





## SHORT TAKES

## Over 9K get vaccine shots, turnout 50%

**New Delhi:** More than 9,200 healthcare workers received Covid-19 vaccine shots in Delhi on Friday in the third week of the inoculation drive, with a turnout of more than 50 per cent. Sources said vaccination will now begin for frontline workers too from Saturday onwards. Frontline workers include, police, civil defence staff, DJB and electricity department employees, among others. Also, the number of scheduled days, from initially being four days — Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday — have now been extended to six days a week, Monday-Saturday, they said. After a sluggish start since the exercise was kicked off January 16, the inoculation drive had picked up pace in the last several days. The targeted number for vaccination on February 5 was 18,400, officials said. On the previous day of the vaccination drive, 9,494 healthcare workers had got the jabs.

## Riots case: Elderly granted bail by HC

**New Delhi:** The Delhi high court has granted bail to a 63-year-old man, arrested for allegedly pelting stones and instigating rioters to attack people during the communal violence in north east Delhi in February last year, noting that there was no video footage or photograph on record to establish his presence at the spot of the incident. The high court said the chargesheet has already been filed in the case and investigation is complete, so no purpose would be served in keeping accused Liyakat Ali behind bars. The petitioner (Ali) is a 63 years old man. Admittedly, no electronic evidence like CCTV footage or video-graphy or photograph has been placed on record to establish petitioner's presence at the spot at the time of the alleged incident, Justice Suresh Kumar Kait said. — PTI

## 'Extend parole of prisoners above 65'

**New Delhi:** An advocate has written a letter to the Chief Justice of the Delhi high court seeking extension of emergency parole of prisoners who are above the age of 65 years and prone to Covid-19 infection due to some ailments and medical conditions. The lawyer, in his letter sent to Chief Justice D.N. Patel through electronic mode, said social distancing is not feasible and possible in jails here as they are already overcrowded and the prisons have been extremely affected by the pandemic. Advocate and social activist Amit Sahni said he has come to know that the jail authorities have been asking prisoners, who were earlier released on emergency parole, to surrender at Mandoli Jail with effect from February 7, and they will be quarantined for certain period before being shifted to the concerned jails.

## 'BUDGET SUMS UP DETERMINATION OF RESURGENT INDIA'

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 5

The Union Budget, methodically presented by Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, sums up the grit and determination of a resurgent India, braving out of the Covid crisis to rewrite the aspirations of 1.3 billion Indians. The Budget reflects the focus of the government under the astute leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasising that India will surge ahead, out of the shadow of the pandemic. The Budget 2021 is built on the premise that India will rebuild itself, with instrumentality of self-reliance, infrastructure investment, and innovation. On the health and wellness front, in addition to the National Health Mission, a new scheme, PM Atma Nirbhar Swasth Bharat Yojana, with an outlay of ₹64,180 crore to be spent over six years, will strengthen the foundation of healthy India at the primary, secondary, and tertiary level. The provision of ₹2.25 lakh crore towards health for FY22 is a marked jump up from its historical levels. The Swachh Bharat Mission, with an outlay of ₹1.41 lakh crore, to be spent over five years, is equally a much needed basic urban living requirement.

## Elderly couple is found dead after party in Greater Noida

Audio recording of elderly woman recovered ■ Guests at party primary suspects

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NOIDA, FEB. 5

An elderly couple was found dead at their residence in Greater Noida in Uttar Pradesh on Friday with the police suspecting that they were murdered by some acquaintances after a house party, according to officials.

The body of Suman Nath, aged around 65, was found inside the house, while that of her husband Narendra Nath, around 70, was recovered from the basement of the building, a senior officer said.

Greater Noida deputy commissioner of police Rajesh Kumar Singh said the incident took place in Alpha 2 sector and police teams and forensic experts were inspecting

▶ An audio recording of the elderly woman had also been recovered in which she is in conversation with her son-in-law

▶ She tells him that a party is underway where guests are drinking and eating although I had asked them not to do so

the site. "Prima facie, it appears that some people had been invited over to the house for a party where they had consumed liquor. Glasses, liquor bottle, chowmein, momos and cigarette stubs have been found from the house," Mr Singh said.

The family members of the deceased have also raised suspicion over involvement of people who had come to the house for the party, he said.

Multiple police teams have been formed for investigation in the case, the officer said.

DCP Singh added that the couple was into money lending and the family members suspect that some borrowers could also be involved in the killing.

"Initial probe suggests no signs of struggle during the entry of the unidentified suspects. It appears the door of the house was opened by the couple and suspects

known to them had a normal entry," the deputy commissioner of police said.

An audio recording of the elderly woman had also been recovered in which she is in conversation with her son-in-law. She tells him that a party is underway on the lower floor of the house where the guests are drinking and eating although I had asked them against doing it, the officer said.

Certainly the guests at the party are primary suspects and the police will unearth the whole case soon, the deputy commissioner of police said, adding an FIR was being lodged at the local Beta 2 sector police station and further proceedings being carried out.



Deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia visit Government Girls Senior Secondary School in Gandhinagar in new Delhi on Friday. — G.N. JHA

## Sisodia visits school, sees if Covid norms being followed

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 5

Deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia visited a government school in Gandhinagar area and reviewed the Covid-19 protocols being followed there after schools in the national capital reopened for classes 9 and 11 on Friday.

"We had to take the decision of reopening schools now. We cannot wait for zero coronavirus case day because by then a lot of damage would be caused to our children's studies.

"If students follow the protocols strictly, school life will also become normal," Mr Sisodia, who also holds the education portfolio, said during the interaction with students at the school.

The Delhi government earlier allowed all schools in the national capital to reopen for Classes 10 and 12 from January 18 in view of the board exams.

"Fifteen days ago the schools were opened for class 10 and 12 students. I am happy that our class 9 and 11 students have also rejoined the schools. I can see their happy faces. It is a challenge to open schools during the pandemic, but we have accepted it," Mr Sisodia added.

**New Delhi, Feb. 5:** The Delhi government on Friday reduced the circle rates of residential, commercial and industrial properties by 20 per cent for the next six months, making it "substantially" cheaper for people to buy real estate in the national capital.

The decision was taken in a Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

The CM hoped that the step will help in giving a boost to the economy post the Covid-19 pandemic.

**While we are slowly recovering from the economic contraction in the post-Covid era, it is the duty of our govt to take all steps to further reduce the financial burden on the common man**

— Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi chief minister

"While we are slowly recovering from the economic contraction in the post-Covid era, it is the duty of our government to take all steps to further reduce the financial bur-

den on the common man," he said.

The decision is expected to make it "substantially cheaper" for people to do property transactions, revive the real estate sec-

■ Police to write to Google to know 'toolkit' IP address

## Chakka jam: Cops tighten security at border points

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 5

Ahead of the "chakka jam" proposed by farmers, the Delhi police has made adequate security arrangements at the borders so that miscreants cannot enter the national capital.

Meanwhile, investigating the 'toolkit document' uploaded on a social media handle, which the Delhi police believes scripted the January 26 violence in the national capital, the police is now writing to Google to know the IP address from where the 'toolkit' was uploaded.

Delhi police commissioner S.N. Shrivastava also held a meeting with the senior officials of the force and reviewed the security arrangements. The police will also be monitoring the content on the social media to keep a watch on those spreading rumours against the force.

"In view of the violence that took place on January 26, adequate security arrangements have been put in place by the Delhi police at the borders so that miscreants are not able to enter the national capital. Police teams are monitoring content on the social media to make sure rumours are not spread against the police. The protestors are camping at the borders of Delhi. We are in touch with the police force of other states also," said Chinmoy Biswal, the public relation officer (PRO) of Delhi police.

"To prevent any kind of law and order situation and disruption of normal life during the 'chakka jam,' adequate forces are



Makeshift barricade with barbed wires at the Singhu border in New Delhi on Friday during the ongoing farmers' agitation against the farm laws. — PTI

▶ THE POLICE will also be monitoring the content on the social media to keep a watch on those spreading rumours against the force

being deployed across the Outer North district. The police has a very high security arrangement at Singhu at present but for Saturday the police is strengthening it at the border," said a senior police official.

