

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI TUESDAY 9 FEBRUARY 2021



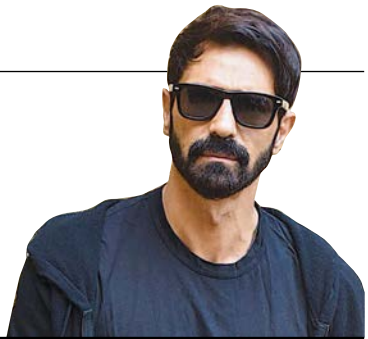
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Trump impeachment trial to open with sense of urgency, speed



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Ashwin takes 6/61 as India stage fight back on Day 4 of first Test



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Arjun Rampal shares fitness mantra & what wellness means to him

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US' Serena Williams after winning against Germany's Laura Siegemund during their women's singles match on day one of the Australian Open in Melbourne on Monday. — AFP

PM Modi speaks to Prez Biden; leaders agree to boost ties

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to US President Joe Biden on Monday and discussed a host of regional issues and their shared priorities, with both leaders looking forward to consolidating strategic partnerships to further peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. This was their first conversation after Mr Biden assumed office last month. In a tweet, Mr Modi said the two leaders agreed to further their cooperation against climate change. — PTI

HC rejects bail plea of Gautam Navlakha

Mumbai: The Bombay high court has dismissed a statutory bail appeal of activist Gautam Navlakha, an accused in the Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case, saying it sees no reason to interfere with a special court's "well reasoned order" which earlier refused him bail. Full report on Page 4

S. African govt halts AstraZeneca vaccine

Johannesburg: South Africa will suspend use of AstraZeneca's Covid-19 shot in its vaccination programme after data showed it gave minimal protection against mild to moderate infection caused by the country's dominant coronavirus variant. — Reuters

COUNTERPOINT



He is ready to give the best price if the government wants to sell this jail!

WEATHER

Max: 25°C
Min: 13°C
RH: 59%
Rain: 10%

Forecast: Partly cloudy

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Pushya Bahula
Trayodasi till 2.06 am
Star: Purvashada till 2.39 pm
Varjyam: 10.31 pm to 12.05 am
Durmuhurtam: 9.05 am to 9.51 am; 11.14 pm to 12.04 am
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.06 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 7.04 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 5.11 AM
MOONSET TODAY 3.38 PM

■ Cites Manmohan, claims Cong U-turn ■ Targets 'Foreign Destructive Ideology'

PM tells kisans: End stir, we'll talk, MSP will stay

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 8

Prime Minister Narendra Modi came out in strong defence of the three controversial agricultural reform laws brought in by his government and urged the protesting farmers to end their agitation. Replying to the debate on the motion of thanks on the President's address in the Rajya Sabha on Monday, Mr Modi said: "End your protests and we will all sit together and talk. We are ready for talks and I am inviting you again for a dialogue from this House." The PM added that agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar was in talks with the farmers' union leaders.

Taking on the Opposition, the PM said the Congress had taken a



Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks in the Rajya Sabha during ongoing Budget Session. — PTI

U-turn on the farm laws, reading out the words of former PM Manmohan Singh. He added: "Those who are not listening to what we are saying will hopefully listen to Manmohan Ji's words. You should, in fact, be proud of the fact that Modi has to do what Manmohan Singh said long ago."

Mr Modi assured farm-

ers that "MSP tha, MSP hai ... aur MSP rahega" (the minimum support price will remain). "No one should spread misinformation," he added. The PM hinted that there was a "conspiracy" behind the protests and said FDI could be termed "Foreign Destructive Ideology", and that the country should be aware of this.

With the protests

End your protests and we will all sit together and talk. We are ready for talks and I am inviting you again for a dialogue from this House.

— Narendra Modi,
Prime Minister

against the farm laws having gone international, with tweets by pop icon Rihanna and Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg supporting the agitating farmers, Mr Modi said: "In the last few years, we have witnessed a new category of protesters 'Andolan jeevi', who one can see in every agitation. We need to protect

■ Turn to Page 4

■ Leader reiterates demand for law on MSP, repeal of 3 laws by govt

Won't allow business over hunger: Tikait

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, FEB. 8

Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait on Monday reiterated farmers' demand for a law on MSP for crops along with the repeal of the three agriculture-marketing laws and said that business over hunger will not be allowed in the country. "Desh mein bhook pe vyaapaar nahi hoga. Bhook kitni lagegi anaaj ki keemat utni hogi. Desh mein bhook se vyaapaar karne walon ko baahar nikaala jaaega (There will not be business over hunger in the country. If hunger goes up, price of crops will be decided accordingly. Those wanting business over hunger



BKU leader Rakesh Tikait with Shankaracharya Narendranand Saraswati, Yogi Rakesh Nath and Bupendra Giri at the Ghazipur border on Monday. — PTI

will be driven out of the country)," Mr Tikait said at Ghazipur border, which has become one of the epicentres of the farmers' protests at Delhi bor-

ders. Mr Tikait's comments came in reaction to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address in Rajya Sabha where he assured

■ Turn to Page 4

Rihanna post: Maha govt to probe 'same tweets' by celebs

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, FEB. 8

The Maharashtra government on Monday said that it will investigate tweets by Indian celebrities in response to criticism of the government's handling of the farmers' protest by foreign personalities. "It has been revealed that there were the same posts by celebrities and at the same time," Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh said. "Hence it will be investigated why it has happened."

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Mamata: TMC to win in Bengal by 'havoc majority'

CM hits back at PM's 'Ram Card' swipe

RAJIB CHOWDHURY
KOLKATA, FEB. 8

A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised that the people of West Bengal "would bid farewell" to the ruling Trinamul Congress with the "Ram Card" in the coming Assembly polls, chief minister Mamata Banerjee, amid large-scale defections by party MLAs to the BJP, exuded confidence in returning to power for a third consecutive term with a "havoc majority" as two former TMC MLAs, now in the saffron party, met her on Monday, triggering speculation of their possible comeback.

The TMC supremo made the statement in the Assembly Monday while replying to the debate on the state budget, a vote on account in an election year, that she had presented last week. "Do not worry. Finish the pending work. Talk about development work of our government. In the Assembly polls, the TMC will come to power again in the state with a havoc majority," Ms Banerjee said, without specifying any numbers.

Showing the victory sign after a photo-op with all MLAs at the end of the three-day budget session,



West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee addresses the "Kheleshree" award function in Kolkata. — PTI

that also marked the 16th Assembly's closure, she later said: "Many are claiming I will not return, but I will be back."

Her positive gesture came after Bongaon North MLA Bishwajit Das and Noapara MLA Sunil Singh, who defected to the BJP from the TMC in June 2019 along with several councillors, held confidential meetings with her in her Assembly chamber on Monday, in a dramatic twist. Mr Singh is a relative of Barrackpore BJP MP Arjun Singh. Mr Das and Mr Singh claimed, however, that they had met the CM in their capacity

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Tribal girl sold 6 times before ending her life

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, FEB. 8

An 18-year-old tribal girl was sold six times in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh over a period of two months before committing suicide in September last year. The arrest of eight accused, including the alleged interstate human trafficking kingpin couple in MP and UP, on Monday unraveled the shocking and tragic story of the girl who hailed from Chhattisgarh.

Santosh Kushwaha, arrested in Uttar Pradesh, spilled the beans saying that after the girl was sold several times over, he bought her to be the bride of his mentally challenged son Babloo, the police said.

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Sasikala returns to Chennai, posters seek AIADMK unity

AGE CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 8

Determined to capture the reins of the AIADMK and to lead the party to victory in the Assembly elections later this year, V.K. Sasikala, former aide of J. Jayalalithaa, returned to Chennai on Monday after four years of imprisonment in Bengaluru with lakhs of supporters lining up to welcome her all along the highway.

Speaking near Vaniyambadi, Ms Sasikala evoked the sentiments of the crowd by quoting an old MGR song to drive home the point that she was a slave to love, a slave to Tamil culture and a slave to her people but would never be cowed down by oppression.

Calling for AIADMK unity, by terming the



Expelled AIADMK leader V.K. Sasikala is welcomed by her supporters as she enters Tamil Nadu via Krishnagiri district on Monday. — PTI

party cadre as the children of one mother, she wanted them to be on a single line as her aim was to ensure their common enemy was stopped from coming to power. "We shall not give in to the divide and rule policy of our enemy. Our great

organisation should not be wrecked for the personal likes and dislikes of some individuals," she declared, hitting out at both the DMK as well as the AIADMK's current leadership.

The crowds gathered

■ Turn to Page 4

32 workers from UP still stuck in Tapovan tunnel, multi-agency rescue ops underway



Rescue operations underway at the Tapovan tunnel in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district on Monday. — PTI

U'khand glacier burst: 26 bodies found, 171 missing

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agencies input
NEW DELHI, FEB. 8

Twenty-six bodies have been recovered so far while 171 people remain missing in Uttarakhand where an avalanche triggered glacier burst, causing massive devastation in the Chamoli and neighbouring regions. The glacier burst on Sunday led to flooding and the heavy flow of water and silt damaged five dams in the downstream areas. Major rescue operations by multiple agencies are underway in the state, particularly in the two tunnels in Tapovan where, according to Uttarakhand DGP Ashok Kumar, 32 persons are trapped in one tunnel and 121 in another are missing.

A multi-agency rescue operation that involves Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), Indian Army,

■ MILITARY AIRCRAFT have conducted six sorties to transport rescued people from the site. Six scientists visited the site for preliminary observation on the disaster.

Indian Air Force, Indian Navy, state police, fire and disaster response force is in full swing to save those stuck in the tunnels.

"A joint team of NDRF, SDRF and Army is conducting a rescue operation. The team has reached the 130-metre mark in Tapovan tunnel, it may take two-three hours to reach the T-point. Efforts are underway to safely rescue those who are stuck in the tunnel," Uttarakhand chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat said on Monday evening. Thirty-two workers belonging to Uttar Pradesh's Lakhimpur Kheri are stuck in

Tapovan. Military aircraft, including MI 17, have conducted six sorties to transport rescued people from the site. Six scientists visited the site for preliminary observation on the disaster.

Mr Rawat quoted scientists to say that the areas where avalanches struck on Sunday was not prone to such activities and the calamity might have been caused by an "abrupt sliding down" of millions of tonnes of snow from a hill, rather than due to a glacier burst.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday asserted that his government is taking all measures to support the people of Uttarakhand. He also assured a delegation of state MPs that the Central government is working to further strengthen infrastructure there to deal with any natural disaster in future. ■ Turn to Page 4

Govt allows BCCI to use drones to film matches

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 8

There's good news for cricket lovers. They will soon get a better experience of watching cricket matches as the ministry of civil aviation (MoCA) and the directorate general of civil aviation (DGCA) have granted conditional exemption to the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) for the deployment of drones for live aerial cinematography of the India Cricket Season in 2021.

MoCA had received requests from BCCI and M/s Quidich for permission to use Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) for live aerial filming.

The conditional exemption is valid till 31st December 2021 from the date of issue of the letter.

As per conditions and limitations, the MoCA has said that the BCCI shall obtain necessary clearances from the local administration, ministry of defence, MHA, Air Defence Clearance from Indian Air Force and Airport Authority of India prior to operation of Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS).

— AP

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As outrage grows, Myanmar imposes curfew

Yangon (Myanmar), Feb. 8: Myanmar's military government has imposed a curfew and bans on gatherings of more than five people in the country's two biggest cities as protests against its coup show no sign of abating. The decrees covering Yangon and Mandalay were issued on a township-by-township basis, and those which have become public so far have the same restrictions. At

■ THE POLICE fired a water cannon at hundreds of protesters in Myanmar's capital who are demanding the military hand power back to elected officials

least seven have been issued, and more are expected for other areas. Rallies and gatherings of more than five people, along with motorised processions, are banned, and

a 8 pm to 4 am curfew is imposed. The measures are effective until further notice.

The decrees say they were issued in response to people carrying out unlawful actions that harm the rule of law.

Earlier, the police fired a water cannon at hundreds of protesters in Myanmar's capital who are demanding the military hand power back to elected officials, as

demonstrations against last week's coup intensified and spread to more parts of the country.

Protesters also rallied at a major downtown intersection in the country's largest city, Yangon, raising a three-finger salute that is a symbol of resistance and carrying placards saying, "Reject the military coup" and "Justice for Myanmar".

— AP

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SHORT TAKES

125 Covid cases, +vity rate 0.23%

New Delhi: Delhi recorded 125 fresh Covid cases on Monday, while the death toll rose to 10,882 with three more fatalities, even as the positivity rate stood at 0.23 per cent. The 125 new cases came out of the 55,390 tests conducted the previous day. The positivity rate stood at 0.23 per cent, according to a bulletin issued by the Delhi health department. The infection tally in the city rose to 6,36,160 and the death toll mounted to 10,882 with three new fatalities, authorities said. The active cases tally on Monday dropped to 1,096 from 1,112 the previous day, according to the bulletin. The total number of tests conducted the previous day, included 42,524 RT-PCR tests and 12,866 rapid antigen tests, the bulletin said. The city had recorded 96 coronavirus cases on January 27, the lowest in over nine months, and the first time the daily incidence count had stood below the 100-mark in that month. — PTI

Man held in Noida with 62 kg cannabis

Noida: The Noida Police has seized around 62 kg of cannabis and arrested a man suspected to be part of a drug supply chain in Delhi-NCR, officials said on Monday. Acting on a tip-off, police intercepted in Sector 73 a car in which the man and his three associates were transporting the contraband. "Sirajul Mamoon has been arrested while others managed to escape. Sirajul is a native of Cooch Behar district in West Bengal and was staying in Indrapuram area in Ghaziabad," additional deputy commissioner of Police (Noida) Ranvijay Singh said. "The police team seized three bags from the accused which had 29 packets containing the contraband, totalling around 62 kg and estimated worth ₹7.50 lakh," he said. The accomplices of Sirajul have been identified and a search operation has been launched to arrest them. An FIR has been lodged at the Sector 49 police station, police said. — PTI

2 shot dead over land-related dispute

Noida: Two men died allegedly of gunshot wounds following a fight between two groups of people over a land-related dispute in Uttar Pradesh's Greater Noida on Monday, police said. The incident took place in the morning in Girdharpur village in the Badalpur police station area, Central Noida deputy commissioner of police (DCP) Harish Chander said. "The dispute was regarding a road stretch between the two groups. Both sides were issued notices by police over their fights earlier also," he said. The deceased — Amit and Salek — belonged to the same side, while another man from the group, Prem, was also shot at and is hospitalised, according to the police. They were attacked by accused Devendra and his supporters, the police added. "Licensed firearms were used in the fight. Strict action will be taken against the accused and proceedings have been initiated to get their arm licenses cancelled," the DCP said. — PTI

NO PROPOSAL FOR JNU NAME CHANGE: MANTRI

New Delhi: There is no proposal for changing the name of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank said on Monday. BJP general secretary C.T. Ravi had proposed last year a name change of the JNU after Swami Vivekananda. "No sir," Nishank said in response to a question in the Lok Sabha whether the government had any proposal for changing the name of the university in Delhi. In November, Ravi had tweeted: "It is Swami Vivekananda who stood for the 'Idea of Bharat'." His philosophy & values signify the "Strength of Bharat". It is only right that Jawaharlal Nehru University be renamed as Swami Vivekananda University. Life of Bharat's patriotic Saint will inspire generations to come." — PTI

January 2021 warmest in 62 years, says IMD

New Delhi, Feb. 8: The minimum temperature recorded in the country in January was the warmest for the month in 62 years, the India meteorological department (IMD) said on Monday.

