and a penalty.

The team had to make an extra precautionary pit-stop in Saturday's opening race which dropped the car down the order.

A five-second time penalty for exceeding the speed limit further set it back, forcing the drivers to claw their way back up to fifth, where they had qualified.