"Forces are deployed at all important points in the entire Outer North district of Delhi police as a preventative measure to ensure that traffic and normal life is not affected and also to ensure that there is no law and order situation or unauthorised 'chakka jam' being done by violating the norms," he said.

Talking about the security arrangement in East district, DCP (East district) Deepak Yadav said that the protesting farmers have said that they will not enter the national

capital, but still as a precautionary measure, the police has made adequate security arrangements to maintain law and order.

"Adequate police presence will be in place at all important points and junctions across the district. There will be additional deployment of pickets at all the border points. All vehicles will be checked thoroughly at the entry and exit points of pickets and borders. Additional buses have already been taken and extra barricades are being put up at the picket points across the city," said the DCP.

Another senior police official from East district of Delhi police said that as a precautionary measure iron nails studded on the roads have also been repositioned behind the barricades at the Ghazipur border, another protest site.

Farmer unions, on Monday, had announced a countrywide "chakka jam" on February 6.

## AAP govt cuts circle rates by 20% in all areas

Buying real estate to be 'substantially' cheaper for next 6 mnts ■ Decision taken at Cabinet meet

**New Delhi, Feb. 5:** The Delhi government on Friday reduced the circle rates of residential, commercial and industrial properties by 20 per cent for the next six months, making it "substantially" cheaper for people to buy real estate in the national capital.

The decision was taken in a Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

The CM hoped that the step will help in giving a boost to the economy post the Covid-19 pandemic.

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"While we are slowly recovering from the economic contraction in the post-Covid era, it is the duty of our government to take all steps to further reduce the financial bur-

den on the common man," he said.

The decision is expected to make it "substantially cheaper" for people to do property transactions, revive the real estate sec-

tor which has been hit severely by the corona pandemic and create new jobs, he said.

The circle rates related to residential, commercial and industrial properties in Delhi have been reduced by flat 20 per cent across all categories of colonies and areas till September 30, 2021, a government statement said.

Deputy CM Manish Sisodia said the move will be a "big relief" for people willing to buy property and a major boost for real estate sector.

"A big decision by Hon CM @ArvindKejriwal. Circle Rates of Residential/Commercial/Industrial Properties in Delhi reduced by 20% across all categories for next 6 months. This would be a big relief for people willing to buy property and a big boost up for Real estate sector," Mr Sisodia tweeted.

Revenue minister Kailash Gahlot said the lowering of circle rates will encourage more people to transact in real estate and avoid the stagnation in the sector. — PTI

## AAP govt floats tender to set up 100 EV charging stations

**New Delhi, Feb. 5:** The Delhi government on Friday floated a tender to set up 100 charging stations for electric vehicles across the city.

The tender, which is largest in the country for setting up charging stations, has been floated by Delhi Transco Limited (DTL), Power Minister Satyendar Jain said at a press conference.

Each station will have five charging points, making it a total of 500 such points. The charging stations will be set up within a year, Jain said.

There will be a mandate for minimum 20 per cent

slow chargers and 10 per cent fast chargers at these charging stations to cater to all kinds of EVs. Majority of these sites will be at Metro stations and DTC bus depots, he said.

Under the electric vehicle policy of the Delhi government launched in August last year, electric vehicles are targeted to comprise 25 per cent of the total vehicle registrations in the city.

Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday launched the "Switch Delhi" campaign for promoting adoption of electric vehicles and replace

petrol and diesel driven ones that are one of main sources of pollution in Delhi.

Industry leaders have hailed Delhi government's "Switch Delhi" campaign, said a city government statement.

Delhi transport minister Kailash Gahlot, in a virtual address at the global event organised by World Bank and WRI Ross Centre, had on Thursday detailed the electric vehicle (EV) policy at a global summit and said the Delhi government has aimed to set up charging stations within every 3 kms distance in the city. — PTI



BJP president J.P. Nadda interacts with party MP Pradeep Choudhary during the ongoing Budget Session at Parliament House in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

## JeM worker arrested at IGI after deportation from Qatar

**Srinagar, Feb. 5:** A most-wanted overground worker of the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) terrorist outfit was arrested on Friday at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi after his deportation from Qatar, the police said.

Muneeb Ahmad Sofi, a resident of the Bijbehara area in south Kashmir's Anantnag district, was arrested by a police team from Kulgam district, the police said on Twitter.

Sofi was a militant associate or overground worker (OGW) for Pakistani militant Waleed Bhai who was killed in an

encounter with security forces in Kulgam last year.

"Today a police party from Kulgam has arrested a most wanted terrorist associate, namely Muneeb Ahmad Sofi... linked with proscribed terrorist outfit JeM from Indira Gandhi International Airport New Delhi after his deportation from Qatar, a police spokesman said.

He said Sofi was involved in a case registered under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act regarding collection of funds for the terror outfit JeM. — PTI

## SC not to hear plea against WhatsApp policy

**New Delhi, Feb. 5:** The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain a plea which had sought a direction to instant messaging platform WhatsApp to roll back its new privacy policy on grounds that it is allegedly violative of laws and can impact the country's security.

A bench headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde observed that this issue is already being heard by the Delhi high court and the petitioner can choose the suitable remedy there.

The counsel appearing for the petitioner sought permission to withdraw the plea with liberty to approach the high court.

"Vivek Sood, senior counsel appearing for the petitioner prays for withdrawal of this petition with liberty to approach the high court of Delhi. Prayer is allowed. Accordingly, the writ petition is dismissed as withdrawn with the liberty aforesaid," said the bench, also comprising justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian.

The apex court was hearing a plea filed by the Confederation of All India Traders which had sought a direction to the Centre to intervene in the matter and frame guidelines to govern large technology-based companies such as

▶ THE COUNSEL appearing for the petitioner sought permission to withdraw the plea with liberty to approach the high court

WhatsApp Inc., Facebook Inc. and Facebook India Online Services Private Limited.

The petition, filed through advocate Vivek Narayan Sharma, had said that the public interest litigation (PIL) was necessitated due to the alleged failure of the Centre in carrying out its constitutional duty and responsibility to protect the rights to privacy and freedom of speech and

expression of the citizens of India.

"The respondent No.1 — Union of India — has granted permission to respondent nos 2 to 4 to run the WhatsApp application in India, but has failed to play the role of a guardian to protect the fundamental rights of citizens in as much as WhatsApp, which is rendering essential public services by enabling citizens to communicate, has recently imposed unconstitutional privacy conditions which are not only violative of the law but can impact the national security of the country," it had claimed.

"On January 4, 2021, WhatsApp introduced its new privacy policy through which it scrapped its 'opt-out policy' and from now on, users will have to compulsorily consent to share their data with Facebook and its group companies for using the platform. The new policy will come into effect from February 8, 2021," the plea had said.

The petitioner had alleged that the updated privacy policy of WhatsApp would adversely impact the citizens' fundamental right to privacy and is also fundamentally opposed to their representation. — PTI



## SHORT TAKES

## Cong gives support to 'chakka jam'

**New Delhi:** The Congress on Friday extended support to the countrywide "chakka jam" called by farmer unions on February 6, saying party workers will stand shoulder to shoulder with farmers in their protest. The Congress also hit out at Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar, who defended the three new farm laws and criticised the Opposition while speaking in Rajya Sabha. Whatever the agriculture minister said was "not only totally bereft of facts" but also "grossly objectionable", the party claimed. Farmer unions on Monday had announced 'chakka jam' on February 6 when they would block national and state highways for three hours in protest against the internet ban in areas near their agitation sites, harassment allegedly meted out to them by authorities, and other issues. Congress leader K.C. Venugopal said the party fully supports the farmers' movement. — PTI

## Court seeks report on Kangana's case

**Mumbai:** A magistrate court in Mumbai on Friday directed the police to submit a progress report on the inquiry it had ordered into a complaint against actor Kangana Ranaut and her sister for posting alleged hateful messages on social media. On Friday when the matter came up for hearing, the Amboli police sought further time to file their report on the complaint filed by advocate Ali Kaashif Khan Deshmukh alleging that the sisters tweeted hateful contents against a particular community. Initially the magistrate in Andheri had ordered an inquiry in October, 2020 and asked the police to file their report by December 5, 2020 into the sisters' tweets from April 2020, but the police sought more time to complete the inquiry. Even though the magistrate had given a final chance to file their report during the last hearing on January 5, the police sought further time on Friday.