South India was particularly warm. The month was the warmest in 121 years, with 22.33 degrees Celsius in south India, followed by 22.14 degrees Celsius in 1919 and 21.93 degrees Celsius in 2020 as the second and third warmest months.

Central India was the warmest (14.82 degrees Celsius) in the last 38 years after 1982 (14.92 degrees Celsius), while 1958 with 15.06 degrees Celsius was the warmest in the 1901-2021 period.

However, the maximum temperatures in January were below normal, the IMD said.

Minimum temperature in Delhi drops to 7.6° Celsius

New Delhi, Feb. 8: Delhiites woke up to a cold morning on Monday, with the minimum temperature settling at 7.6 degrees Celsius, the Meteorological department said.

On Sunday, the minimum temperature had settled at 8.3 degrees Celsius. The minimum temperature was one notch below the season's average on Monday, MeT department

officials said. The maximum temperature was recorded at 24.6 degrees Celsius.

The weatherman forecasted a partly cloudy sky for Tuesday with shallow to moderate fog in the morning.

"The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 25 and 9 degrees Celsius respectively," the MeT department said. — PTI

An analysis for 1901-2021 shows that the all-India average minimum temperature in January 2021 was 14.78 degrees Celsius. The January of 1958 recorded a similar monthly mini-

imum temperature.

The January of 1919 recorded 15 degrees Celsius and it remains the warmest January so far.

"So January 2021 has also become the warmest

and other states have gone back to attend their classes and to prepare for their upcoming exams. Now around 60 students come here. They are from class 1 to 7," he said.

"During morning hours from 8 am to 11 am, there is library time where people read books whatever they want according to the availability. Earlier, we used to get almost every newspaper, however, after the restrictions were imposed, we only get few Hindi and Punjabi papers," Barwa said.

"We are teaching students general subjects, including morale science and languages. We also have the history books of different religions and those who are interested can read them. There are eight to nine teachers who teach students in a group of 10 according to their class," he added. — PTI

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Singhu border: School started by farmers' group resumes

New Delhi, Feb. 8: A makeshift "informal" school at Delhi's Singhu border, where farmers have been protesting the new agri laws, has resumed after a two-week break with less children owing to the tense situation following the tractor parade violence on Republic Day.

A group of farmers from Punjab's Anandpur Sahib had in December started the school in a makeshift tent for school going children who had accompanied their parents to the Singhu border protest site and those living in the slums nearby.

Pioneered by writer Bir Singh and advocate Dinesh Chaddha, the temporary school is part of the multiple "sewa" practices being offered at the protest site.

Sukhwinder Singh Barwa, a resident of Roop Nagar district in Punjab



Farmers during the ongoing protest against the new farm laws at Ghazipur Border in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

After pandemic, Delhi sees rise in power demand in new year

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 8

Electricity demand in Delhi is picking up in the new year and recovering from the coronavirus pandemic-hit 2020 with January registering 19 per cent more peaks on 23 days than that in the last year, officials of power distribution companies said on Monday.

Delhi's peak power demand was 3,504 MW (megawatt) on December 1, 2020. Since then, it has increased by over 50 per cent, said a BSES

spokesperson.

"In January 2021, Delhi's peak power demand on 23 days surpassed the peak power demand on corresponding days of January 2020 by up to 19 per cent," he said. However, Delhi's peak power demand in January 2021 at 5,265 MW was a shade less than the peak power demand of 5,343 MW in January 2020, he added. In the winters, Delhi's peak power demand crossed 4,000 MW for the first time on December 16, 2020, and 5,000 MW on January 1, 2021, he said.

21 from Myanmar arrive in Delhi for organ transplant

New Delhi, Feb. 8: Twenty-one people from Myanmar, with chronic cases of kidney, liver and cardiovascular diseases, have arrived in Delhi to undergo organ transplant at a city hospital.

According to a statement by the hospital, these patients have been waiting for organ transplants for over six months now. Easing of travel restrictions has come as a respite for these patients requiring specialised medical attention, it said.

"The Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals along with the Indian Embassy

has arranged for a special chartered flight to get these patients to India for immediate kidney/liver transplants and expedite treatment for patients requiring attention for cardiovascular ailments. They reached India on February 5," the hospital said.

The Indian Mission in Myanmar was of great help in transporting these patients. They had been waiting for a while, some even for over six months, to get treated. These are all critically ill patients who were on regular follow up but couldn't travel

Kejriwal's daughter duped of ₹34K while selling sofa online

FIR is registered, investigation underway: Cops

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 8

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's daughter Harshita has allegedly been duped of ₹34,000 by a man, who approached her as a buyer on an e-commerce platform, where she had put up a sofa on sale, police said on Monday.

An FIR under the relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) has been registered at the Civil Lines police station under north district of the Delhi Police on Sunday after a complaint was received in this regard, they 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. To check if the account details shared by her were correct, he initially transferred a minimal amount of money into



Harshita

her account.

Subsequently, the man sent a QR code to the seller and asked her to scan it so that the amount fixed under the deal could be transferred to her account but instead, ₹20,000 got deducted from her account when she followed the instructions of the buyer, a senior police officer said.

When she enquired about it, the man claimed that he had sent a wrong QR code by mistake and

sent another link to her, asking her to follow the same procedure. But again, an amount of ₹14,000 got deducted from the seller's account when she scanned the QR code, the officer said.

"Based on the complaint received, we have registered an FIR under the relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code. An investigation has been initiated and we are trying to trace the suspect," he added.

50-year-old man held for murder in Uttam Nagar area

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 8

A 50-year-old man was arrested for allegedly killing a person following a quarrel between them after they drank together, police said on Monday.

The accused, Bala Sahni, allegedly stabbed Subhash Chandra (35) to death on January 28 after a quarrel broke out between them when he teased him over a woman, they said.

Sahni, who originally hails from Bihar's Begusarai district, was arrested based on inputs that he would come to Uttam Nagar in Delhi on Thursday, police said.

Chandra, an e-rickshaw driver, had consumed alcohol with Sahni and one other person before the incident that took place at Nawada village of Mohan Garden area in Delhi.

Deputy commissioner of police (Dwarka) Santosh Kumar Meena said with the help of technical surveillance and further investigation, it emerged that Chandra often teased Sahni, also an e-rickshaw driver, over a woman and that led to a quarrel between them.

After stabbing Chandra, Sahni dumped the body near the house and fled the spot, according to police.

Chandra was taken to a Hospital where he was declared brought dead, he said.

"A raiding team was sent

to Begusarai but the team informed us that as per his family, the accused was in Delhi. During investigation, we received information that Bala Sahni would come from Shiv Vihar Ganda Nala, Uttam Nagar and subsequently, he was arrested," he added.

During interrogation, Sahni confessed to the killing and a blood-stained knife used in the crime was recovered along with the mobile phone of the victim, the DCP said.

In another incident, a 50-year-old man was stabbed to death allegedly by an unidentified person at his house in Patel Nagar area, police said on Monday.

The deceased, identified as Shiv Kumar, worked as a manager at the office of his relative and also as a caretaker in the building where the incident took place, they said.

The police said the man had stab injuries near his neck and was found lying unconscious on his bed.

His wife and children were sleeping on the floor in the same room when the incident took place, they said.

SC sets aside Centre's decision not to lower cut-off marks for dental surgery course

New Delhi, Feb. 8: In a setback to the Centre, the Supreme Court, on Monday, set aside its order not to lower the minimum marks for admission to the Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) course for 2020-2021 saying it suffers from the vices of illegality and irrationality.

The top court directed the Centre that the vacant seats in first year BDS for the academic year 2020-2021 be filled from the candidates who participated in the NEET (UG) courses for the current year after lowering the minimum

mark by 10 percentile.

It noted that there are about 7,000 seats available for admission to the first-year BDS course during the current academic year for which the examinations were held on September 13, 2020.

A bench of Justices L.N. Rao and Krishna Murari held that the candidates belonging to the general category who have secured 40 percentile shall be eligible to be considered for admission in the first year BDS course for 2020-2021.

The bench said the students belonging to the

SC/ST/OBC categories shall be declared qualified if they have secured 30 percentile.

In so far as general candidates with bench mark disabilities specified under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, is considered they would be eligible if they have secured 35 percentile, it said, adding that the admissions shall be made strictly in accordance with merit and the admission process shall be completed by February 18, 2021.

It said that any other student who has qualified in

the TOP court directed the Centre that the vacant seats in first year BDS for the academic year 2020-2021 be filled from the candidates who participated in the NEET (UG) courses for the current year after lowering the minimum mark by 10 percentile.

NEET (UG)-2020 examination, even without lowering the minimum marks and is willing to participate in the admission process, shall also be considered for admission to

the BDS course.

The bench rejected the submission of the Centre that there is sufficient number of dentists in the country and, therefore, there is no harm in the seats being unfilled.

It, however, concurred with the government submissions that the actual reason for BDS seats going vacant is due to the exorbitant fee charged by the private dental colleges which is a deterrent for the seats not being filled up.

Only 265 out of 7,000 seats are vacant in government colleges. All the

other unfilled seats are in private dental colleges. The managements of private dental colleges shall consider reducing the fee charged by them to encourage students to join the colleges, the bench said. It noted that the Centre has reduced the minimum marks for admission to first-year BDS course for the year 2019-2020 in consultation with the Dental Council of India but for the current academic year, despite recommendation by the council on December 28, 2020, it deemed fit not to lower the

minimum marks.

The bench noted that the total number of seats available for the academic year 2020-2021 for MBBS is 91,367; BDS 26,949; and AYUSH 52,720, making it a total of 1,71,036 seats. However, the NEET qualified candidates are 7,71,500.

The ratio of seats available vis-à-vis eligible students is 1:4.5 and not 7. The basis for the decision to not reduce minimum marks, that there are sufficient eligible candidates, is without considering these vital facts. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Forest staff booked for remarks on PM

Firozabad, UP: An FIR was lodged against a Forest Department employee for demanding bribe from a saw mill owner and using derogatory language against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday, an official said. A video of the incident had surfaced on social media, in which forest guard Gulsher Ahmed is seen allegedly demanding ₹1.75 lakh from the mill owner in the Sirsaganj police station area. On refusal, he is seen using derogatory language against the PM and the CM, district magistrate Chandra Vijay Singh said. The video was found correct on inquiry after which Ahmed was suspended with immediate effect, the DM said, adding that a case has also been registered against him. Directives have also been issued for a departmental inquiry into the matter, the DM added. — PTI

65 Secretariat staff test +ve in Kerala

Thiruvananthapuram: At least 65 employees from various departments in the state secretariat have tested positive for COVID-19, as Kerala logged 3,742 new cases and 16 deaths on Monday, taking the caseload to 9,72,180 and toll to 3,883. With several employees testing positive, authorities have issued directions to reduce the number of staff inside the administrative complex to half in some sections, including the finance department. The Health department suspects the rise in number of infections in the secretariat due to the recent election to canteen posts that was conducted last week. Around 4,200 employees had attended the election that was organised at the Darbar Hall, Secretariat. A total of 5,959 people got cured of the disease today, taking the total recoveries in the state to 9,02,627. — PTI

New Kolkata top cop calls on gov

Kolkata: Newly-appointed Kolkata police commissioner Soumen Mitra called on West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar. Mr Dhankhar tweeted that Mitra presented him a book *Under the Banyan Tree: The Forgotten Story of Barrackpore Park* which has been jointly authored by him and his wife Monabi Mitra. The police commissioner called on the governor at the Raj Bhavan. Mr Mitra took charge as the commissioner of Kolkata police Monday from Anuj Sharma, who has taken over as the additional director general, CID, West Bengal. With the Assembly elections due in April-May, the state government on Saturday ordered the transfer of 22 IPS officers. — PTI

ED ATTACHES ₹34-CR ASSETS OF FIRM IN MAHA

New Delhi: The ED has attached assets worth more than Rs 34 crore of a company promoted by Maharashtra MLA Hitendra Thakur in a money laundering probe linked to alleged diversion of Rs 200 crore worth bank loan taken from Yes Bank, the agency said on Monday. "The attached assets are in the form of two commercial properties measuring 15,000 sq mtrs area in Kaledonia building (Andheri East), Mumbai and they are valued at ₹34.36 crore," it said in a statement. The provisional order for attachment has been issued under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The money laundering case pertains to investigation against Viva Group, promoted by Maharashtra MLA and Bahujan Vikas Agadhi (BVA) party chief Hitendra Thakur, Housing Development Infrastructure Ltd (HDIL), its promoters Rakesh Kumar Wadhawan and his son Sarang Wadhawan for allegedly "siphoning off" a Rs 200 crore loan sanctioned by Yes Bank to a company called Mack Star Marketing Pvt Ltd. The agency had raided five premises of the group and arrested two executives linked to the company. The ED filed a criminal case against the accused after studying a CBI FIR that was registered against them earlier. — PTI

Tribal girl sold 6 times, ends life

Kinpun couple of human trafficking racket among 8 accused

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, FEB. 8

An 18-year-old tribal, a victim of inter-state human trafficking, was sold six times in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh over a period of two months before committing suicide in September last year. Arrest of eight accused, including the alleged interstate human trafficking kinpin couple, in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh on Monday unravelled the shocking and tragic story of the deceased.

While Pancham Singh Rai and his wife were

arrested in Chhatarpur in Madhya Pradesh, Kallu Raikwar, Harendra Singh Bundela, Rajpal Singh Parmar, Deshraj Kushwaha, Munna Kushwaha and Santosh Kushwaha were arrested in Lalitpur in Uttar Pradesh in connection with the human trafficking incident which ended in tragic death of the girl, hailing from Chhattisgarh.

According to the police, a team of Chhattisgarh police landed in Chhatarpur on February 4 to trace out the girl following a complaint lodged by her parents alleging that a couple was threatening to kill her if they did not pay

them money.

Later, a joint team of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh police on Monday raided the house of Santosh Kushwaha in Lalitpur in Uttar Pradesh and arrested him.

Santosh spilled the beans on the serial human trafficking saga saying that he bought the girl from Munna at a price of ₹70,000.

Police investigation has revealed that the girl was brought to Chhatarpur in July 2020 by the couple allegedly with the assurance of providing her a job.

She was, however, allegedly sold to Kallu Raikwar, a local in

Chhatapur, for ₹20,000 in July last year.

She was subsequently allegedly sold to Harendra, Rajpal, Deshraj, Bundela, Munna and Santosh successively.

Santosh purchased the girl to marry her off to his mentally challenged son Babloo, police said quoting him.

The girl however could not bear it and committed suicide on September 10, 2020, police said. "We are probing if the couple were involved in trafficking of more girls from tribal areas of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh," Chhatarpur district superintendent of police Sachin Sharma said.



A teacher takes a class at a school in Gurugram on Monday. Authorities in haryana allowed schools to conduct classes for students of Class 6 to 8 with certain safety norms. Most of the schools in summer zone areas of Jammu resumed classes for the students of

Classes 1 to 8, a week after educational institutions reopened for higher classes. Schools in Nagaland also reopened on Monday for students of Class 6 to 12. The schools reopened after remaining shut since March 19, 2020 due to coronavirus pandemic. — PTI

■ Rahul Gandhi says online 'warriors' will counter hate Cong to raise army of 'Web warriors'

New Delhi, Feb. 8: The Congress on Monday launched a 'Join Congress Social Media' campaign with an aim to have five lakh online "warriors" who, former party chief Rahul Gandhi said, will counter hate and "defend the idea of India".

The country needs non-violent warriors to fight for truth, compassion and harmony, Gandhi said in a video message that was streamed at the launch of the campaign.

Launching the campaign along with AICC social media head Rohan Gupta and party spokesperson Pawan Khera, AICC in-charge (Administration) Pawan Kumar Bansal said at a press conference that the aim is to have five lakh social media "warriors".

In his video message, Mr Gandhi said, "As a young person you know what is

going on. Nothing is hidden from you, in your schools, colleges and universities, you can see the oppression, you can see the attack on the idea of India."

"Look outside Delhi, you can see what is happening to the farmers. The backbone of this war on the nation is a troll army. Thousands of people who spread hatred and anger and are paid to do so. We also need warriors to defend liberal values, to defend the ideas of compassion, peace, harmony and affection," the former Congress chief said.

"Come, join this army. This is not an army of hatred, this is not an army of violence, this is an army of truth and this is an army that will defend the idea of India. We are building this platform for you to give you the tools to



Congress MP Rahul Gandhi (in the front row) in the Lok Sabha during Budget Session of Parliament. — PTI

fight this battle and win it," Mr Gandhi said.

Mr Gupta, in his remarks, alleged that the Modi government is scared of social media and "we are giving a platform

BJP's Bengal Rath Yatra diverted, workers fume

PRANMOY BRAHMACHARI
BERHAMPORE, FEB. 8

Within two days of its flag-off by BJP president J.P. Nadda from Nabadwip in Nadia, the first leg of the saffron party's Rath Yatra, calling for 'Parivartan' in poll-bound West Bengal, was allegedly stopped by the police at Beldanga in Murshidabad on Monday morning.

The incident took place a day before Nadda, in his second visit to the state in a span of three days, is expected to flag off the second leg of Rath Yatra from Tarapith in Birbhum.

As the ongoing procession came to a halt on its way, angry BJP workers erupted in protest and squatted on the Beldanga-Nowda state highway, putting up a road blockade for around three hours. They also shouted slogans against high handedness by the police.

Bengali TV actor Kaushik Roy, who participated in the rally, said, "Actually the ruling party is anguished by the spontaneous public welcome irrespective of cast, creed and religion to our event. So it is upto to stop our overwhelmed success."

On Sunday afternoon Trinamul Congress workers from Mirzapur in Beldanga shouted slogans against the Rath Yatra, objecting its route in the area.

BJP (Murshidabad) president Gouri Shankar



West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee during Khelashree Award function at Netaji Indoor Stadium in Kolkata on Monday. — ASIAN AGE

Ghosh said, "The Rath Yatra entered the district as the party rank and file made an overnight stay at Bharat Sebashram Sangha in Beldanga. But the police stopped it to bar its passage through the Nowda-Hariharpara police station area, though it was our scheduled route, in apprehension of a communal trouble. Our Rath Yatra remained peaceful however."

Denying of stopping Rath Yatra, superintendent of police (Murshidabad) K. Sabari Rajkumar said, "Its route was diverted to National Highway 34 apprehending some trouble."

Later the Rath Yatra reached Berhampore. — PTI

Modi speaks to US Prez Biden

New Delhi, Feb. 8: Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to US President Joe Biden on Monday and discussed a host of regional issues and their shared priorities, with both leaders looking forward to consolidating strategic partnerships to further peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

This was their first conversation after Biden assumed office last month.

In a tweet, Mr Modi said that he conveyed his best wishes to the US President, and the two leaders agreed to further their cooperation against climate change.

"President Biden & I are committed to a rules-based order. We look forward to consolidating our strategic partnership to



Narendra Modi

further peace & security in Indo-Pacific region and beyond," Mr Modi tweeted.

Earlier on January 20, Mr Modi had congratulated Joe Biden for assuming office as the 46th President of the US. "My warmest congratulations to @JoeBiden on his assumption of office as President of the United States of America. I look forward to working with him to strengthen India-US strategic partnership," he had tweeted. — Agencies

₹41L spent on 5 Rafale induction ceremony

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 8

The government spent ₹41 lakh (including ₹9.18 lakh GST) on the induction ceremony of five Rafale jets in September 2020 at Ambala Air Force Station, Parliament was informed on Monday.

"All new aircraft types in IAF are traditionally inducted through a befitting ceremony," said defence minister Rajnath Singh in a written reply. He said that the arrangements for this event were made mostly through local resources of IAF.

Mr Singh, French minister of armed forces Florence Parly, CDS Gen. Bipin Rawat and Air Chief Marshal R.K.S. Bhaduria were also present during the ceremony. The first

five Rafale fighter aircraft were inducted in Squadron No. 17 or Golden Arrows at its first home base Ambala Air Force Station, one of the oldest air bases in the country.

In 2016, India had signed a \$59,000 crore deal for 36 Rafales which will be based in Ambala and Hasimara (West Bengal) air bases. India has till now received 11 Rafale aircraft.

On a question on procurement for forces on China border, minister of state for defence Shripad Naik said that on the basis of the threat perception and technology available, the armed forces are procuring terrain and weather specific equipment to thwart the likely threat from our Northern adversary.

India to have 17 Rafale jets by March: Govt

New Delhi, Feb. 8: India will have 17 Rafale jets by March this year and the entire fleet of the fighter aircraft bought by the country will reach by April 2022.

"I want to inform that till 11 Rafale have arrived and by this March 17 Rafale will be on our land. I also inform that all Rafale will be reach India by April, 2022," the minister said while replying a question in the Rajya Sabha.

Mr Singh said all new aircraft types in IAF are traditionally inducted through a befitting ceremony.

The first five Rafale aircraft of IAF were formally inducted into IAF on September 10, 2020. — PTI

India's daily Covid deaths below 150 for last 10 days

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB 8

In a significant achievement, India's daily death toll due to Covid-19 has been less than 150 continuously for the last 10 days and in the last 24 hours, only 84 deaths were reported.

According to the Union health ministry, 17 states and Union Territories have not reported any death in the last 24 hours. These are Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Daman and Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Nagaland, Lakshadweep, Ladakh, Sikkim, Rajasthan, Meghalaya, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu-Kashmir, Puducherry,

critical and severe patients of COVID-19," officials added.

On Monday the 11, 831 fresh cases of novel coronavirus were reported. States like Andhra Pradesh that were reporting a high number of cases till a month back on Monday had 73 new detections while Odisha had 72, Rajasthan 75, Haryana 67, Assam 8, Uttarakhand 15, Jharkhand 38.

India has so far vaccinated 60,35,660 persons out of which 54,12,270 are health-care workers and 6,23,390 are frontline workers.

India becomes the fastest country to vaccinate 6 million people and the third topmost country with maximum vaccinations.

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R-Day violence a conspiracy by BJP govt, says Adhir

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 8

Launching a scathing attack on the Centre over the ongoing farmers' agitation and the mayhem witnessed at Red Fort on Republic Day.

Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury on Monday alleged in the Lok Sabha that the violence that had unfolded in Delhi was a conspiracy by the BJP-led NDA government. Trinamul Congress MP Mahua Moitra also said that the country was

under an "undeclared emergency".

"The most important question is how could the miscreants reach Red Fort on a day like Republic Day? January 26 is a day in which the national capital remains under maximum security. Then, how can such an incident take place? I am sure that this was an incident staged by the government. You sent your people, who came disguised as farmers, and took part in violent activities," he said while participating in the discussion

on the Motion of Thanks on President's address.

Earlier, ending days of the logjam, the Opposition had accepted defence minister Rajnath Singh's appeal to let the House function and allow the discussion on President's address so as to 'not let the traditions break down'.

"You (the Centre) are declaring war against Musalman (Muslims) and Kisan (farmers) now," Mr Chowdhury said, adding that the "Prime Minister can speak to the whole world but doesn't have time

to apeak with farmers".

Indian tradition, the Congress leader said, starts with an enquiry, doubt, challenge. "Our civilisation is an unending celebration of pluralism. Plurality accommodates differences. We should not be afraid of any debate, dissent, dialogue. It reflects in our civilisation," Mr Choudhury added.

Mr Narendra Modi was present in the Lok Sabha when the Congress leader was speaking.

Referring to the BJP's constant invocation of

Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's name, especially in the wake of the forthcoming West Bengal assembly elections, Mr Choudhury said, "Since there's no national icon in the BJP, the leaders look for great personalities to take advantage of before each election."

Participating in the discussion, Trinamul MP Mahua Moitra also launched a strident attack on the BJP. "Citizenship Amendment Act was passed in 2019 in this House on the pretext of granting

citizenship to persecuted Hindus and other minorities in neighbouring countries. At the same time, it threw into abusive insecurity, millions of Indians who had been living in this land for generations. But the rules by which this act will be implemented were not yet prepared by December 2020, according to the mome ministry," Ms Moitra said.

She added that India today is "under an undeclared emergency" amid protests from the treasury benches.

"In addition to tickets given to four candidates from the Behrampur ward under my constituency, the party gave mandate to two more candidates separately."

"I told the (GPCC) president (Chavda) that this is not done as this shows lack of discipline in the party. The party should not do injustice to dedicated workers in my Assembly constituency," he told reporters.

"To make my point, I submitted my resignation," he said. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

₹50 cr racket run by Chinese busted

Hyderabad: An online racket involving two Chinese nationals was busted with the arrest of three Indians who allegedly duped around 20,000 people across the country to the tune of ₹50 crores by offering huge returns on investments, police said on Monday. The trio, along with the absconding Chinese, was accused of enticing the public by offering 4.5 times returns on deposits in 90 days, Cyberabad Commissioner of Police V.C. Sajjanar said. Acting on a complaint by a depositor, a case was registered and the Indians were arrested in Haryana and Delhi, the police said. One of the Chinese nationals left India and did not return while the other had never come to India. They, along with the trio, launched an app and started cheating people, according to police. — PTI

Man kills pregnant spouse, daughter

Baghpat (UP): A 30-year-old man killed his pregnant wife and minor daughter here on Monday following an argument, police said. The man, who worked as a barber, later went to the police station and confessed his crime, they said. The incident took place at the Gayatripuram locality here under the Kotwali police station area. Circle officer M. S. Rawat said Gulfam was suffering from cancer. "On Monday, there was an argument between Gulfam and his wife Muskan (22) following which he strangled her and his four-year-old daughter Aayat (4) to death," Mr Rawat said, adding that the accused then reached the police station and told officials about the incident. "The deceased was the Gulfam's third wife. The accused has been arrested, and a case has been registered," Mr Rawat said. — PTI

BSF officer charged for cattle smuggling

New Delhi: The CBI on Monday filed a charge sheet against BSF Commandant Satish Kumar and six others for their alleged involvement in a cattle smuggling racket operating at the India-Bangladesh border, officials said. The agency had taken over the case on September 21, 2020. The charge sheet has been filed against Kumar, the then Commandant of 36 Battalion BSF, Enamul Haque, Anarul Seikh, Golam Mustafa Taniya Sanyal, Badal Krishna Sanyal and Rashida Bibi, the officials said. In the charge sheet filed before a special court in West Bengal's Asansol, the CBI alleged that Haque was the mastermind of the illegal cattle trade and was assisted by two other accused in connivance with Kumar. — PTI

PM tells kisans: End stir, we'll talk, MSP will stay

■ **Continued from Page 1** this country from these 'Andolan Jeevi', who are actually 'parjeevi'. They don't have their own strength, but they join all agitations." Talking about the Opposition's protests against the farm laws, the PM said: "A lot was discussed in the House but mostly it was on the protest, not on the solution... you can oppose the procedure but could have explained to farmers that it is high time for these farm reforms... but now they are saying they are not consulted before, like 'fufaji' uncle who gets angry for not being invited to a wedding... this happens in large families." Mr Modi added that the earlier framework did not work favourably for the farmers and alleged the Opposition parties had kept silent on the core issues of farmers. Mr Modi said the number of marginal farmers with small landholdings had increased from 51 per cent in 1971 to 86 per cent at present. Taking a did at the internal strife within the Congress, Mr Modi said that while he was happy that Ghulam Nabi Azad had praised his government (on the holding of elections in Kashmir), he cautioned the Congress not to do the opposite just because Mr Azad had said so. He said: "I hope your party takes it in the right spirit. They shouldn't make the mistake of doing just the opposite considering it as the view of the G-23."

■ 'Move will stop misuse of celebrities' Farmers stir: Maha police to probe celebrity tweets

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, FEB. 8

In a new twist to the war of tweets over the farmer's stir in Delhi, Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh has ordered a probe into tweets by Indian celebrities, including Sachin Tendulkar and Lata Mangeshkar. Action will be taken in this matter according to the rules, he said. "The Maharashtra Congress delegation through a video conference asked me to probe the misuse of Indian celebrities on the issue of farmers, who are protesting for last 70 days on the Delhi border for the demand of abolition of farm bills. I have promised them to take action as per the rules," Mr Deshmukh tweeted on Monday. Many celebrities and sportspersons such as Bharat Ratna awardee Sachin Tendulkar and Lata Mangeshkar, along with Akshay Kumar and Saina Nehwal, have joined together to support the government via social media, using hashtags #IndiaTogether and #IndiaAgainstPropaganda

■ **MANY CELEBRITIES** and sportspersons such as Bharat Ratna awardee Sachin Tendulkar and Lata Mangeshkar, along with Akshay Kumar and Saina Nehwal, have joined together to support the government on social media



Lata Mangeshkar Sachin Tendulkar

in response to tweets by foreign celebrities including Rihanna, Mia Khalifa and climate activist Greta Thunberg in support of the farmers' protest. Mr Deshmukh said, "We all respect the personalities, who are honoured with the Bharat Ratna award. But the Congress has demanded a probe on whether they were pressurised by the BJP leaders (to support the government)."

The home minister, who is currently in quarantine after testing positive for Covid-19, joined a video conference with the Congress delegation headed by Mumbai Congress leader Sachin Sawant. "We demanded investigation of BJP connection into the tweets of celebrities and security to be provided to our national heroes if needed and find

out whether these celebrities were arm-twisted by the BJP," said Mr Sawant.