## Hostels in varsities to be named Matoshree

**Mumbai:** Maharashtra minister Uday Samant on Friday said upcoming student hostels in state-run universities will be named "Matoshree" and the existing ones may also be renamed. "Matoshree" happens to be the name of Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's residence in suburban Bandra here. Speaking to reporters, the minister for higher and technical education said he will be exploring the possibility of renaming the existing hostels as 'Matoshree, as these facilities offer students shelter like their own mothers. "All the upcoming hostels on campuses of state-run universities will be named 'Matoshree'. I will also explore the possibility of giving the same name to the existing facilities," Mr Samant said. — PTI

## 2,000KG PICKLES DONATED TO TIRUMALA SHRINE

**Tirupati:** An unusual offering of two tonnes of pickles was made by a devotee to the shrine of Lord Venkateswara at Tirumala, near here, on Friday, an official of the temple said. After offering worship at the temple, the devotee Kaaturi Ramu from Chirravuru village in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh handed over the pickles to TTD (Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam) Board chairman YV Subba Reddy at the temple-run pilgrims free meal canteen, the official told PTI. Different varieties of vegetable pickles, including mango, lemon, tomato, and gongura were packed in plastic canisters, the official said. Ramu requested the TTD to utilise pickles at the canteen where over a lakh meals were served daily to the visiting devotees. Meanwhile, a TTD press release said the foundation stone would be laid on February 13 for the construction of a replica of the temple of Goddess Padmavathi to be built by the TTD in Chennai. The foundation stone would be laid by the seer of Kanchi Kamakota Peetham Vijayendra Saraswati, the release quoted the TTD Board chairman as saying. — PTI

## Major farmers' meet in UP, RLD slams 'strong arm tactics'

**Noida (UP), Feb. 5:** Thousands of farmers turned up for a meeting in Shamli district in western Uttar Pradesh on Friday amid a growing clamour against the Centre's agri-marketing laws in the region.

People from Shamli and nearby districts started reaching Shamli's Bhainswal village on tractors, two- and four-wheelers and on foot for a 'kisan panchayat' being held there by the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD).

The people gathered there despite the Shamli administration denying permission for the meeting and imposing prohibitory orders under section 144 of the CrPc.

This is the fourth major farmers' meeting in western Uttar Pradesh after Muzaffarnagar, Mathura and Baghpat, besides some in Haryana, to support the ongoing stir against the farm laws.

Scores of regional khap leaders, Bharatiya Kisan Union members and RLD vice-president Jayant Chaudhary, among others, attended the event, even as security personnel were deployed in large number in the area.

Asserting that farmers will not settle for anything less than the repeal of the new farm laws, Mr Chaudhary said the government's "strong arm tactics" will not work against the tillers and the nails being laid on roads for them would turn out to be the nails in the "political coffin" of the BJP.

The RLD leader alleged that the current leadership of the country is far removed from sentiments and is not perturbed by riots, deaths or big agitations as it is "cocooned" in its own bubble. "It is a totalitarian administration. They are not even listening to their own political people on the ground. If you speak to BJP MLAs or MPs off the record, they are not happy and they can feel the angst rising in the people of India, in the common man who voted for (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi," the former MP said. — PTI

## Major fire at Mumbai scrapyard



Clouds of smoke rises in the sky after a major fire broke out in a warehouse at Mankhurd in Mumbai on Friday in which a 40-year-old fire brigade officer suffered minor injuries during the firefighting operation. The fire broke out in Mandala, a slum-dominated area in the eastern suburb, where several things like plastic objects, tins and wooden material were kept. It was tagged a 'level-3' (major) fire, a fire brigade official said.

— PTI

## NIA fails to find farmers' stir links to Sikh outfit

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 5

An initial probe by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has failed to establish any link between a case registered against banned outfit Sikh For Justice and funding of the ongoing farmers' agitation. NIA has issued summons to 40 people, mostly from Punjab, including some farmer union leaders for the SFJ case to ascertain whether there it had any links with the ongoing agitation also.

Sources claimed that during the initial investigations conducted by the NIA has so far not revealed any direct connection between subversive elements and transfer of funds to the ongoing farmer agitation who have been camping at Tikri, Singhu and Ghazipur borders for the last more than two months.

Among the 40 people whom the NIA had issued notice included some farmer leaders also in addition to some Punjab based businessmen and others. Though some did

## Shivraj, Nath hold closed-door meet

RABINDRA NATH  
CHOUDHURY  
BHOPAL, FEB. 5

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Friday held a closed-door meeting with his predecessor and veteran Congress leader Kamal Nath here sparking speculations on 'track 2 talks' to end the impasse over the ongoing farmers' stir. The one-to-one meeting, held in the Chief Minister's official residence here, lasted about 20 minutes. Neither the Chief Minister nor Nath spoke to the media to detail what transpired in the meeting. Congress spokesman here Narendra Saluja,

not turn for questioning by NIA, others were interrogated by the investigating agency.

Multiple agencies, including NIA and

farmers' agitation. NIA had registered a case against the SFJ on December 15 where it alleged that large amounts of funds being collected by Khalistani terrorist outfits are being sent through NGOs to pro-Khalistani elements based in India. The FIR said designated terrorists such as Gurbatwant Singh Pannun, Paramjeet Singh Pamma, Hardeep Singh Nijjar and others spearheaded campaigns to collect huge funds for on-ground campaign and propaganda against the government of India that includes staging demonstrations against Indian missions in the US, the UK, Canada and Germany.

"Though our primary investigation was against the SFJ, we were examining some other aspects also. But so far there is no direct link between farmers and subversive elements operating from abroad. But this is an ongoing investigation and nothing can be ruled out in the coming days," a senior investigating official remarked.

Enforcement Directorate, are conducting detailed investigations into the possibility of foreign funding and entry of subversive elements into the

## 'Deploy only Central forces for Bengal poll'

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 5

A BJP delegation on Friday urged the Election Commission to deploy only Central Armed Police Forces for the West Bengal assembly polls to ensure "fairness, dignity and sanctity of the process." Alleging that the state's police and administrative machineries do not exhibit much confidence about their "non-political or bi-partisan conduct," the party demanded that central observers should oversee them and should have the final say in the electoral process.

The delegation, including BJP national general secretary Bhubender Yadav, party's West Bengal chief Dilip Ghosh, MPs Swapna Dasgupta, Locket Chatterjee and Arjun Singh, besides leaders Om Pathak and Sanjay Mayukh, conveyed their apprehensions about the possible misuse of the provision that

allows people with disability and voters above 80 years of age to cast their votes by postal ballots. The party suggested that instead they should be given special facilities at polling booths.

The EC had come out with this provision last year following the outbreak of Covid-19.

The memorandum submitted by the BJP noted that active Covid-19 cases are declining in the country at an accelerated rate with their numbers merely 1.52 per cent of the total caseload. India has also launched the world's largest inoculation drive against the infection, it said.

This has led to the home ministry permitting all activities, including social, religious, sports, entertainment, educational and cultural activities, the memorandum stated.

The Assembly polls in West Bengal are expected to be held in the month of April and May.

## Centre to give 1 more chance to UPSC aspirants

**New Delhi, Feb. 5:** The Centre on Friday told the Supreme Court that it is agreeable to give an extra chance as a one-time relaxation to UPSC civil service aspirants, who had appeared in their last attempt in the 2020 exam amid the Covid-19 pandemic and are otherwise not age-barred.