The Congress leader said that the home minister has assured that the state intelligence department will probe the matter. He questioned how Bollywood actors and other celebrities are posting identical tweets. "Why tweets of Akshay Kumar and Saina Nehwal are matching with each other? Why Suniel Shetty tags his tweet to a BJP officer bearer? This has completely exposed the role of the BJP, which is capable of pressuring celebrities," Mr Sawant said.

It is the duty of the MVA government to provide an atmosphere where every individual can exercise their right of freedom of speech without any pressure, he added.

Rajnath: Army has restricted Pak mischief to just border

New Delhi, Feb. 8: The Indian Army has limited Pakistan's mischief to just the border, giving a befitting reply to their misadventures, defence minister Rajnath Singh said in the Rajya Sabha on Monday.

"Now Indian Army has restricted Pakistani mischief to the border. No praise is enough for the actions taken by the Army, BSF and other security forces in containing (Pakistan sponsored terrorist activities)," he said while replying during the Question Hour.

The minister stressed that there was no question of any lethargy while dealing with ceasefire violations by the neighbouring country.

Asked why the government was "lethargic" and not taking stern action to

Singh: 60 security men by Pak in '20

New Delhi: Pakistan resorted to 5,133 incidents of ceasefire violations last year in which 46 security force personnel were killed, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Monday, referring to Pakistani hostilities along the Line of Control and International Border in Jammu and Kashmir.

The defence minister said "appropriate retaliation" to the ceasefire violations, as required, has been carried out by the security forces. — PTI

stop the ceasefire violations, Singh said. "There is no question of lethargy. I want to make it clear that our Army has taken effective steps. They have

done earlier also and I am not saying the Army is taking action after our government came to power."

The minister also said it would not be appropriate to go into details about the steps being taken and weapons used to deal with ceasefire violations.

"But I would like to say this much that Pakistan violates ceasefire to infiltrate terrorists into Indian borders and also to bring them back. They keep trying this," Mr Singh said.

"You should have faith that our Army is taking effective steps at borders and responding to ceasefire violations," he said, and added only Pakistan knows about the actions being taken against them by Indian security forces. — PTI

U'khand glacier burst: 26 bodies found, 171 missing

■ **Continued from Page 1** Union home minister Amit Shah and BJP president J.P. Nadda were also present at the meeting.

Mr Modi said several institutions of the Central government are part of the rescue mission and state bodies are also working effectively. Noting that the Himalayan state is vul-

nerable to natural disasters, Mr Modi asserted that the government is working to further boost the state's infrastructure to deal with such a crisis.

The Uttarakhand glacier burst has caused an estimated loss of Rs 1,500 crore at the NTPC's 480 mw Tapovan-Vishnugad hydel project and has put a question mark on its

Isro, DRDO studying cause of U'khand glacier burst: Rawat

CM Rawat says relief work immediate priority

New Delhi/Dehradun, Feb. 8: As multi-agency relief operations continue in Chamoli and adjoining areas of Uttarakhand, chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat Monday said a comprehensive analysis of the entire incident is being carried out to avert future tragedies, and asserted the immediate priority was to provide food and other assistance to the affected people.

In an interview to PTI, he said the incident appeared to have happened due to the breaking of the glacier and the Chief Secretary has been instructed to find out the real reasons.

Preliminary estimates show that around 200 people are still missing, while 11 bodies have been found, he said.

"A DRDO (Defence Research and Development Organisation) team is already studying the cause of this tragedy and we have also sought the help of ISRO (Indian Space Research Organisation) scientists and experts for the same," he said.

After a comprehensive analysis is undertaken to find out the reasons of this incident, "we will build an elaborate plan to avert any potential tragedy going forward", Rawat said.

Asked about the ongoing relief operations, he said they are continuing in full swing.

"We have made all arrangements needed for the rescue and relief operations along with providing healthcare facilities to the affected people. Most importantly, we are working on re-establishing the connectivity to the affected villages," he said.

Rawat said while the extent of economic loss will be ascertained in due course, the top most priority for now is to save as many lives as possible and to rehabilitate those who have got displaced from their homes.

Multiple agencies are coordinating efforts to search for survivors on Monday, a day after a portion of the Nanda Devi glacier possibly burst through its banks at Joshimath, triggering an avalanche and a deluge



Activists light candles for the victims of flash flood in Uttarakhand, in Ahmedabad, on Monday. — PTI



Family members of the workers stuck inside the Tapovan Tunnel in Chamoli on Monday. — PTI

Mindless rampage in name of development must stop: Activist

Gopeshwar, Feb. 8: The glacial burst near Chamoli district's Raini village, the cradle of the Chipko movement, should serve as a wake-up call to stop the rampage on the Himalayan ecological system in the name of development, said Magsaysay awardee Chandi Prasad Bhatt on Monday.

According to the 87-year-old environmentalist, who was a Chipko movement leader, projects like the Rishi Ganga hydel project, which bore the brunt of Sunday's calamity, should not have been given environmental clearance.

Me Bhatt said that in 2010 he had written to the then environment minister warning against the adverse effects of the project. "Had my advice been heeded, the loss of lives

and largescale damage to property at the project site could have been prevented. The mindless rampaging on the Himalayas in the name of development must stop," he told PTI.

A portion of the Nanda Devi glacier broke off in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district on Sunday, triggering an avalanche and a deluge in the Alaknanda river system that washed away hydroelectric stations, leaving at least 10 people dead and 143 missing, who are feared dead.

The sudden flood in the middle of the day in the Dhauli Ganga, Rishi Ganga and Alaknanda rivers—all intricately linked tributaries of the Ganga—triggered widespread panic and large-scale devastation in the high mountain areas. — PTI

that rippled through the Alaknanda river system in the upper reaches of the Himalayas.

Mr Rawat said multiple teams have been drawn, both

from the Centre and the state's disaster relief agencies, along with the defence forces who have been convened to lead the huge rescue operations. — PTI

HC junks plea over Ayodhya mosque land

Lucknow: The Allahabad high court on Monday dismissed a petition filed against the allotment of land in Ayodhya's Dhannipur village for the construction of a mosque, following the Supreme Court verdict in the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute.

Two Delhi-based sisters had moved the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad high court on February 3, claiming ownership of the five-acre land allotted to the Uttar Pradesh Sunni Central Waqf Board for the mosque.

Appearing for the state, Additional Advocate General Ramesh Kumar Singh had opposed the plea, saying the plot numbers allotted for the mosque are different from those the petition is filed about. — PTI

Yogi asks officials to trace missing people

Lucknow, Feb. 8: Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday directed officials to initiate effective action in collaboration with the Uttarakhand government for tracing people from the state who have gone missing in flash floods in the hill state, an official said.

In a high-level meeting convened at his official residence on Monday night, the chief minister said that his government is committed to provide all possible help to those affected by the disaster, including its own people as well as extending all possible help to the Uttarakhand government, the official spokesperson said.

Mr Adityanath has also talked to his Uttarakhand counterpart Trivendra Singh Rawat and assured him of all possible help in

COMMISSIONING OF NTPC PROJECT MAY BE DELAYED

Dehradun: The Uttarakhand glacier burst has caused an estimated loss of ₹1,500 crore at the NTPC's 480 mw Tapovan-Vishnugad hydel project and has put a question mark on its scheduled commissioning in 2023, Union power minister R.K. Singh said on Monday. The minister visited Tapovan on Monday to assess the extent of damage at the project site, a day after the glacier burst in Chamoli district. He said estimated losses to the project are worth around ₹1,500 crore. — PTI

EFFORTS ON TO SAVE 34 TRAPPED IN TUNNEL

Dehradun: A multi-agency operation to rescue an estimated 34 people trapped inside a big tunnel at Tapovan is being carried out after a glacier burst-triggered deluge killed 11 people in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district while over 202 are missing, officials said on Monday. Personnel from the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and some state disaster response teams are clearing the tunnel. — PTI

ENGINEER FROM KASHMIR AMONG THOSE MISSING

Srinagar: An engineer from Kashmir is among those missing following a glacier burst in Uttarakhand, officials said on Monday.

Basharat Ahmad Zargar, a resident of Soura area of Srinagar and working as a private company civil engineer at the Rishi Ganga power project in Uttarakhand, went missing after the glacier burst on Sunday morning, the officials said. — PTI

Sasikala returns to Chennai, posters...

■ **Continued from Page 1** since early morning to give a grand reception to the former AIADMK general secretary, who was expelled by the present leadership. All through her journey on the Bengaluru-Chennai highway, flowers, bouquets, garlands and folk dances greeted her as hordes of supporters waved both AIADMK and AMMK flags as her convoy inched its way home.

Ms Sasikala, who started from the farmhouse in

Bengaluru's suburbs, where she was staying since her release from Parappana Agrahara Jail on January 27, in a car with the AIADMK flag on the bonnet at 7.40 am was escorted till the Tamil Nadu border by a Karnataka police vehicle.

As she entered Tamil Nadu at around 10 am, the flag was removed from her vehicle. But Ms Sasikala herself changed cars and boarded a Toyota MUV with the AIADMK flag on

the bonnet. Though the police had given prior warning that she wouldn't be allowed to use the flag of the party from which she was expelled, nothing could be done to the flag on the vehicle, which belonged to a AIADMK leader.

Driving through a sea of supporters who gathered at various points on the highway, Ms Sasikala, in a shimmering green saree and face mask, accepted the greetings of the people with folded hands.

Won't allow business over hunger: Tikait

■ **Continued from Page 1** farmers that the MSP will last forever. "MSP tha, MSP hai, aur MSP rahega (MSP was there, MSP is there and MSP will continue)... Affordable ration for the poor will continue. Mandis will be modernised," Mr Modi said while requesting farmers' unions to call off their 75-day agitation.

Mr Tikait, who has now become the face of the agitation, said the farmers' protests have highlighted that there is no law on MSP because of which traders loot them by buying crops at lower prices. He said the price of crops

will not be decided the way the rates of a flight ticket fluctuate several times a day. "The way the rates of a flight ticket fluctuate three to four times a day, the price of crops will not be decided the same way."

On the PM's remark about the emergence of a "new community" which is "engaged in protests", Mr Tikait said, "Yes, this time it is the farmers' community which has emerged and people are also supporting the farmers... This movement was first portrayed as Punjab's issue, then Sikhs', then Jats, so on and so forth.

The farmers of the country are united. There is no small farmer or big farmer. The movement belongs to all farmers," he said.

Reacting to Mr Modi's appeal to protesters to call off their agitation, farmer leader Satnam Singh Sahni said the PM should immediately call a meeting of the union leaders to end the stalemate. "If he (PM) calls a meeting tomorrow, we are ready to attend it... Today, the major question before us is how our agriculture mandis can survive," he said.

Another farmer leader

Abhimanyu Kohar said that the protesting unions were ready to hold talks with the government only if it comes through formal channels. "Any issue can be resolved through proper dialogue. We are ready in-principle to resume talks."

Mr Tikait had recently said that two government representatives had come to meet him, but he had refused to meet them separately. "Every discussion will be held collectively in the presence of the Kisan Samyukth Morcha (an umbrella body of the protesting farmers' unions)."

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, FEB. 8

The Bombay High Court on Monday rejected the bail plea filed by Gautam Navlakha, a senior journalist and activist arrested in connection with the Elgar Parishad case for allegedly having links with Maoists.

The division bench of Justice S.S. Shinde and Justice M.S. Karnik observed in its order that the court saw no reason to interfere with the order of the trial court, which rejected his bail application. Navlakha had sought default bail saying the central probe agency National Investigation Agency (NIA) failed to file charge sheet



Gautam Navlakha

against him within stipulated 90 days time and hence he was entitled for default bail. After hearing the arguments the trial court had rejected his bail application.

According to Navlakha's lawyers Kapil Sibal and Yug Chaudhry, their client was placed under house arrest, following an order of the court, therefore it would be

termed as judicial custody. The order had restricted his movement, making his plea for release, under section 167(2) of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), valid. Mr Sibal had argued the NIA sought an extension to file their chargesheet, on June 29, last year. By then Navlakha had spent nearly 100 days in prison, taking into account 34 days of custody.

Additional solicitor general S.V. Raju on behalf of the NIA opposed the bail application and argued that the date an accused was produced before the court was relevant not the date of arrest while deciding if she/he should be granted default bail or not.

THE ASIAN AGE

9 FEBRUARY 2021

An ecological tragedy of Himalayan proportions

A tragedy of gargantuan proportions washed away close to 200 people, destroyed or damaged two hydroelectric dams and five bridges as the Nanda Devi glacier burst in Uttarakhand. The GLOF (glacier lake outburst flood) event that created a deluge of frightening proportions downstream in rivers was said to have been triggered by an avalanche on Sunday morning. The rescue efforts by over 2,000 members of the Army, police and paramilitary forces, and state and national disaster response teams have been heroic as the Himalayan state grappled with yet another tragedy like the 2013 monsoon floods in the wake of cloudbursts that killed nearly 6,000 people, which was the worst ever toll as muddy water poured down the gorges and drowned entire villages.

Ecologically fragile regions around the world are fraught with danger and the pace of development in sustaining a rising population trend, and man's co-existence with nature has been threatened in the most basic ways. The fallout from deforestation is clear even as the more populated stretches of the Himalayas show how precariously man is perched on mountainous terrain. It is obvious that lessons have not been learnt from years of having to deal with floods from the monsoon or melting glaciers. It is against this background that the foolishness of building hydroelectric dams too close to glaciers must be viewed when global warming is seen to create havoc in the icy Himalayan upper reaches.

It is a specious argument that a state which has to purchase power in the region of ₹1,000 crore a year must build dams in ecologically sensitive regions in order to save money. So long as the consumer pays for the power purchased, there should be no need for Uttarakhand to spend thousands of crores in building dams to generate electricity. They

have been warned about this, including in scientific advice tendered to ruling party politicians. The era of building dams is truly over as man has learnt from experience that Nature is a force that can be overpowering when it is taken on or teased.

Himalayan efforts by a tiny state like Uttarakhand can't by themselves reverse global warming but man can learn from the simple principle that Nature cannot be toyed with, particularly in fragile zones. Melting glaciers are the clearest signs of climate change, and since this event took place outside the monsoon period, it is safe to assume human intervention was a causative factor. It will be up to scientists to study the event and render an opinion on what may have caused it and it is entirely up to the administration in hilly areas to enforce laws strictly to ensure that ecological preservation rules are always followed lest such events recur.

Quick communication of the impending water flow may have saved hundreds of lives downstream of the Ganga's several tributaries as many villagers were evacuated in time. The standard announcement of relief to the families of the dead followed a pattern which points to the government's utter helplessness in dealing with calamities and in stopping human contribution to climate change. The bursting of a glacier in the Garhwal Himalayas is a chilling warning of what we may be up against if we continue to recklessly exploit our planet's finite resources.

‘Gilt’ option for citizens

The Reserve Bank of India, during its latest monetary policy review, proposed to allow retail investors to park their money in government securities (G-Secs) — also called “gilt bonds” — by opening gilt securities accounts or “retail direct”. This is one of a series of steps that the Reserve Bank has been taking since January 2002 to increase the participation of a larger number of people in the purchase of government securities.

G-Secs are tradeable investment instruments issued by the Central or state governments and are the most risk-free sovereign-backed bonds available in the country. These securities are available in both short-term and long-term tenures — ranging from three months to 30 years — with an annual yield starting from 3.37 per cent. Though commercial banks and asset management companies dominate the G-Secs market now, the RBI's decision would provide a new risk-free investment option for retail investors.

This decision could also provide elbow room for the Central government to reduce its presence in the banking sector. A couple of years back, former RBI governor Yaga Venugopal Reddy had said that an “average citizen of India is most comfortable banking with PSU banks”. Sixty-five per cent of total deposits in the banking sector are with the public sector banks for the mere reason that they are owned by the government. If most risk-averse depositors could be persuaded to shift to the G-Secs, the government could go ahead with the denationalisation of banks at a faster pace.

However, there still remain a few challenges. Since G-Secs offer lower yields than fixed deposits, many people might not find it an attractive investment option. Banks' fixed deposits and small saving schemes have become a safety net for vulnerable sections of society and unless the government creates a decent social security net, they cannot be wished away by any government without facing the consequences in election season.

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Aakar Patel



Democracy Index: Why India's rank now falling

The Economist is a magazine though it refers to itself as a newspaper. It is over 175 years old and sells about 10 lakh copies a week. Its readers are mostly professionals, highly educated and with higher incomes. It is one of the very few magazines in the world, and possibly the only one of its size, which makes more money from subscriptions than it does from advertising. That means that its readers purchase it for its content. One year's subscription costs ₹15,000 in the United States, meaning that each issue is ₹300.

The magazine promotes free market policies of the sort generally associated with conservative, meaning right-leaning, parties. The Economist Intelligence Unit is its research and analysis division. Each year it compiles a “Democracy Index”, which shows the state of democracy around the world. This month, it gave its results for 2020. It would be instructive to see what it has said about India.

We have fallen from a global ranking of 27 in 2015 to 53. This is mainly, the Economist Intelligence Unit says, because “democratic norms have been under pressure since 2015”, and

as a result India's “global ranking slipped from 27th to 53rd as a result of democratic backsliding under the leadership of Narendra Modi”.

The slippage has not come due to electoral processes and political participation where, as most of us will accept, India continues to do well. The problem is on the side of political culture and civil liberties, where since Narendra Modi took over in 2014 India has declined. In January 2014, in the UPA's last days, the EIU gave India its highest rating of 7.92. This slid to 7.74 in 2015 and then 7.23 in 2017 and then dipped to 6.9 in 2019 and 6.61 in 2020. The EIU classifies India as a “flawed democracy”.

It describes flawed democracies as countries that have free and fair elections and, even if there are problems (such as infringements on media freedom), basic civil liberties are respected. “However, there are significant weaknesses in other aspects of democracy, including problems in governance, an underdeveloped political culture and low levels of political participation.”

In the last few years, India has seen “the increasing influence of religion under the Modi premiership, whose policies have fomented anti-Muslim

feeling and religious strife, has damaged the political fabric of the country”. Remember, this is the magazine the world's topmost corporate executives and decision makers read. While our government responded strongly to Rihanna and Greta Thunberg, with the external affairs ministry issuing a statement, it hasn't said anything on this downgrade, which more people will read and take seriously than someone's tweet.

The EIU says that the enactment in December 2019 of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 “continued to fuel riots in 2020, with several left dead following clashes in February in the capital city, New Delhi. The act introduces a religious element to the conceptualisation of Indian citizenship, a step that many critics see as undermining the secular basis of the Indian State”.

The magazine does not deny Mr Modi's popularity but says that it comes from the same aspects it finds concerning. It says that he participated in the ground-breaking ceremony at the site of the destroyed Babri Masjid, and notes “the temple's construction will further endear Mr Modi to his Hindu nationalist base”.

Unfortunately for us, this is not a

popularity contest. The EIU says: “On top of these issues, the authorities' handling of the pandemic has also led to a further erosion of civil liberties in 2020.” And finally, it notes “by contrast, the scores for some of India's regional neighbours, such as Bangladesh, Bhutan and Pakistan, improved marginally in 2020”.

For those who think India's democracy is just fine and there has been no change in the past few years, perhaps it would be instructive to see what has happened on a few issues. The first is the introduction of electoral bonds. This is a mechanism whereby corporates and even foreign entities can donate money anonymously to political parties. Readers may not know that over 90 per cent of the total value of the bonds donated since the scheme began two years ago are bought in ₹1 crore denominations. Meaning it's not the common man giving money secretly to parties.

Second, that the Modi government has changed the RTI law to make its commissioners dependent on the government for their term and salary. Third, that the Constitution was repeatedly violated through bypassing the Rajya Sabha by illegally calling pieces of legislation

“money bills”. The manner of the passing of the farm laws, where the Rajya Sabha was not even allowed to vote despite it not being a money bill, will tell us where things stand today in democratic India.

The Economist also ran a story on India in this week's edition headlined “India's government is censoring people before they comment”. It quotes Idi Amin, late Ugandan dictator, who once declared he respected freedom of speech, but could not guarantee freedom after speech. The magazine says “India's government seems to be taking this concept one step further. Despite running what is often hailed as the world's biggest democracy, it has gained a taste for curtailing freedom before speech.” This is what the world made of issues like the jailing of Siddique Kappan by UP and Munaqar Faruqui by MP.

If you were angered, like Sachin Tendulkar, Lata Mangeshkar, Virat Kohli, Ajay Devgan and Akshay Kumar, by six-word tweets from Western celebrities, you should consider what their most respectable and respected voices are also saying.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

Subhani



Does India want to be a Tier-2 UNSC member?



Mohan Guruswamy

Sometime recently, Mr T.S. Tirumurti, our permanent representative at the United Nations in New York, once again pleaded for the expansion of the UN Security Council permanent membership (P-5) to make it more broad-based. Addressing the UN General Assembly by video on September 26 in the landmark 75th General Debate, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had also raised the issue of India's entry into the Security Council as a permanent member. He posed the question: “How long will India, the world's largest democracy and home to 1.3 billion people, be kept out of the decision-making structures of the United Nations?” He also asserted that reform in the responses, processes and very character of the global body was the “need of the hour”.

This is interesting, because for the first time India has asked for more than just a mere expansion of the UNSC by accommodating it as a permanent member. India has asked for a greater and comprehensive reform in “the responses, processes and character of the UN”.

The United States, Russia and China have already unveiled their visions of an expanded UN Security Council. During his visit to New Delhi as chief guest at India's Republic Day celebrations in 2015, then US President Barack Obama categorically said he supported a reformed UNSC with India as a permanent member. But no sooner Mr Obama had returned to the US after his New Delhi visit, then US ambassador to the UN Samantha Powers said:

“It is very critical that any reform proposal enjoy broad consensus among member states”. This position takes it very close to the proposal of nations under the banner “Uniting for Consensus Group”, which is opposed to the UNSC's expansion by adding the G-4 of India, Germany, Japan and Brazil to it.

This group, led by Canada, Italy, Colombia and Pakistan, has made a counter proposal that envisages an enlargement of the number of non-permanent members from 10 to 20. The non-permanent members would be elected by the General Assembly for a two-year term and would be eligible for immediate re-election, subject to the decision of their respective geographical blocs.

The Chinese want “small and medium-sized countries to take turns to serve on the UNSC”. Russia, while not opposed to any expansion, has taken the position that the powers of the members of present UNSC should remain the same with full veto powers, meaning there could be two or three classes of UNSC members. The G-5 with veto powers, G-4 permanent members without the veto, and whoever else may be elected by the General Assembly.

The creation of the United Nations to preserve world peace began in October 30, 1943 when Britain, China, the Soviet Union and the US signed the Moscow Declaration on General Security. The signatories then met continuously from August to October 1944 at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington D.C. and fashioned a basic plan for the UN. The center-

piece of this plan was a Security Council in which the US, the Soviet Union, Britain, France and China would be permanent members.

Fifty nations then met in San Francisco on April 25, 1945, less than a fortnight before Germany surrendered and four months before Japan was defeated, to consider this plan. After much deliberation the differences, mostly over the veto power demanded by the then Big Three — the US, USSR and Britain — were papered over and on June 26, 1945 the 50 nations present signed the UN Charter and the world body formally came into being.

As an immediate response to a destructive world war, the UN reflected the reality and ethos of that age. Nothing reflected this more than the composition of the permanent members of the Security Council. Four out of the five were “white” nations. Two, China and France, were defeated nations. Two, Britain and France, were colonial powers. The other 10 members of the Security Council are elected members from the various regions. These are members without the veto and with little voice or clout.

While it can be argued that a Security Council of a smaller number of countries is desirable to make the UN effective, it must also reflect world realities and be more representative of its diversity. For instance, Africa and Latin America are not represented in the P-5. Likewise, the Islamic world does not find a place. India, which has a fifth of the world's population, does not find a place. The biggest economy in Europe, Germany, does not find a place. On

the other hand, with two members, Britain and France, Western Europe is clearly over-represented. With Russia added, Europe has three members. Clearly this is not a satisfactory arrangement. The UN Security Council, as it is now, does not reflect the world order or its diversity.

In the Cold War era, veto powers ensured that one bloc could not override the interests of the other one. The veto thus came to be used 252 times since 1946. Since 1996, Russia has not exercised the veto even once whereas the United States has used it six times and China twice. This presumably reflects the settled shape of the world order now.

Clearly, the use of the veto itself must be reviewed. One nation alone must no longer be allowed to block the consensus of the UNSC. It is time that a threshold of members to collectively enforce the veto be discussed.

The times have also changed. The United States is no longer the dominant economic and political power it was in the latter half of the twentieth century. The G-4 nations are all bigger economies than Russia, France and Britain. They possibly have bigger global footprints than the three. How can the power to veto be justified for these three and denied to the G-4?

In the past few years, India's diplomacy has centered around a craving to just become a member of the UN Security Council. It seems a second-class membership is still feasible. The big question then is whether this is what India really wants? Or do we want a greater democratisation of the UNSC to reflect the status and size of the G-4?

India has asked for a greater and comprehensive reform in “the responses, processes and character of the United Nations”.

The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.

LETTERS

CRAVEN JUDGES

With all due respect to the judiciary, I am unable to understand why Justice M.R. Shah of the Supreme Court felt the need to shower Prime Minister Narendra Modi with encomiums when he released a postage stamp online to mark the completion of 60 years of the Gujarat high court. The chief justice of the Gujarat high court, Justice Vikram Nath, also said that “in Modi's popularity, his sense of fairness and dedication towards his duties have played a very important role. If the leadership is so just, then it is as inspiring as that of a family member”.

Bidyut K. Chatterjee
Faridabad

JAGTAP'S STRATEGY

I WELCOME the decision of newly appointed Mumbai Congress president Ashok Jagtap to contest all 227 seats in the forthcoming Mumbai civic body elections in 2022, with an alliance with the Shiv Sena if the Congress high command so desires. The Congress Party's main target will be the BJP even if it contests independently. Mumbai has about 28-30 per cent Marathi voters, whom Mr Jagtap hopes to bank on. His trade union background will also come in handy with the disaffected migrant workers who were badly let down by the BJP during the Covid-19 lockdown.

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

GENDER BENDER

THE CRPF for the first time inducted 34 women commandos in its elite Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) unit, which was raised in 2009 and is mainly deployed in states affected by left-wing extremism. These women commandos from the CRPF's 6 Mahila Battalions will undergo strenuous CoBRA pre-induction training for three months and will be posted in areas hit by left-wing extremism after they complete their training.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

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

IN BRIEF

Armed men kill
19 in Nigeria

Kano, Nigeria: Nineteen people were killed at the weekend when armed men raided two villages in northwest Nigeria's Kaduna state, the government said, in the latest violence to hit the region. Gunmen from kidnapping and cattle rustling gangs — called bandits by locals — often raid villages in northwest Nigeria, stealing cattle, kidnapping for ransom and burning homes after looting supplies.

Aussie journalist
held in China

Sydney: An Australian journalist who worked as an anchor for Chinese state television has been formally arrested for “illegally supplying state secrets overseas”, six months after she was detained in China without explanation, Canberra said on Monday. Australia's foreign minister Marise Payne said Chinese authorities informed her that Cheng Lei was formally arrested on February 5, after disappearing from public view last August.

Iran refuse French
mediation in N-deal

Tehran: Iran appeared Monday to dismiss an offer by France to mediate between the United States and the Islamic republic in order to revive the 2015 nuclear deal. “The nuclear deal has no need for a mediator,” foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh told reporters without specifically mentioning France, but in response to a question about recent comments by the country's president. Emmanuel Macron said last week he was ready to act as an “honest broker” in talks between the new US administration of President Joe Biden and Tehran after the multilateral deal was torpedoed by ex-president Donald Trump.

Snow in Europe
disrupts transport

Berlin: Transport disruption in Germany and the Netherlands persisted into a second day on Monday as heavy snowfall and icy temperatures gripped parts of central and northern Europe. Dutch children's return to school after the Coronavirus lockdown was delayed. Trucks got stuck in snowdrifts overnight on the A4 highway near Gera in eastern Germany, while part of the A7 highway near Goettingen in northern Germany was closed after trucks became stuck on uphill stretches. Railway operator Deutsche Bahn said services remained suspended across parts of central and northern Germany, with no long-distance trains running northeast from Frankfurt, west from Berlin or southwest from Hamburg.

US CAUCUS TO
INDIA: MAINTAIN
DEMOCRATIC NORMS

Washington, Feb. 8: A powerful India Caucus in the US Congress has urged the Indian government to ensure that the norms of democracy are maintained and protesters allowed to demonstrate peacefully and have access to the Internet as it held a meeting with New Delhi's envoy here. India's Ambassador to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu, who regularly interacts with India Caucus members on a number of issues, had a virtual meeting with the top leadership of the Congressional India Caucus last week. The members included congressmen Brad Sherman and Steve Chabot who are the two Co-Chairs of the Congressional India Caucus along with Indian-American Congressman Ro Khanna, who is the Vice Chair of the Caucus. “During this discussion, the caucus leadership welcomed reforms in the Indian economy including in agriculture,” sources said. During the meeting, the leadership of the India Caucus, which is the largest country-specific caucus in the House of Representatives, condemned the violence on January 26 in Delhi. Among other things “they were appreciative of the government's perspective on the farm reforms,” according to those familiar with the meeting. Sherman tweeted that they urged India to ensure that the norms of democracy are maintained and the protesters allowed to demonstrate peacefully and have access to the Internet.



People stage a demonstration against the February 1 military coup along a street in the town of Muse in Shan state, near the China-Myanmar border on Monday.

— AFP

Myanmar's junta imposes
curfew to stop protesters

Yangon, Feb. 8: Myanmar's military government imposed a curfew and bans on gatherings of more than five people in the country's two biggest cities on Monday as protests against last week's coup showed no sign of abating.