"Relaxation, only to the extent of providing one extra attempt for Civil Service Examination (CSE), specifically limited to CSE-2021, may be granted to only those candidates who appeared for CSE-2020 as their last permissible attempt and are otherwise not age-barred from appearing in CSE-2021," the Centre told a bench headed by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar.

In a note filed in the apex court, the Centre said that no relaxation shall be granted for CSE-2021 to those candidates who have not exhausted their permissible number of attempts or to those who are otherwise age-barred from appearing in CSE-2021 as per the prescribed age limits of different categories, or to any other candidate for any other reason whatsoever.

"This relaxation for the candidates and to the extent as prescribed above, shall be a one-time relaxation only and shall apply only for appearing in CSE-2021 and shall not be treated as a precedent," it told the bench, also comprising Justice Dinesh Maheshwari.

The Centre said that the relaxation "shall not create any vested right whatsoever or any other purported right on ground of

THE CENTRE said that no relaxation shall be granted for CSE-2021 to those candidates who have not exhausted their permissible number of attempts or to those who are otherwise age-barred from appearing in CSE-2021

parity or otherwise, in favour of any other set/class of candidates at any time in the future."

"As per the suggestion of this court, the Union of India is agreeable for the following ex-gratia, one-time, restricted relaxation to be granted to the prospective candidates, subject to the same being part of a consent order, disposing off the petition," the note, filed by Additional Solicitor General S.V. Raju, said.

The bench told Raju to circulate the note and asked the petitioners to file their responses to it. The top court said it would hear the matter on February 8.

The bench is hearing a plea seeking grant of one more chance in the UPSC's civil services exam to those aspirants who could not appear in their last attempt in 2020 due to the pandemic.

On February 1, the Centre had told the top court that it cannot grant an extra chance to civil services aspirants who could not appear or prepare well for their last attempt in the UPSC civil service exam in 2020 due to the pandemic, while reiterating that it would amount to extending "differential treatment" to similarly placed candidates. — PTI

## Now, Jai Shri Ram chants greet Didi as she tables budget

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA, FEB. 5

West Bengal BJP MLAs shouted "Jai Shri Ram" and "Goru Chor" (cattle thief) slogans at chief minister Mamata Banerjee, leading to huge chaos and disruption in the Assembly Friday as the Trinamul supremo, in a first during two terms as CM, rose to table the state budget — a vote on account in a poll-bound state — in the absence of finance minister Amit Mitra, who is ailing.

Without losing her cool, Ms Banerjee calmly braved the ruckus by BJP MLAs before they walked out, becoming the second CM after Jyoti Basu to present the budget. This was boycotted by Congress and Left MLAs.

This was the second time in two weeks Ms Banerjee was greeted with the "Jai Shri Ram" slogan, after the Parakram Diwas celebration on January 23 when she, feeling insulted, refused to address the audience in the PM's presence at Victoria Memorial.

The BJP MLAs' unruly behaviour came even after Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar stated to "... authorise Hon'ble Chief Minister, Government of West Bengal Ms Mamata Banerjee, to perform the duties relating to the presentation of Annual Financial Statement of the government of West Bengal for the year 2021-2022 and motion for vote on Account and also the



Mamata Banerjee

presentation of supplementary estimates for the year 2020-2021 and other matters pertaining thereto in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly on and from February 5, 2021."

He also tweeted, "Authorisation imparted in consequence of communications emanating from Dr Amit Mitra, Finance Minister @MamataOfficial and Hon'ble Speaker of the Assembly." As the CM started reading out the budget, the BJP MLAs headed by their Assembly leader Manoj Tigga, objecting to her role, disrupted her address by raising slogans while going to the well of the House.

An angry CM complained to Speaker Biman Banerjee. Trying to pacify the BJP MLAs, Mr Banerjee warned them, "Please hold your respective seats. Otherwise, I have to be very harsh. I do not want to take any harsh action. The governor has authorised the CM. I do not understand why you do not know or learn the law. You are unnecessarily shouting. You have no agenda here.

## BOTTOM LINE

## New testbed will help make accurate thunderstorm predictions

## Odisha to host India's 1st lightning research centre

AKSHAYA KUMAR  
SAHOO  
BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 5

India's first thunderstorm and lightning research testbed will come up at Balasore in Odisha. This was informed by meteorological department (IMD) director general Dr Mrutyunjay Mohapatra on Friday.

Speaking to reporters in Delhi, Dr Mohapatra said that the state has been recording high casualties due to lightning strikes. The new testbed will help make accurate predictions on thunderstorm



Mrutyunjay Mohapatra

and lightning strikes and thereby save thousands of precious lives.

The proposed facility on thunderstorm and lightning prediction will be the first of its kind research centre in India.

WEST BENGAL, Odisha, Jharkhand and Bihar witness thunderstorms and lightning strikes during April to June. A lot of human casualties are reported in such thunderstorms and lightning.

The centre will provide the latest information on lightning and thunderstorms in Odisha.

"Several states, including Odisha, West Bengal, Jharkhand, and Bihar witness thunderstorms and lightning strikes during April to June. A lot of human casualties are

reported in such thunderstorms and lightning. To save precious lives, there is a need to undertake research so that early information can be disseminated," said Dr Mohapatra.

"The lifespan of a thunderstorm ranges between half an hour and three hours and it is limited to a particular area. To predict accurately, we need to analyse data and improve numerical model systems. Nor'westers in these regions are formed in Bihar and Jharkhand and subsequently travel through Odisha and West

Bengal. Their intensity increases as they get moisture from the Bay of Bengal," said the IMD DG.

"The thunderstorm testbed will be set up in North Odisha and it will have automated weather stations, radar, wind profilers, and other latest equipment. A detailed project report is being prepared and assistance from the Centre and Odisha government will be sought.

"IIT Bhubaneswar, IIT Kharagpur, and other academic and research centres will also assist in the project," he added.

**EAST DELHI MUNICIPAL CORPORATION**

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
**Self-declaration of East Delhi Municipal Corporation as 'Garbage-Free City 3-Star'**

The general public and all concerned are informed that in connection with the self-declaration of the East Delhi Municipal Corporation Zone as "Garbage-Free City 3-Star", all the residents of East Delhi were given the opportunity to lodge their suggestions and objections etc. at the East Delhi Municipal Corporation, and all the suggestions and objections etc. received from them have been properly addressed by the East Delhi Municipal Corporation. In this regard, various programmes of publicity and public awareness are also being carried out. Accordingly, the East Delhi Municipal Corporation Zone is self-declared as 'Garbage-Free City 3-Star'.

In case any person is found dumping garbage in the open, a punitive action will be taken against him.

**Executive Engineer**  
**P.I.U. / Central Store**

**RO NO - 83/DP/EAST/2020-21**  
EDMC's Citizens Helpline No. 155303



## SHORT TAKES

## 3 LeT associates held in J&amp;K district

**Srinagar:** Security forces have arrested three militant associates of the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) outfit in Bandipora district of Jammu and Kashmir, the police said on Friday. Acting on specific input, security forces apprehended three militant associates linked with LeT in the Rakhi Hajin area of the north Kashmir district, a police spokesman said. He identified them as Bashir Ahmed Mir, a resident of Rakhi Hajin; Irfan Ahmad Bhat alias Ifa, a resident of Bonikhan Mohalla Hajin and Hilal Ahmad Parray, a resident of Parray Mohalla Hajin. The spokesman said as per police records, the three were involved in providing shelter, logistic and other support to active militants in Sumbal and Hajin areas. Incriminating material, including three live hand grenades, an AK-47 magazine and 21 AK-rounds, was seized from their possession, he said. A case has been registered. — PTI