The decrees covering Yangon and Mandalay were issued on a township-by-township basis, and those which have become public so far have the same restrictions. At least seven have been issued, and more are expected for other areas. Rallies and gather-

ings of more than five people, along with motorized processions, are banned, and a 8 pm to 4 am curfew is imposed. The measures are effective until further notice. The decrees say they were issued in response to people carrying out unlawful actions that harm the rule of law.

The generals issued a stern warning Monday against further protests as an uprising against their coup gathered pace, with hundreds of thousands on the streets demanding the release of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The junta has so far refrained from using deadly force to quell the demonstrations sweeping most of the country, but with pressure building riot police fired water cannon in an attempt to disperse thousands gathered in Naypyidaw.

The military last week detained Suu Kyi and dozens of other members of her National League for Democracy party, ending a decade of civilian rule and triggering international condemnation. In the face of an increasingly bold wave of defiance, state

broadcaster MRTV warned that opposition to the junta was unlawful and signalled a potential crackdown.

“Action must be taken according to the law with effective steps against offences which disturb, prevent and destroy the state's stability public safety and the rule of law,” said a statement read by an announcer on the channel.

Tens of thousands of people overcame a nationwide internet blockade to rally over the weekend in the first major outpourings of opposition to the coup.

— AP/AFP



Benjamin Netanyahu

NETANYAHU'S
CORRUPTION
TRIAL RESUMES

Jerusalem, Feb. 8: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu briefly appeared in a Jerusalem courtroom on Monday to respond formally to corruption charges just weeks before national elections in which he hopes to extend his 12-year rule. Netanyahu was indicted last year for fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three separate cases. In recent months, Israelis have held weekly protests calling on him to resign over the charges and criticizing his government's response to the coronavirus crisis. He stands accused of accepting lavish gifts from wealthy friends and offering to grant favours to powerful media moguls in exchange for favourable coverage of him and his family. The latest hearing was postponed last month due to lockdown restrictions on public gatherings. — AP

S Africa to try new vaccine
after stopping AstraZeneca

Johannesburg, Feb. 8: South Africa is considering giving a Covid-19 vaccine that is still in the testing phase to health workers, after suspending the rollout of another shot that preliminary data indicated may be only minimally effective against the mutated form of the virus dominating the country.

The country was scrambling Monday to come up with a new vaccination strategy after it halted use of the AstraZeneca vaccine — which is cheaper and easier to handle than some others and which many had hoped would be crucial to combatting the pandemic in developing countries.

Among the possibilities being considered: mixing the AstraZeneca vaccine with another one or giving Johnson & Johnson's single-dose vaccine, which has not yet been authorised for use anywhere, to 100,000 health care workers while monitoring its efficacy against the variant.

The abrupt change in strategy was prompted by preliminary results in a small study that showed the AstraZeneca vaccine was only minimally effective against mild to moderate cases of the disease caused by the variant.

There is reason to hope the Johnson & Johnson vaccine may fare better in the country. — AP

WHO holds virtual
meet over vaccine

Geneva, Feb. 8: The World Health Organisation's vaccine experts were deciding on Monday on their usage recommendations for the AstraZeneca-Oxford Covid-19 vaccine — including for older adults.

The 15-member Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) was spending the day in a virtual extraordinary

meeting discussing the two-shot vaccine.

The WHO said the recommendations on who it should and should not be used for would be made public later this week.

The regulatory authorities in several European nations have not authorised the vaccine for use among the over-65s — by far the most vulnerable age group for serious Covid-19 disease. — AFP

Tanzanian prayers
fail to prevent virus

Dar es Salaam, Feb. 8: Tanzania has spent more than six months trying to convince the world it has been cured of the coronavirus through prayer, while refusing to take measures to curb its spread.

However, dissent is mounting, along with deaths attributed to “pneumonia”, with even a politician in semi-autonomous Zanzibar admitting he has the virus.

“Covid-19 is killing people and we see a lot of cases but we cannot talk about the disease,” said a doctor in a public hospital in Tanzania's biggest city Dar es Salaam, who like many asked not to be named for fear of reprisals.

Tanzanian President John Magufuli has continually played down the seriousness of the virus even as neighbouring countries shut borders and implemented curfews and lockdowns. — AFP

US plans re-entry
in UN rights panel

Finds authoritarian rulers leading UNHRC

Washington, Feb. 8: Announcing the new approach from Washington, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the pullout in June 2018 “did nothing to encourage meaningful change, but instead created a vacuum of US leadership, which countries with authoritarian agendas have used to their advantage.”

“The Biden administration has recommitted the United States to a foreign policy centered on democracy, human rights, and equality,” he said in a statement. “Effective use of multilateral tools is an important element of that vision.”

The decision is likely to draw criticism from conservative lawmakers and many in the pro-Israel community, who have derided the council and echoed Trump administration complaints that it was too quick to overlook abuses by autocratic regimes and governments and even accept them as members.

Blinken said President Joe Biden had instructed the State Department to “reengage immediately and robustly” with the council, but he acknowledged it still needs work.

“We recognise that the Human Rights Council is a flawed body, in need of reform to its agenda, membership, and focus, including its disproportionate focus on Israel,” he said.

Blinken said the council, when it works well, “shines a spotlight on

Impeachment trial
of Trump today

Washington, Feb. 8: Donald Trump's historic second impeachment trial is opening this week with a sense of urgency — by Democrats who want to hold the former president accountable for the violent US Capitol siege and Republicans who want it over as fast as possible.

Scheduled to begin on Tuesday, just over a month since the deadly riot, the proceedings are expected to diverge from the lengthy, complicated trial that resulted in Trump's acquittal a year ago on charges that he privately pressured Ukraine to dig up dirt on a Democratic rival, Joe Biden, now the president. This time, Trump's Jan. 6 rally cry to “fight like hell” and the storming of the Capitol played out for the world to see. While Trump very well could be acquitted again, the trial could be over in half the time.

Details of the proceedings are still being negotiated by the Senate leaders, with the duration of opening arguments, senators' questions and deliberations all up for debate.

So far, it appears there will be few witnesses called, as the prosecutors and defense attorneys speak directly to senators who have been sworn to deliver “impartial justice” as jurors. Most are also witnesses to the siege, having fled for safety that day as the rioters broke into the Capitol and temporarily halted the electoral count certifying Biden's victory.

Defense attorneys for Trump declined a request for him to testify. Holed up at his Mar-a-Lago club, Florida, the former president was silenced on Twitter without comments since leaving the White House. — AP

countries with the worst human rights records and can serve as an important forum for those fighting injustice and tyranny.”

“To address the council's deficiencies and ensure it lives up to its mandate, the United States must be at the table using the full weight of our diplomatic leadership,” he added.

Trump pulled out of the council due to its disproportionate focus on Israel, which has received by far the largest number of critical council resolutions against any country, and because it failed to meet an extensive list of reforms demanded by then-US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley. — AP

No jury in Hong Kong's
1st national security trial

Hong Kong, Feb. 8: Hong Kong has decided against using a jury for the first trial under a sweeping national security law imposed by Beijing, a legal source with direct knowledge of the case said on Monday.

Secretary for Justice Teresa Cheng informed the defendant's legal team in early February, citing “the personal safety of jurors and their family members”, the source said.

Instead the trial will be heard by three judges who have been appointed to try national security cases.

A Department of Justice spokesperson declined to comment when asked because proceedings were ongoing.

The spokesperson for the judiciary also declined to comment “on individual cases”.

Trial by jury has been used by Hong Kong's common law legal system for 176 years and is described by the city's own justice department as one of the judiciary's “most important features”.

But the new national security law — which was imposed by fiat last June — allows for trials to be heard by dedicated national security judges in some circumstances.

The first person to face trial is Tong Ying-kit, a 23-year-old man arrested the day after the law came into effect for allegedly driving his motorbike into a crowd of police officers while flying a protest flag.

Currently on remand, he is charged with terrorism and inciting secession — two new national security crimes — and faces up to life in prison if convicted.

His case is being handled by the High Court's Court of First Instance, where trials are usually heard by a judge alongside seven to nine jurors.

According to the legal source, the Secretary for Justice invoked Article 46 of the national security law, which states three instances where juries can be scrapped for national security crimes.

They are protecting state secrets, cases involving foreign forces and protecting the personal safety of jurors and their families.

Hong Kong's Bar Association had previously raised concerns about that provision.

“The right to trial by jury can be taken away by the Secretary for Justice on certain grounds without any residual discretion in this regard being left with the courts,” the association said shortly after the law was published. The legal source said Tong's defence team were considering their next step.

“The only possible way to fight is via judicial review,” the source said.

Hong Kong's internationally respected legal system has come under sustained pressure in the politically charged wake of 2019's huge pro-democracy protests and Beijing's subsequent crackdown. — AFP

CHINA BLOCKS
UNCENSORED
CLUBHOUSE APP

Beijing, Feb. 8: A rare uncensored app that had attracted Chinese internet users to freely discuss taboo topics, including the mass detention of Uighurs, democracy protests in Hong Kong and the concept of Taiwanese independence appeared to have been blocked on Monday night.

Authoritarian China deploys a vast and sophisticated surveillance state to scrub the internet of dissent and prevent citizens from accessing international social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter in what is often known as the “Great Firewall”.

But the Clubhouse app had for a brief while side-stepped the censors and drawn crowds of Chinese internet users — but appeared to quickly fall foul of the censors. The American invite-only audio app allows users to listen and participate in loosely moderated live conversations in digital “rooms”.

And in recent days, Chinese online users have filled those rooms discussing highly censored subjects — such as Beijing's sweeping incarceration of mostly Muslim minority Uighur communities in the far western Xinjiang region. — AFP

SOCIAL | CONNECTION

Kim Beom-su, worth \$9.4 billion is founder of KakaoTalk

Korean billionaire to donate his wealth

Seoul, Feb. 8: One of South Korea's wealthiest people, the billionaire founder of the country's biggest mobile messenger operator KakaoTalk, promised on Monday to give away more than half his wealth. The decision by self-made Kim Beom-su, worth around \$9.4 billion, is an unusual one for the world's 12th-largest economy, where business is dominated by sprawling family-controlled conglomerates.

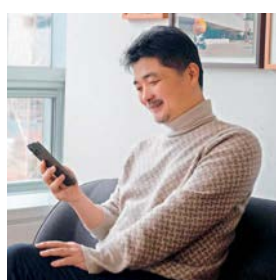
“I have pledged to donate more than half of my assets throughout my life to solve social issues,”

Kim said in a message sent to all of Kakao's employees.

Kakao, founded in 2010, has a range of mobile offerings and its flagship messaging application is installed on more than 90 per cent of phones in South Korea.

Forbes described Kim the nation's “biggest gainers” during the Coronavirus pandemic last year.

His firm benefited from social distancing measures that saw more use of its messaging app, e-commerce platform, and online games.



Kim Beom-su

● **THE PROMISE** to donate more than half of a billion-dollar fortune is at the core of the Giving Pledge, the philanthropic initiative set up by Bill and Melinda Gates, as well as Warren Buffett.

More 200 super-wealthy have signed the pledge, according to its website, but it has struggled to make headway in East Asia, listing only a handful of donors from China,

Hong Kong and Taiwan — and none from Japan or South Korea.

Kim said he was looking to make his pledge official, adding discussions on the details of his donation were “at the early stage”.

“I plan to find and help people that Kakao has difficulty approaching to solve social problems,” he added.

Kakao reported 120 billion won in operating profit in the third quarter, up 103 percent from a year earlier, and is expected to report record yearly profits for 2020. — AFP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	51348.77	1.22
Nifty 50	15115.80	1.28
S&P 500*	3,902.36	0.40
Dollar (₹)	72.96	-0.04
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.04	-0.20
Euro (₹)	87.71	-0.41
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,877▲94	0.20
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	60.34	1.69
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.040	-0.51
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.181	0.011

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Hyundai, Kia say Apple car deal now off

Hyundai Motor Co said it is not now in talks with Apple Inc on autonomous electric cars, just a month after it confirmed early-stage talks with the tech giant, sending the automaker's shares skidding. Wiping \$3 billion off its market value, Hyundai's stock slid 6.2 per cent. Shares in its affiliate Kia Corp, which had been tipped to be the likely operational partner for Apple, tumbled 15 per cent—a \$5.5 billion hit.

NH construction pace in Apr-Dec was 28 km/day



The pace of highway construction during April-December 2020, on an average, was 28 km a day. Total highways constructed across India during the period was 7,767 km, road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari told Rajya Sabha. Of the total 7,767 km, the highest 1,662 km was constructed in Maharashtra at a cost of Rs 6,858 crore followed by 552 km in UP (Rs 1,351 crore) and 495 km in MP (Rs 1,446 crore).

Indian pharma market may hit \$130 bn by 2030

India's pharma industry has proved to be a dependable supplier of quality drugs and is expected to reach a size of \$130 billion by 2030, chemical and fertiliser minister D. V. Sadananda Gowda said at an industry event. "The total market size of the Indian pharma industry is expected to reach \$130 bn by 2030. The medical devices industry has the potential to grow at 28 per cent per annum to reach \$50 bn by 2025," he said.

NMDC Q3 net profit jumps 53% to ₹2,108 crore

NMDC said its consolidated net profit jumped 53 per cent to Rs 2,108 crore for the December quarter against Rs 1,375 crore in the year-ago quarter. Total income rose to Rs 4,461 crore from Rs 3,137 crore. Total expenses during the third quarter stood at Rs 1,650 crore against Rs 1,491 crore. NMDC, India's largest iron ore miner, is also involved in the exploration of minerals like copper, limestone, dolomite and gypsum.

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HCL Tech celebrates \$10-bn revenue with ₹700-cr bonus to staff

New Delhi, Feb. 8: HCL Technologies on Monday announced a special one-time bonus worth over Rs 700 crore for its employees, as the IT giant marked the \$10-billion (about Rs 72,800 crore) revenue milestone. The special bonus will be paid to employees this month—amounting to nearly \$90 million-plus

payroll taxes in some countries, the impact of which is excluded from FY21 Ebit (earnings before interest and taxes) guidance provided by the company last month, HCL Tech said in a statement. HCL Tech said it is "issuing a one-time special bonus to employees around the world" worth over Rs 700 crore in recog-

nition of its recent milestone of crossing the \$10-billion mark in revenue for 2020. "In celebration and gratitude all employees with one year of service or greater will receive a bonus, the equivalent of ten days' salary," the statement said. Despite an unrelenting pandemic, each and every

member of HCL family demonstrated strong commitment and passion, contributing to the growth of the organisation, HCL Technologies' chief human resources officer Apparao V. V. said. "The \$10 billion revenue milestone is a testament of our remarkable resilience as an organisation and the entrepre-

neurial spirit of our 1,59,000 plus employees," Apparao added. HCL Tech said achieving this historic milestone in technology, business and engineering services and software, in just 20 years since its IPO, reflects efforts and consistent achievements of employees, deep relationships with leading compa-

nies across industries and a strong network of partners and stakeholders. The IT services company had posted a 31.1 per cent rise in its December quarter net profit at Rs 3,982 crore, riding on strong momentum in its digital, products and platform segments. It had exuded confidence of clocking further accelera-

tion in bookings in the coming quarters. HCL Tech's revenue grew 6.4 per cent to Rs 19,302 crore in the December quarter from Rs 18,135 crore in the year-ago period, as per US GAAP. The company had recorded revenue growth at 3.5 per cent quarter-on-quarter in constant currency.

■ Bull run takes Sensex above 51000

Nifty crosses 15000-mark

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, FEB. 8



The market continues to make heavy gains post-the Union Budget and closed at new all-time highs on Monday, with the Nifty-50 Index closing above the 15000-mark at 15115.80 with 191 points gain.

The Nifty-50, launched on April 22, 1996, hit the 5000-mark in 2007 and 10000-mark in 2017. The Sensex also, for the first time, closed above 51000 with a 617-points gain at 51348.77.

Global cues were also positive with US market closing in the positive territory on Friday, as US treasury secretary Janet Yellen pushed for the Congress to pass \$1.9 billion stimulus package, and the Asian markets opening in the green, Japan's Nikkei Index closed 2.12 per cent and China's

Shanghai Composite closed 1.03 per cent up. Investors are taking comfort from the world's biggest-ever vaccination campaign. More than 124 million doses have been administered across 73 countries so far. While the vaccination programme in countries like India has just begun, countries like Israel have already inoculated more than one-third of their population with at least one of the two doses, according to a report.

"Indian equity markets continued their positive streak for the 6th day post Union Budget, amidst positive global cues," said Siddhartha Khemka, head-retail research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services. IT, metal and auto sector stocks were top gainers, driven by heavy foreign portfolio investors buying after a strong earnings season. FPIs were net buyers of equities worth Rs 1,876.60 crore, as per provisional data.

INDIAMART CEO BOOKED FOR GOVARDHAN HILL ROCK SALES

Mathura (UP), Feb. 8: Three men, including the CEO of e-commerce site Indiamart, were booked on Sunday for allegedly putting up for sale rocks taken from the Govardhan Hill here, at Rs 5,175 apiece, police said. Govardhan Hill in Mathura is considered a sacred site for Hindus, as it is the setting for many legends relating to the life of Lord Krishna, who is believed to be embodied in the earth of the hill. SP (rural) Shirish Chandra said an FIR has been filed under Section 265 of the IPC and Section 66 of the Information Technology Act against Indiamart founder-CEO Dinesh Agarwal, co-founder Brajesh Agrawal and Mathura-based supplier Ankur Agrawal. The FIR was lodged based on a complaint by Mathura-based social worker. —PTI

HC stays status quo order in Future-Reliance deal

SANGEETHA G with agency inputs CHENNAI, FEB. 8



The Delhi High Court on Monday stayed an earlier order by a single judge asking Future Group to maintain status quo with respect to its Rs 24,713-crore deal with Reliance Retail till the pronouncement of its final order.

A bench of chief justice D. N. Patel and justice Jyoti Singh passed the interim direction on Future Retail's appeal challenging the February 2 order of the single judge. In the February 2 order, Future Retail and all the concerned authorities were directed to maintain status quo with respect to all matters in violation of the order dated October 25, 2020. The single-judge is hearing Amazon's plea seeking enforcement of the October 25, 2020 Emergency Award given by Singapore International Arbitration Centre,

restraining Future Group from going ahead with the deal with Reliance Retail. "Statutory authorities should not be restrained from proceeding in accordance with law on Future-Reliance deal," said the division bench on Monday, referring to bodies like NCLT, CCI and Sebi. It also turned down Amazon's request to suspend Monday's order for a week. However, the bench clarified that it will not come in the way of the final order to be pronounced by the single judge. While asking the respondents to

maintain status quo, the single judge also wanted to file the status report within 10 days of the receipt of the order. The court issued notice to Amazon and sought its stand on FRL's appeal by February 26 when it will commence day-to-day hearing of the matter. In the interim order, the division bench said it was staying the single judge order as firstly, FRL was not a party to the share subscription agreement (SSA) between Amazon and Future Coupons Pvt Ltd (FCPL) and the US e-commerce giant was not a party to the deal between FRL and Reliance Retail. The bench further said it was of the prima facie view that the share holding agreement (SHA) between FRL and FCPL, the SSA between FCPL and Amazon and the deal between FRL and Reliance Retail "are different" and "therefore, the group of companies doctrine cannot be invoked."

Foreign arrival figures fox tourism industry

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 8

Official data shows India received 2.1 lakh foreign tourists in the nine-month period since the lockdown was imposed. Though this is less than 3 per cent of the arrivals in the year-ago period, the industry is still sceptical of the number presented by the government. The country hardly received tourists during the period and the industry assumes that the arrivals could have been for purposes other than tourism.

Between April and December this year, 2,13,853 foreigners had arrived in India. The arrivals had picked up from August when 11,619 people arrived. Since then, arrivals have been steadily growing, going up to 79,910 in December, minister of state for tourism Prahlad Singh Patel replied to a question on foreign tourist arrivals in Parliament. Though the arrivals are 97.2 per cent less than the figure of 77,50,563 during the same period in 2019, the industry believes that

these many foreigners would not have come into the country for travel and tourism. "Except for the Vande Bharat Mission, flights were not operating normally all these months. Monuments and religious places were closed, transportation facilities were not properly available and hotels too were not functioning normally. I don't see any reason to think that these many foreign tourists arrived. Probably, these could be NRIs arriving for religious or family functions like weddings, or foreigners coming for medical or business purposes. Most of these purposes are combined under tourism arrivals," said Iqbal Mulla, chief consul, Global Tourism Council. The government has also initiated a study to understand the job losses and economic losses of the sector. The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) was engaged by the government in January 2021 to conduct the study. "India and the Coronavirus Pandemic: Economic Losses for

Households Engaged in Tourism and Policies for Recovery". "The closure of the travel and tourism industry has had a cascading effect on the livelihood of people dependent on tourism... Since the situation is still evolving, the final impact can only be ascertained in due course," the minister said. The NCAER study will quantify sector-wise and overall loss in income of the economy and of the household sector and also the loss in jobs due to the impact of the pandemic on the tourism sector. It will also propose policy measures to provide relief to the tourism sector, in general, and households involved in tourism related activities, in particular, based on feedback received from various stakeholders. "I am glad that the government has initiated an assessment of the industry situation. Whatever measures are being taken to mitigate the losses have to be done on a war-footing. Procedural delays have to be avoided," said Mulla.

Upstart Dixon surges 824% as CEO bets on phone-making

SARITHA RAI FEB. 8



Sunil Vachani

Almost three decades ago, Sunil Vachani borrowed \$35,000 so he could start making 14-inch television sets in a rented shed outside New Delhi. It was an unconventional choice given India, though renowned for software and services, had long lagged behind in manufacturing. Today, Vachani's startup has grown into a sprawling electronics empire. His Dixon Technologies boasts a market value of more than \$2.5 billion and the capacity to produce about 50 million smartphones this year. It's an early indicator of the country's opportunities in building a sophisticated manufacturing sector, a top priority for PM Narendra Modi. While Vachani, 52, struggled in his early days, his company's shares have surged 824 per cent since a 2017 initial public offering. Sales and profits have boomed with domestic demand for smartphones, along with India's ambitious plans to develop its own local industry. "This is only a start," Vachani said in a telephone interview. "We are

bringing about a mindset change that global manufacturing can happen in India." The founder and his siblings are now in the league of India's billionaire families. Vachani controls a one-third stake worth about \$900 million. Dixon is an example of how quickly India is changing: It has ramped up production capacity from about 2 million smartphones a month last year to about 4 million after a government incentive programme began. "India is well qualified to be the world's alternative to the China supply chain," said P.N. Sudarshan, partner at Deloitte India. "Once component makers move, vibrant manufacturing clusters will form." India lags behind China, making about 330 million

smartphones annually compared with 1.5 billion in China, data from the Indian Cellular Association shows. Vachani comes from an entrepreneurial family. His father and siblings started a business that produced electronics and appliances under the Weston brand. They made the country's first colour televisions and video recorders—and operated a string of video game parlours on the side. After studying business in London, Sunil opted to go his own way in 1993. He started making colour TVs and later added Sega game consoles, Philips video recorders and push-button mobile phones for Bharti Airtel to the portfolio. Dixon's fortunes began to improve in the 2000s, when a regional political party gave the company a contract to make televisions for free distribution. Dixon now makes televisions for Xiaomi Corp, washing machines for LG Electronics Inc and lighting products for Philips. It began producing mobile phones in 2016 for brands like Panasonic Corp and Samsung Electronics Co. —Bloomberg

MADRAS HIGH COURT QUASHES CHARGES AGAINST EX-CFO OF SKS MICROFINANCE



S. Dilli Raj

S. UMAMAHESHWAR HYDERABAD, FEB. 8

Five years after his arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) during its probe into financial irregularities at First Leasing Company of India, the Madras High Court has quashed the prosecution of S. Dilli Raj, a former chief financial officer of Hyderabad-based micro-lender Bharat Financial Inclusion Ltd, under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act. Commenting on the charges levelled against Mr Dilli Raj, a bench of the Madras High Court, comprising Justice P.N. Prakash and Justice V. Sivagnanam, opined that, "We are unable to persuade ourselves to agree with the Enforcement Directorate that the salaries and perquisites that were paid to Dilli Raj while he was in employment with FLCI would amount to proceeds of crime and any property purchased with that would stand tainted." In its charges against Dilli Raj, the ED claimed that "the salaries, performance bonus and other perquisites paid to S. Dilli Raj, as a vice-president of FLCI during his tenure from 1996-2007, were out of bank borrowings fraudulently obtained by FLCI, which are nothing but proceeds of crime. Accordingly, it is found that the above said property is involved in money laundering." Dilli Raj had quit Bharat Financial Inclusion Ltd, formerly SKS Microfinance, after he was arrested by the ED in 2016. He was a key member of the transition team at SKS Microfinance, which reoriented it away from its founder and microfinance sector's erstwhile poster boy Vikram Akula.

CARBON | NEGATIVE DRIVE Teams will have to show a method for capturing 1 tonne CO2 per day

Musk offers \$100 mn prize for removing CO2 from air

AKSHAT RATHI FEB. 8

Elon Musk became the richest person in the world by dramatically improving electric vehicles, pushing forward a technology that reduces carbon-dioxide emissions and slows global warming. Now he's putting \$100 million of that fortune into prizes for technologies to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere itself. The carbon-removal contest will be administered by the Xprize Foundation, a non-profit group that's held competitions to spur technology development to improve space travel, food and health. The new prize,

the largest of its kind, will be backed by a donation from the Musk Foundation, a non-profit founded by the chief executive officer of Tesla Inc and Space Exploration Technologies Corp. "Carbon negativity, not neutrality," Musk said in a statement. "This is not a theoretical competition... Whatever it takes. Time is of the essence." Details of the \$100 million prize for innovators who aid the development of carbon dioxide removal (CDR) technologies were released on Monday, following an initial announcement by Musk on Twitter on January 21. Entries for the prize will



open on Earth Day, celebrated on April 22. Three winners will be named for three separate prizes—\$50 million, \$20 million and \$10 million on the same day in 2025. Conventional carbon capture focuses on removing CO2 from the exhaust

of power plants or factories, then burying the greenhouse gas deep underground to eliminate its contribution to global warming. Today this technology captures about 0.1 per cent of global emissions and it is used in most cases by oil producers or

heavy industry to, in effect, achieve carbon neutrality at a limited number of facilities. But overall reductions in worldwide emissions have been delayed for so long that climate scientists are now convinced of the need for newer technologies that remove CO2 from the air. That's what Musk means by "carbon negativity." Scientists are clear that the world needs to first reduce emissions. But if climate change is to be limited to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, as proposed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's special report published in 2018, then the world may

also need to capture and store as much as 20 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide from the air. That's as much as half of current global CO2 emissions. The 1.5°C threshold is the more ambitious goal under the Paris Agreement, which all countries in the world signed five years ago. Teams entering the Xprize competition to win a portion of Musk's \$100 million will have to demonstrate a method for capturing as much as 1 tonne of CO2 per day as cheaply as possible, while proving to judges that the technology can be scaled up to remove as much as 1 billion tonnes a year. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

US still to decide on Tokyo Games

Tampa: US President Joe Biden said late Sunday it remains to be seen if the US will send a team to the pandemic-postponed Tokyo 2020 Olympics, in a radio interview in which he also weighed in on diversity in sport.

Japan's government, organisers and Olympic officials all insist the Games will go ahead this summer, and that extensive virus countermeasures will ensure the event is safe.

Asked in a Super Bowl half-time radio interview with network Westwood One if he thought the Games would go ahead, Biden said any decision "has to be based on science".

"I hope we can play, I hope it's possible, but it remains to be seen," he said, stressing that Japanese prime minister Yoshihide Suga was "working very hard to be in a position to be able to safely open the games." — *AFP*

AITA lines up 78 events in March

New Delhi: Indian tennis will be buzzing with a lot of activity next month with 78 tournaments, including the pending 2020 National Championships and six ITF tournaments, set to unfold across the country after a halt in action caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

After the 2020 calendar was thrown haywire by the pandemic, the All India Tennis Association is clearing the backlog and has scheduled the men's and women's Nationals from March 15. The other age category Nationals will be played through the month. There will be 45 ranking series events too — 10 Talent series, 3 Championship series and one National series. The ITF events will begin with the men's \$15,000 event in Lucknow and a similar prize money women's event in Delhi from March 1. — *PTI*

Hami signs new deal with Merc

London: Lewis Hamilton has ended his long-running contract saga with Mercedes by signing a new one-year deal, the Formula One team announced on Monday.

The British driver, 36, will be bidding to win an unprecedented eighth world title when the season gets under way in Bahrain next month.

"We have always been aligned with Lewis that we would continue, but the very unusual year we had in 2020 meant it took some time to finish the process," said team principal Toto Wolff, referring to impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

"The story of Mercedes and Lewis has written itself into the history books of our sport over the past eight seasons, and we are hungry to compete and to add more chapters to it," he added. — *AFP*

Mitchell leads Jazz over Pacers

Washington: Donovan Mitchell scored 27 points, passed off 11 assists and grabbed nine rebounds to spark the NBA-best Utah Jazz to their fourth straight victory on Sunday, beating Indiana 103-95. Mitchell matched a career high in assists but just missed a triple double as Utah won for the 15th time in 16 games while the Pacers lost for the fifth time in six starts. "My mind wasn't really on that at the end of the day," Mitchell said of a triple double. "I'm just trying to go out there and find ways to impact the game." — *AFP*

Live on TV

TENNIS

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

CRICKET

India vs England: First Test, Day 5 from 9.20 am on Star Sports 1, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Bengaluru FC vs Mohun Bagan from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

FA Cup: Fifth round — Burnley vs Bournemouth from 11 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD; Manchester United vs West Ham United from 1 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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ASH-TONISHING

Offie Ashwin takes 6/61 as India stage fight back

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR
CHENNAI, FEB. 8

The ebbs and flows of Test cricket make it an intriguing spectacle. The fourth day of the opening Test between India and England was high on drama. The hosts who had begun the penultimate morning with the laborious task of saving the Test worked their way into contention. Chasing 420, India now need 381 runs in 90 overs with nine wickets in hand to cap off one of the greatest comeback wins in Test cricket.