## Rajasthan BJP MLA booked for rape

**Udaipur:** A BJP MLA in Rajasthan's Udaipur has been booked for allegedly raping a woman on the pretext of marriage. The FIR against Gogunda MLA Pratap Lal Bheel (52) was registered at Sukher police station on Thursday. The medical examination of the victim, who is aged around 35 years, was conducted and statements were recorded yesterday (Thursday), SP Udaipur Rajeev Pachar said. The case was referred to the CID for investigation, he added. The victim is from Madhya Pradesh and has alleged that the MLA promised to marry her and then raped her on several occasions. They belong to the same community and have been in touch for a few years, another police officer said. The MLA was not available for comment. — PTI

## SDM, driver held for taking bribe

**Barmer, Rajasthan:** A subdivisional magistrate (SDM) and his driver were arrested for allegedly taking a bribe of Rs 10,000 in Barmer district of Rajasthan Friday, an anti-corruption bureau official said. SDM of Gudamalani in Barmer district Sunil Kumar had demanded the bribe from a man for help in some official work. "After verification of the complaint, a trap was laid and the accused was held while accepting the bribe through his driver Durgaram," the official said. Kumar, an officer of the Rajasthan Administrative Service (RAS), and his driver were arrested under the Prevention of Corruption Act. After the arrests, a search was conducted at the SDM's residence and other premises, the official added. — PTI

## U.P. SAND MINING CASE: 3 EX-BABUS TO BE QUESTIONED

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 5

Days after conducting searches at the premises of senior Samajwadi Party (SP) leader and former mining Uttar Pradesh minister Gayatri Prajapati, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is all set to question three retired senior bureaucrats in connection with its ongoing investigation into the alleged illegal sand mining scam in the state. According to sources these former bureaucrats allegedly played crucial role in the scam. While refusing to divulge the identity of the retired public servants, sources said former bureaucrats will also be confronted with the SP leader and his sons during interrogation. "The agency will soon issue summons to them (retired public servants) for questioning. Their statements will be recorded under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)", sources said adding sons of former minister were in constant touch with these bureaucrats. Investigation by the Enforcement Directorate has already revealed that sons of the former minister, who is accused in a rape case, allegedly sold off some of his assets to garner funds for influencing key witnesses of the case apart from personal gains, sources said.

## Forest guard in MP shot dead by poachers

Slain forester shoots video of attack on his mobile phone before his death

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY  
BHOPAL, FEB. 5



Madanlal Verma

In a rare display of courage, a forest guard on patrolling duty took on the suspected poachers in a Madhya Pradesh jungle "single-handedly" and shot a video of the attack on his cellphone before he was shot dead by them.

Madanlal Verma (52), a forest guard posted in Ratanpur beat of Punjapur forest range in Dewas district, was found dead on the bank of a water body inside the jungle on the intervening night of Thursday and Friday.

The forest guard was on patrolling duty in Ratanpur beat forest area on Thursday afternoon but failed to return home till the late evening after which forest officials launched a search for him.

A team of forest officials were sent to locate him in the jungle and they found his body on the bank of the water body. His mobile phone was found near his body.

When forest officials checked his cellphone they a video clip of the attack by the suspected poachers and his subsequent death.

"We have recovered the footage of the video of the attack on him. The video was shot by the slain forest guard himself in his cellphone. However, the accused were not captured in the video", Dewas divisional forest officer P.N. Mishra said.

The victim's kin will be provided with a special allowance of ₹10 lakh and a job on compassionate grounds as per government rules, Mr Mishra added.

An initial probe has

revealed the victim had confronted his assailants, who fired at him from a country-made weapon, the police said.

He was also heard in the video asking the poachers to surrender while chasing them on his motorcycle. He was also heard in the video clip challenging the alleged poachers to open fire on him after perhaps noticing his killers brandishing the firearm.

Then the sound of a firearm was heard in the video as he fell down from his motorcycle.

"The accused were yet to be identified. A task force of the forest department has begun a probe into the incident," spokesman of state forest department here said.

The police has also started an investigation into the case.

Police suspect poachers or timber mafia members were behind the killing of Madanlal Verma in the Punjapur reserve forest on Thursday. This was the second killing of a forest guard in the Madhya Pradesh jungle in the last 10 months.

A forest guard, Rana, was shot dead by poachers in Ghatigaon wildlife sanctuary in Gwalior district 10 months back.

"More than 25 assaults on forest officials by poachers in the forests of MP have been reported in the last 10 months", a senior forest officer said.

## India vaccinates close to 53 lakh beneficiaries till date

## Pfizer pulls out of vaccine race

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
with agency inputs  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 6

Vaccine firm Pfizer on Friday announced its decision to withdraw its application for Emergency Use Authorisation (EUA) of its Covid-19 vaccination in India.

Pfizer was the first pharmaceutical firm to seek an emergency use authorisation from the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) for its Covid-19 vaccine in the country, after it secured such clearance in the UK and Bahrain.

"In pursuance of the Emergency Use Authorisation of its Covid-19 vaccine, Pfizer participated in the Subject Expert



A medic inoculates a dose of Covid-19 vaccine to district magistrate Abhishek Prakash in Lucknow. — PTI

Committee meeting of the Drug Regulatory Authority of India on February 3. Based on the deliberations at the meeting and our understanding of

additional information that the regulator may need, the company has decided to withdraw its application at this time," a company spokesperson

## Thousands join mahapanchayat

■ Continued from Page 1

on the ground of the "unruly behaviour" of the farmers during the Republic Day tractor rally and "violation of Covid guidelines" by protesters. The administration even imposed Section 144 CrPC prohibiting the gathering of more than four persons from February 4 till April 3. Despite the ban, a large number of people joined the mahapanchayat, where songs imploring the PM to listen to the voice of farmers played in the background. Chants of "Inquilab Zindabad" were also raised by farmers who walked or drove to the venue on tractors.

"We are saying in one voice, if anyone raises a lathi to the farmer, we will crush that finger. Let's take a decision today if this government is not hearing you out, you do the same in next year's election," RLD leader Jayant Chaudhary said.

After Section 144 was imposed to ban large gatherings, Mr Chaudhary tweeted on Thursday: "144 reasons why I will go to Shamli tomorrow!"

Addressing the gathering, Mr Chaudhary accused the

BJP of hatching a conspiracy for the Republic Day violence. "The Delhi police chose to remain a mute spectator to the acts of vandalism by rowdy elements on January 26 in Delhi."

Mr Chaudhary also accused the Centre of treading the path of rigidity and arrogance. He advised the Narendra Modi government not to make it a prestige issue and repeal the laws.

At another mahapanchayat in Dausa, a resolution seeking repeal of the three farm laws and withdrawal of cases filed against farmers for the Republic Day was passed. The resolution also sought compensation for the families of farmers who died during the protests which started in November last year.

Addressing the mahapanchayat, former Rajasthan deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot said: "While making these laws, none of the state governments or farmers' organisations were consulted. The Government of India claims these farm laws are in the interest of the farmers but they are being opposed across the country.

The farmers are protesting in a Gandhian manner, but the way barricades were put up and electricity and water supply discontinued, it is unjustified."

Yet another mahapanchayat was held at Sirsa in Haryana, where Indian National Lok Dal's Abhay Chautala, who recently quit as an MLA in support of the farmers, addressed the meeting.

Several mahapanchayats have been held over the past few weeks across UP and Haryana in support of the farmers' agitation against the new farm laws. The recent mahapanchayats in UP's Bhagpat and Haryana's Jind were also attended by thousands of farmers.

Mr Tikait, who has planned a series of meetings across UP till February 18, is scheduled to address a mahapanchayat in Dadri's Charkhi village on Sunday. The three khaps of Dadri district — Sangwan, Phogat and Sheoran — have socially boycotted Haryana deputy CM Dushyant Chautala, Bhiwani-Mahendergarh MP Dharambir Singh and former Dadri MLA Rajdeep Phogat.

## After month in jail, comic Faruqui gets bail from SC

**New Delhi, Feb. 5:** In a relief to comedian Munawar Faruqui, arrested in a case for allegedly hurting religious sentiments by passing objectionable remarks about Hindu deities during a show, the Supreme Court on Friday released him on an interim bail.