It's not going to be as simple as the equation suggests though. The red-soil surface is expected to deteriorate further on day five and Virat Kohli & Co. would also be mindful of the fact that the highest successful chase on Indian soil was 387, incidentally against the same opposition at the same venue. Can India do it again?

Having lost Rohit Sharma (12) early, India, who were 39 for one at stumps, will resume the proceedings with Shubman Gill (15 not out) and Cheteshwar Pujara (12 not out) in the middle. An enthralling day's play is on the cards with fans hoping for yet another incredible chase much like the recent Brisbane heist.

The day, however, belonged to Chennai boys Washington Sundar and R. Ashwin. An elegant left-handed batsman, Washington showed a lot of maturity, scoring an unbeaten 85 that helped India cut down their first innings deficit to 241. The two TN players put on 80 runs for the seventh wicket. For Washington, it was his second successive Test half-century.

Washington's senior state-mate Ashwin then took on the mantle to put England's second innings plans in disarray. Ashwin's 6/61 — his 28th five-wicket haul and third in as many matches at Chepauk — dismantled Joe Root & Co. for 178. England's second essay fizzled out especially after



R. Ashwin celebrates taking the wicket of England's Dom Bess on Day Four of the first Test in Chennai on Monday. — *BCCI*

going through the motions post-tea. In the morning session, left-arm spinner Jack Leach and pacer James Anderson grabbed two wickets each as England bowled India out for 337, to take a lead of 241 runs.

India made their intentions clear when Kohli tossed the new ball to Ashwin who struck off the innings' first ball to remove Rory Burns with a beauty. Ishant Sharma

completed his landmark 300th when he trapped Dan Lawrence. As wickets fell at regular intervals, England found it difficult to accelerate.

Ashwin who had to slog for 55 overs to take three wickets in first innings on a flat surface bowled with venom.

All-rounder Ben Stokes came a cropper by edging one to the wicket-keeper off Ashwin. Joe Root again top-scored for

England with a brisk knock of 40 (32 balls) before falling prey to the reverse swing of Jasprit Bumrah.

Ollie Pope's wicket at 130 for six — holed out to Rohit Sharma in a bid to reverse sweep Shahbaz Nadeem — changed England's approach on its head. They were in an attacking mindset until Pope departed. By cleaning up Jofra Archer, Ashwin claimed his fifth.

SCORECARD

England 1st Innings: 578
India 1st Innings (overnight 257/6): Rohit Sharma c Buttler b Archer 6; Shubman Gill c Anderson b Archer 29; Cheteshwar Pujara c Rory Burns b Dom Bess 73; Virat Kohli c Ollie Pope b Dom Bess 11; Ajinkya Rahane c Root b Dom Bess 1; Rishabh Pant c Jack Leach b Dom Bess 91; Washington Sundar not out 85; Ravichandran Ashwin c Buttler b Leach 31; Shahbaz Nadeem c Stokes b Leach 0; Ishant Sharma c Pope b Anderson 4; Jasprit Bumrah c Stokes b Anderson 0. Extras (b-4, lb-1, nb-1) 6. **Total (all out in 95.5 overs) 337.**
FoW: 1-19, 2-44, 3-71, 4-73, 5-192, 6-225, 7-305, 8-312, 9-323.

Bowling: James Anderson 16.5-5-46-2, Jofra Archer 21-3-75-2, Ben Stokes 6-1-16-0, Jack Leach 24-5-105-2, Dominic Bess 26-5-76-4, Joe Root 2-0-14-0.
England 2nd Innings: Rory Burns c Rahane b Ashwin 0; Dominic Sibley c Pujara b Ashwin 16; Daniel Lawrence lbw b Ishant 18; Joe Root lbw b Bumrah 40; Ben Stokes c Pant b Ashwin 7; Ollie Pope c Rohit b Nadeem 28; Jos Buttler st Pant b Nadeem 24; Dominic Bess lbw b Ashwin 25; Jofra Archer b Ashwin 5; Jack Leach not out 8; James Anderson c and b Ashwin 0. Extras (nb-7) 7. **Total (all out in 46.3 overs) 178.**
FoW: 1-0, 2-32, 3-58, 4-71, 5-101, 6-130, 7-165, 8-167, 9-178.

Bowling: Ravichandran Ashwin 17.3-2-61-6, Shahbaz Nadeem 15-2-66-2, Ishant Sharma 7-1-24-1, Jasprit Bumrah 6-0-26-1, Washington Sundar 1-0-1-0.

India 2nd Innings: Rohit Sharma b Jack Leach 12; Shubman Gill batting 15; Cheteshwar Pujara batting 12. **Total (for 1 wkt, in 13 overs) 39.**
FoW: 1-25.

Bowling: Jofra Archer 3-2-13-0, Jack Leach 6-1-21-1, James Anderson 2-1-2-0, Dominic Bess 2-0-3-0.

COACH CONFIDENT ENGLAND WOULD BOWL INDIA OUT

AGE CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 8

England have let India crawl back into the game with their inexplicable approach post-tea, but the visiting team's bowling coach Jon Lewis said "they are very much in control of the proceedings."

Set a target of 420, India require 381 runs on final day. Lewis is confident that England would bowl them out. "We are really happy with where we are at and with that many runs on the board, we are ahead of the game. We played some really good cricket and we are confident that we can create enough chances to win the game tomorrow," Lewis said.

When was asked about England's failure to accelerate the run-rate, Lewis said: "I think the guys were positive in the way they played and I do not think it is a straightforward pitch to just go and be reckless... So, in terms of the position in the game, we are really comfortable with where we are at."

Lewis tipped spinner Jack Leach to trouble the Indians and prove to be a match-winner. "He's bowled an absolutely beauty to get Rohit Sharma out. He could walk away with four or five wickets tomorrow and we could win a Test match — I'm pretty sure people won't be talking about Rishabh Pant's first-innings runs if he does that."

Ashwin believes India can pull off a comeback win

AGE CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 8

Off-spinner R. Ashwin who inspired India's fightback on day four of the opening Test against England believes the hosts can pull off a comeback victory.

"If we can have a good fifth day, we will be quite happy to win this Test match. I thought we fought back really well through the course of last two days. Personally when I saw the wicket, I believed it will be a good one to bat but I thought it might go a little more than what happened on the first day. It was really flat and it was like a crucial toss for us, I would say," said Ashwin, who removed England opener Rory Burns off the first ball of the second

NUMBERS GAME

● Ishant Sharma became the sixth Indian and the 35th bowler overall to pick up 300 Test wickets, when he trapped England batsman Dan Lawrence in the second innings of the First Test in Chennai on Monday.

● Former leg-spinner Anil Kumble heads the list with 619 wickets in 132 Tests ahead of Kapil Dev (434 wickets in 131 Tests), Harbhajan Singh (417 wickets in 103 Tests), Ravichandran Ashwin (386 wickets in 75), Zaheer Khan (311 wickets in 92 Tests) and Ishant Sharma (300 wickets in 98 Tests).

— *S. PERVEZ QAISER*

innings.

Ashwin, who bowled his heart out for his three-wicket haul in the first and added six in the

City end 18-yr Anfield hoodoo Four-goal Man City crush Liverpool, Kane stars for Spurs

London, Feb. 8: Manchester City left Liverpool's title defence in tatters as Ilkay Gundogan's double and two costly mistakes from Alisson Becker inspired the Premier League leaders' dazzling 4-1 win, while Harry Kane starred in Tottenham's 2-0 victory against West Bromwich Albion on Sunday.

Inspired by Gundogan's goals and Phil Foden's stylish display, City moved 10 points clear of fourth-placed Liverpool after their first win at Anfield since 2003.

The troubled champions were blown away by Pep Guardiola's side, who became the first team to score four times in a

league game away to Liverpool in 12 years.

City hold a five-point lead over second placed Manchester United and have a game in hand on their local rivals as they eye a third title in four seasons.

They have won 14 successive games in all competitions to equal the record for an English top-flight club, set by Preston in 1892 and Arsenal in 1987.

Liverpool are in disarray after losing three consecutive home league games for the first time since 1963.

KANE BACK IN STYLE

Jose Mourinho admitted Tottenham "depend" on

THE RESULTS

Liverpool (Salah 63-pen)
Manchester City (Gundogan 49, 73, Sterling 76, Foden 83)

Tottenham (Kane 54, Son 58)
West Brom

Wolves
Leicester

Sheffiled United (Rudiger 54-og)
Chelsea (Mount 43, Jorginho 58-pen)

Kane after the Tottenham striker delivered a dominant display on his return

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Djokovic off to fluent start

Melbourne, Feb. 8: Novak Djokovic served a reminder of why he's the greatest Australian Open champion in history as he demolished France's Jeremy Chardy in straight sets in round one on Monday.

The eight-time winner's 6-3, 6-1, 6-2 win showed that normal service had resumed at Rod Laver Arena after the year's first Grand Slam was delayed three weeks over the coronavirus.

Serena Williams, Naomi Osaka and Simona Halep also enjoyed convincing wins as the tournament finally got underway in front of limited crowds after a troubled build-up.

"It feels great, so great to see people back in the stadium," Djokovic said. "This is the most I've seen on a tennis court in 12 months."

Form and fitness are highly unpredictable at the Australian Open after the coronavirus wiped out five months of last season and badly disrupted preparations for the first Grand Slam of 2021.

But Djokovic left little doubt about his readiness to pursue a record-extending ninth title in Melbourne, breaking in the first game and completing the victory in 91 minutes.

The Australian Open was postponed to allow players to quarantine and play warm-up events, which were suspended for a day last week after a coronavirus case at a tournament hotel.

After the tortuous build-up, third seed Osaka struck the first serve on the centre

SELECTED RESULTS

Men's singles first round: Stanislav Wawrinka (SUI x17) bt Pedro Sousa (POR) 6-3, 6-2, 6-4; Milos Raonic (CAN x14) bt Federico Coria (ARG) 6-3, 6-3, 6-2; Emil Ruusuvuori (FIN) bt Gael Monfils (FRA x10) 3-6, 6-4, 7-5, 3-6, 6-3; Alexander Zverev (GER x6) bt Marcos Giron (USA) 6-7 (8/10), 7-6 (7/5), 6-3, 6-2; Dominic Thiem (AUT x3) bt Mikhail Kukushkin (KAZ) 7-6 (7/2), 6-2, 6-3; Grigor Dimitrov (BUL x18) bt Marin Cilic (CRO) 6-4, 6-2, 7-6 (7/5).

Women's singles first round: Bianca Andreescu (CAN x8) bt Mihaela Buzarnescu (ROM) 6-2, 4-6, 6-3; Venus Williams (USA) bt Kirsten Flipkens (BEL) 7-5, 6-2; Petra Kvitova (CZE x9) bt Greet Minnen (BEL) 6-3, 6-4; Naomi Osaka (JPN x3) bt Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (RUS) 6-1, 6-2; Serena Williams (USA x10) bt Laura Siegemund (GER) 6-1, 6-1; Simona Halep (ROM x2) bt Lizette Cabrera (AUS) 6-2, 6-1.

court against Russia's Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova and strode just 68 minutes later as a 6-1, 6-2 winner.

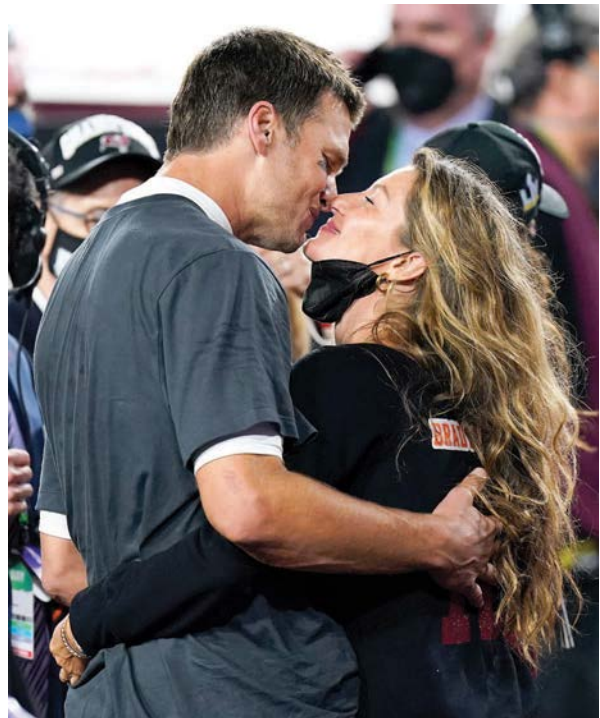
VINTAGE SERENA

Williams started her quest for a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title in style with a 6-1, 6-1 romp past Germany's Laura Siegemund in 56 minutes.

"This was a good start, it was vintage Serena," said the 39-year-old, turning heads in a brightly coloured, one-legged catsuit.

Later, the 2019 US Open champion Bianca Andreescu won an emotional first match after 15 months out against Romania's Mihaela Buzarnescu 6-2, 4-6, 6-3.

— *AFP*



Tampa Bay Buccaneers quarterback Tom Brady kisses wife and supermodel Gisele Bundchen after defeating the Kansas City Chiefs in the NFL Super Bowl 55 football game in Tampa, USA, on Sunday. The Buccaneers beat the Chiefs 31-9 to win the Super Bowl. — *AP*

Brady's 'special' 7 in Super Bowl

Tampa (USA), Feb. 8: Tom Brady refused to rank his record seventh Super Bowl crown on Sunday after the Tampa Bay Buccaneers' stunning upset of the Kansas City Chiefs.

The 43-year-old Buccaneers quarterback confounded the odds once more by leading Tampa Bay to a 31-9 victory less than a year after ending his two-decade career with the New England Patriots.

The win, which came 19 years after Brady's first Super Bowl triumph with the Patriots in 2002, has been hailed as the quarterback's greatest achievement. But Brady was merely content to look back on what he called an "amazing" season.

"They're all special in their own way," Brady said of his Super Bowl wins. "It's been an amazing year. Just really proud of all the guys, all the coaches, the effort we put in."

"We knew we were playing a great football team tonight and we got the job done. If you get this far you've got to get the job done."

The Bucs' victory capped

a remarkable run through the playoffs which saw the team account for three of the game's greatest quarterbacks in consecutive games.

A road victory over Drew Brees and the New Orleans Saints last month was followed by an NFC Championship defeat of Aaron Rodgers and the Green Bay Packers at Lambeau Field.

Brady saluted the work of the Bucs defence, which on Sunday shut down Patrick Mahomes and restricted the Chiefs to just nine points.

"They stepped up to the challenge," Brady said, adding, "You go up against a guy like Pat, an incredible player, Aaron (Rodgers) two weeks ago, the MVP, they played incredible. Before that against Drew (Brees) they played great. They stepped up and rose to the occasion against extremely talented offenses. Just so happy they all came to play tonight."

Brady also praised the contributions of tight end Rob Gronkowski and Antonio Brown. — *AFP*