The court also stayed the Madhya Pradesh high court order of January 28, which had refused to grant him bail noting that to "promote harmony" is one of the constitutional duties.

It also stayed the production warrant issued against Faruqui by a trial court in Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh in connection with the FIR lodged in the state.

A bench of Justices R.F. Nariman and B.R. Gavai said issued notice on two petitions filed by Faruqui seeking bail in a case lodged in Indore in Madhya Pradesh and quashing of FIRs lodged for the same alleged offence in different states. The top court sought response from Madhya Pradesh government on both the pleas filed by Faruqui and from Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Maharashtra governments on the plea seeking quashing of FIRs.

This being the case, we issue notice in both the petitions, and stay the Judgment of the High Court. The petitioner is released on ad-interim bail on conditions to the satisfaction of the trial court. In the meantime, there shall be stay of the production warrants as well, the bench said.

At the outset, advocate Saurabh Kirpal, appearing for Faruqui said, This is a case of victimisation. He said that allegations made in the FIR are vague in nature and procedure of arrest laid down by the court in its 2014 verdict was not followed. — PTI

## 4G Internet services back in J&amp;K

High-speed mobile Net services across UTs restored after 18 months

YUSUF JAMEEL  
SRINAGAR, FEB. 5

High-speed 4G Internet services were restored in entire Jammu and Kashmir late Friday evening, exactly after a gap of 18 months.

The authorities said that the decision to this effect was taken after the review of the security situation in the Union Territory and in view of the recommendations of a committee set up by the government to look into the issue some time ago.

The announcement was made by principal secretary, information, Rohit Kansal, who is also government spokesperson, through a tweet. It said, "4G mobile Internet services being restored in entire J&K @diprjk"

A formal order signed by Shaleen Kabba, principal



J&K lieutenant-governor Manoj Sinha interacts with the Republic Day contingents NCC cadets from J&K and Ladakh at Civil Secretariat in Jammu on Friday. — PTI

secretary (home), said that in view of the advice of the special committee constituted on the directive of Supreme Court and upon "careful review" of the overall security scenario the restrictions on mobile data services and fixed-line Internet connectivity is revoked "except to

the extent that the prepaid SIM cardholders shall be provided excess to the Internet connectivity only after verification as per the norms applicable for post-paid connections".

In August last year, the J&K authorities had restored high-speed 4G Internet service on "experi-

mental basis" in two districts of the erstwhile state-Udhampur and Ganderbal, more than a year after a complete communication blackout was enforced in both Jammu region and Kashmir Valley regions ahead of the Centre's abrogating Article 370 and bifurcating the state into two Union Territories on August 5, 2019.

Though the landline and mobile phone and 2G bandwidth Internet services were restored in a phased manner across what is now called the UT of J&K earlier, 18 out of 20 of its districts continued to be deprived of the high-speed 4G Internet.

A series of judgments given and observations made by the SC in the past had failed to end what the critics called was J&K's "digital siege".

## Govt to induct 30 more pvt sector experts on key posts

■ Usually, the posts of joint secy and director are manned by officers selected through the civil services exam & other tests conducted by UPSC

**New Delhi, Feb. 5:** In a major move, the Centre has decided to induct 30 more private sector specialists into different government departments at the crucial decision-making level of Joint Secretaries and Directors.

The personnel ministry had in June 2018 invited applications for ten joint secretary-rank posts through lateral entry, considered an ambitious step by the Modi government to bring fresh talent in the bureaucracy.

The lateral entry mode relates to the appointment of specialists from the private sector in government organisations.

Usually, the posts of joint secretary and director are manned by officers selected through the civil services examination and other tests conducted by the UPSC and other organisations.

The UPSC has issued advertisements seeking applications from talented

and motivated Indian nationals against 30 posts three of joint secretary and 27 at the level of directors in different government departments.

As per the requisitions received from the department of personnel & training (DoP&T), government of India, talented and motivated Indian nationals willing to contribute towards nation building are being invited to join the government at the level of joint secretary on contract basis in the ministry of commerce & industry, department of revenue, ministry of finance and ministry of agriculture & farmers welfare, a statement issued by the personnel ministry said.

Private sector individu-

als would be appointed at the level of director on contract basis in the ministry of commerce & industry, department of financial services, department of economic affairs, ministry of agriculture & farmers welfare, ministry of law & justice, department of school education & literacy, department of higher education, ministry of consumer affairs, food & public distribution, ministry of health & family welfare, ministry of road transport & highways, ministry of jal shakti, ministry of civil aviation and in the ministry of skill development and entrepreneurship, it said.

Candidates with a minimum of 15 years experience for joint secretary and 10 years experience for director level posts are eligible to apply, the UPSC said in an advertisement.

Central government employees are not eligible to apply for these posts, it said. — PTI

## 174 docs, 116 nurses, 199 health staff have died due to Covid: Govt

**New Delhi, Feb. 5:** A total of 174 doctors, 116 nurses and 199 healthcare workers have died due to Covid-19 in the country, the government informed Lok Sabha on Friday citing data from states received under an insurance scheme.

In written reply to a question, Union minister of state for health Ashwini Choubey said that duly implementing a series of containment measures including lockdown and promotion of Covid-19 appropriate behaviours, India has been able to successfully manage and blunt the aggressive progression of the virus.

Elaborating on the measures taken to contain the pandemic, the minister said dedicated health infrastructure

focused on Covid-19 was identified and earmarked to manage surge in cases. "Based on the intimations received from the states under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package: Insurance Scheme for Health Workers fighting Covid-19, 174 doctors, 116 nurses and 199 healthcare workers have died due to this pandemic as on February 2," the minister said.

As on February 3, there are 15,17,506 isolation beds and 79,385 ICU beds with 40,311 ventilators available in the country, he said. "As of now the case per million and death per million in the country are 7,719 and 111, respectively which is much lower compared to the status in many developed countries also," he said. — PTI

## Retail investors now allowed to buy govt bonds

■ Continued from Page 1

allow the direct entry of small investors in the government debt market, while the United States and Brazil allow indirect entry, Mr Das said.

Finding inflation within the tolerance band, the RBI projected 10.5 per cent real GDP growth for FY22 — in the range of 26.2 to 8.3 per cent in H1 and 6.0 per cent in Q3. Also, Consumer Price Index inflation has been revised to 5.2 per cent for Q4 of FY21 from 5.8 per cent predicted earlier. CPI inflation could come down to 4.3 per cent by Q3 of FY22.

"After breaching the upper tolerance threshold continuously since June 2020, CPI inflation moved below six per cent in December for the first time in the post-lockdown period," Mr Das said.

To support growth, the RBI continued its accommodative stance. The Marginal Standing Facility (MSF) rate and the bank rate were left unchanged at 4.25 per cent. Further, the RBI has decided to gradually restore the Cash Reserve Ratio in two phases in a non-disruptive manner to 3.5 per cent from March 27 and four per cent from May 22, 2021.

## Tomar hits back at Opp.

■ Continued from Page 1

the protest in Parliament, as indulging in "khood ki khethi".

Amid the uproar in Parliament, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a strategy meeting with home minister Amit Shah, parliamentary affairs minister Prahlad Joshi and I&B minister Prakash Javadekar on how to tackle the ongoing protests by the farmers and the Opposition campaign.

Insisting that the protests over farm laws are limited to only "one state (read Punjab)" and that the farmers are being "instigated", Mr Tomar said: "I made it clear that the government is ready to make amendments but it doesn't mean

there is any problem in the farm laws. People in a particular state are misinformed... Farmers are being misled that others would occupy their land if these laws are implemented. Let me know if there is a single provision in the contract farming law which allows any trader to snatch away the land of any farmer," said the minister. In an apparent reference to a booklet released by the Congress recently against the laws, the minister hit back: "The world knows water is required for farming. Only the Congress can do farming using blood." He also said the government had not "defamed" the farmers, as alleged by the Opposition parties.

## Bengal Cong wants alliance with ISF

■ Continued from Page 1

president of the ISF is a Hindu but the person behind the front is a Muslim religious leader named Pirzada Abbas Siddiqui who belongs to the Eminent Religious Family of Furfura Sharif, Hooghly. He is not only popular for his oratory skill among Muslims but among dalits and rribals also. Lakhs of people gather in his meeting in dalit and tribal areas."

The Congress MLA of Chandani in Hooghly told Mrs Gandhi, "So the addition of ISF in the Left-Congress alliance may be a game changer in the ensuing Assembly

elections of West Bengal. I have started unofficial dialogue with them. PCC president has also visited the place of Pirzada Abbas Siddiqui already. He has discussed this issue with me and is seeking my help to resolve the issue because of my personal relation with the family of Prada Abbas Siddiqui since decades. Md. Selim, ex-MP and Politburo member of CPI(M) has also started a discussion with the ISF. If AICC agrees with the arrangement, then we can start dialogue with ISF officially. We are waiting for AICC's consent to make a grand alliance in Bengal."



# THE ASIAN AGE

6 FEBRUARY 2021

## US remarks a wake-up call Delhi can't ignore

The American government's statement on Thursday — in which the right of peaceful protest, free speech, and unhindered access to the Internet were flagged as signs of a "thriving democracy" — is a straightforward response to the egregious steps of the Narendra Modi government in recent days. These are the first substantive public observations on India by the two-week-old Biden administration. The message — in the backdrop of the farmers' agitation in the country, and the comments by journalists and other public figures in that context — accords with the sentiments of millions of Indians, and millions worldwide, who are surprised by the turn of events and processes in India for some time. President Joe Biden's administration has underlined first principles in a neutral, moderate voice. Also, the US state department's cautionary observations — which was reiterated by the US embassy in India — was in response to a question by the American newspaper *The Wall Street Journal*, not off its own bat. This is a useful device suggestive of an official criticism, but not quite.

It will be obvious except to the dense that the present US administration's first public observations on India came immediately after the Narendra Modi government targeted some international icons, including the famous pop star Rihanna, the teen Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg (who is nominated for the Nobel Prize) "and others" for lending support to the farmers' stir (since it is being railroaded by a monstrous government, actions which have drawn considerable domestic criticism).

Through a tweet, the climate activist offered a "toolkit" to back protesters. This is standard mobilising tactic for activists everywhere with the use of "Twitter storm" and the like. Supporters of the ruling party in India do this routinely when playing polarising games at election time.

The so-called "toolkit" has moved the Indian government, including its normally external affairs ministry, and the ruling party, to smell an international "conspiracy", no less, to defame India. This is laughable, of course.

The Delhi Police, frequently a violent and communal force, has filed a FIR against international personalities without naming anyone. This is a fig leaf. It is clear that Ms Rihanna and Ms Thunberg, "and others" (including the US vice-president's lawyer-writer niece Meena Harris), are the principal objects of its ire.

These FIRs — the official call for investigation — by the Delhi police, which is directly controlled by Union home minister Amit Shah, are related to extremely serious criminal offences such as sedition and attempt to cause disharmony as between communities. Before the international celebrities, it had been the turn of journalists in India — last week six well-known editors, in a long string of journalists in recent times, and senior politicians like Shashi Tharoor — to face exactly the same official allegations. The US state department's remarks appear to have this figured.

In its sorry response, the India's external affairs ministry is self-congratulatory, calling India a "vibrant" democracy with "shared values" with the United States. In today's climate, is it? No amount of seeking to falsely equate the January 6 attack on the US Capitol and the January 26 move by infiltrators in the entirely peaceful farmers' movement to create chaos at the Red Fort, hides the ugly reality of our present.

## Don't pardon Rajiv killers

Given the embarrassing task of granting clemency to seven life convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, the Tamil Nadu Governor, Banwarilal Purohit, has ducked the responsibility. He has passed the political football back to the President of India saying he is the appropriate authority to take the call though he may find it difficult to explain why he sat on it for two-and-a-half years before declining to decide. The prisoners for life, some of whose sentences were commuted to life and thus got a reprieve from the gallows, have been languishing in Tamil Nadu prisons for close to three decades. The question that arises is whether they deserve any sympathy.

Mercy may be a quality that is twice blessed, as the Bard of Avon put it, but sympathy for the conspirators of a heinous crime aimed at one who had been Prime Minister of India may be totally misplaced even if some of them may have, innocently or otherwise, contributed very little to the plot like buying a 9-volt battery to complete the circuit to blow up the explosives hidden in the body belt worn by the assassin Dhanu. The plot, hatched by LTTE's murderous chief Velupillai Prabhakaran, seemed to have come straight out of a Frederick Forsyth novel and was carried out on Indian soil near Chennai, killing 18 including Rajiv Gandhi and the assassin and injuring 43 bystanders on May 21, 1991.

Sympathy on humanitarian grounds for the surviving plotters has been built up in the strange political ambience in a state that once viewed a Tamil Eelam in northern Sri Lanka as a desirable outcome. Rajiv Gandhi, confused by a welter of opinions on the Tamils issue, may have erred in judgment in sending a peace keeping force to the island nation and paid the price. No government at the Centre could be seen as weak in pardoning the killers of a Prime Minister. The ball is back with the President even as the top court will continue to grapple with the legal challenges to lifetimes in prison.

### THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani

THE WORLD IS SHRINKING... BUT WE ARE SPENDING MORE TO GO AROUND IT



## Yeh Rihanna-Wihanna, Greta-Vreta... kaun hai?

Shobhaa De



I was in salubrious Goa, desperately trying to dodge zillions of Dilliwallas who have as good as taken over this gorgeous state and established their own "klonies" across favoured villages and hamlets. Poor Goans, I thought to myself. First came the Israelis, then the Russians — and now these! Arpora has become a mini-Gurgaon, and the locals aren't amused. In such a surrealist setting, it was a bit tough for me to focus on a single tweet posted by a Barbados-born singer and the havoc it generated across India. Well, I'm getting carried away — it was Dilli netas and assorted celebrities/influencers who jumped in, and boom! Rihanna went viral. Be honest — how many of you reading this column had even heard of Rihana before this *hungama*? Okay — maybe, you had heard her. And even danced to her tracks, but did Rihanna and what she tweeted impact your life even remotely? No, *na*? I recall enjoying *Under my umbrella*, which brought Rihanna into the global stage way back in 2007. After that, I totally forgot all about her.

Now, I am unlikely to forget! The 32-year-old singer with a staggering 100 million followers on Instagram. No wonder our *netas* got sufficiently *hilaaoed* and obviously rattled, when she had the gumption to tweet in support of our protesting farmers. More than 226.3K retweets followed, with 490.3K users "liking" the tweet. Whoa! What was going on?

*Uske baad*, that opinionated Greta what's-her-face, got into the act and *lagaaoed* her own

tweet. Mayhem followed as all *desi* patriots scrambled to counterattack these impudent folks who had dared to question our official stand on the farmers' protests. People who had absolutely nothing to do with either the farmers or the government, jumped in feet first to damn and attack the global "influencers", accusing them of generating an international conspiracy designed to break up our vast country and hand it over to China! Stumped? So was I ... as it was, the sultry Goan weather had started to play tricks with my mood and thinking (without feni, let me hastily clarify), *upar se*... I was going through *zabardast* tweets posted by super-patriotic Indians, basically asking Rihanna and Co to butt out of India's affairs. Someone brilliant called Sambit Patra (know him?) thundered on a bigoted/compromised television channel: "Why doesn't Rihanna tweet about the 1984 riots?" Excellent question, Shri Patra. But the singer was born in 1988 and Twitter started only in 2006. *Koi baat nahi* — loyalty game fully on, even if the goof-ups are totally embarrassing. So much for credibility. Hot air has its uses when the audience itself is grossly uninformed.

Confession: I am pretty clueless myself. But when I read accounts of two elderly *fauji* farmers (Jeet Singh, 70, and Gurmukh Singh, 80) being picked up by the Delhi police as suspects, charged with an act of violence (FIR No. 31) they were allegedly a part of ... nothing makes sense! Lodged in Tihar Jail, the two men who had served the Army for over two decades in the

same Sikh Regiment, dealing with this strange situation that their traumatised families can do little about. Jeet Singh's son Veer works as a guard. He said: "Our fathers fought for India in their youth. The government has disrespected them by putting such veterans in jail." The two farmers own an acre of farmland each, on which they grow wheat. Today, they are languishing in jail and being called "Khalistanis" and "terrorists". Rihanna sang *Unapologetic* in 2012. You go figure who deserves an apology in this case.

Soon, everybody had jumped in to express their two bits' worth. I saved my *gyaan* and stayed out — savouring grilled calamari at a beach shack seemed a far more worthwhile pursuit. I thought lazily and idly to myself, trying hard not to get distracted by the over-dressed Gurgaon crowd swigging beer at the next table: "Why is everybody frothing at the mouth and dissing Rihanna?" Then I remembered. If VVIP *Bharatwaasis* did not step up publicly and lecture us on our duty as citizens ("call out Rihanna, tell her not to meddle in India's affairs, let the world know we can handle our own internal matters..."), their bag of *sarkari* goodies would be snatched away. The more relevant counter question to all those big names who have passed the patriotic test with flying colours — did

**Perhaps Rihanna does indeed possess remarkable understanding of complicated political, social and cultural issues in distant lands she may never ever set foot in. But the chances are, she goes along with what her PR team places before her.**

even one of them understand the highly complex farmers' problem? Frankly, it beats most analysts. Without getting to the bottom of what is nothing short of an unfortunate impasse at the moment, why ignite more fires? Who is Rihanna to us? Had her tweet been ignored, we would not have attracted even more global scrutiny — it was as if the entire government machinery at the time was busy dealing with a famous foreign entertainer's tweet!

Most super celebrities hire PR teams to manage social media accounts and project a finely calibrated public image. Perhaps Rihanna does indeed possess remarkable understanding of complicated political, social and cultural issues in distant lands she may never ever set foot in (unless the money is good, of course). But the chances are, she goes along with whatever her alert and socially aware PR team places before her. In simple words, it is shrewd brand building. It shows her as a thinking star concerned with humanity. That's it! Yes, a tweet from such an individual does snowball into a bigger controversy, if it catches on — like it did this time. These are the expected repercussions in the age of celebrity — deal with them wisely, as a government. By falling into the trap, we fed the monster and kept the story alive. *Mogambo* is very *naraaz*, okay? Get smart, you guys. Focus on *asli* matters. Rihanna's other hit was titled: "*Bitch, better have my money...*" She has made hers. The "bitch" has delivered. Where does that leave us? Still roping in celebrities to counter Rihanna! Hello! She has moved on, okay? She is probably tweeting about saving endangered dolphins in some remote bay. Such *bewakoofi*, I tell you!

Readers can send feedback to [www.shobhaade.blogspot.com](mailto:www.shobhaade.blogspot.com)

### LETTERS

#### NOT BINDING

The Joe Biden Administration has made its first major diplomatic overture by taking a view on the farmers' agitation in India, coming out in favour of the farm laws as beneficial to the market. It has openly backed the government's move to privatise the agricultural market. This is a setback to the farmers' struggle which had begun to gain moral ground. India is a sovereign country which frees us from other influences in our internal affairs. The United States is free to comment on them, but their view is not binding on the government.

**Divyesh Chovatiya**  
Rajkot

#### OUTMODDED CONCEPT

**SEDITION OUGHT** to be made of sterner stuff. It arises out of demonstrable crime against the State and not merely out of disenchantment with it. It is an anachronism that the notion of freedom of speech being above all liberties should be under siege in this day and age. Free speech, meaning free argument, is at the heart of a self-governing society and cannot be a partisan issue. But sadly in these tide and times, there is a stiff price being set for sponsoring and pursuing freedom of speech. Worse, very few seem prepared to pay for what is the very sap that would nurture the spirit of men, society and nations.

**R. Narayanan**  
Navi Mumbai

#### SANCTIMONIOUS

**THIS REFERS TO** the editorial, "Govt's anti-Twitter rage betrays own uncertainty" (Feb. 5). If the MEA statement's claim that "some vested interest groups" were mobilising international support smacked of paranoia, the fact that a few isolated comments could send the Indian government into a tizzy and lead to a lengthy riposte reflects a siege mentality arising from deep insecurity. The government must not see all criticisms as part of a grand conspiracy against India.

**Sankar Paul**  
Chakdaha, West Bengal

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

Farrukh Dhondy  
Of Cabbages & Kings



"Gratitude is an angel  
With a very short memory.  
Jealousy, a demon  
With a stimulated long one  
Indifference shrugs its shoulders  
In dismissal whenever he  
Encounters a strong emotion  
Condemning it as the wrong one."  
— From the *Opera Bheeda Pareeda*  
Translated from Hungarian by  
Bachchoo

It was a Greek called Aristarchus who in 200 BC first said that the earth was a globe. Galileo was certain of it and in later centuries the Portuguese Magellan added the decisive circumnavigating proof. An early definition of "globalisation" was born. Today "globalisation" means an exchange of culture and trade amongst most if not all nations of the world and it would certainly include the phenomenon of the spread of the Internet to every crook and nanny of the world.

A Marxist definition would concentrate on the international flow and exchange of capital and of labour — with American motor car manufacturing relocating to the Far East and Coca Cola being concocted, bottled and sold

from the Uighar districts of western China.

Its inevitability hasn't led to popularity. There are Canutes who wish to turn back the tide. The most boastful and vociferous of these in recent times was one Donald Trump, whose opposition to globalisation may not have included the conviction that the world was flat (though one can never be sure what neo-troglodytes believe). It certainly included a political programme that attempted to reverse the flow of capital out of, and labour into, the United States of America. It negated international treaties designed to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons and was opposed to global action on climate change.

Britain's political position was paradoxical. On the one hand, Brexit caused the UK to leave one of the planet's largest trading blocs to go it alone, and on the other hand it trumpeted intentions to open Little England to an ambitious programme of international trade, an invitation to capital to come here with the promise of low taxes and Rishi Sunak's free ports, while at the same time stopping the import of even necessary labour. Welcome to "Free port and deport

England" — both policies perpetrated, ironically, by British ministers whose origins are Indian and Indo-African.

Yet now, gentle reader, the most dreadful reminder that the tide of globalisation is upon us is not the rush of refugees from Africa to Europe or the determination of Japanese car manufacturers to relocate to countries where the promise of profit is the greatest. Independent of the will of capital and labour, nature has shown its near-apocalyptic hand. There have been plagues before, and Sars and Ebola did spread from one country to another, but Covid-19 and its menacingly developing variants is, after the very early spread of the ancestors of homo sapiens to all corners of the globe, the first truly fast-moving inhabitant of everywhere.

Earlier plagues hit single countries. Daniel Defoe wrote his *Journal of the Plague Year* as a novel covering events in London 1665. Then Shakespeare, it is said, wrote *Macbeth* and *King Lear* under lockdown in the early years of the seventeenth century. The Internet has alerted me to several literary efforts attempting to capture the ennui, isolation, change in shopping arrangements, etc during today's

Covid lockdowns. No doubt there will be whole novels about what Netflix programmes some scribbler watched, with photographs of the meals they cooked in these dreadful months. I myself have found time to complete two books which have nothing to do with how I spend my time or what I cook but are brilliant fictional... (*I've repeatedly told you that this space is not for your idiotic self-advertisements — Ed. Sorry yaar, iss mushkil vakhth mey thhodee si publicity sey kya farak padtha? — fd*).

The globalist way of looking at these times is to see them as a battle between two species of evolved life — the mutating, deadly coronavirus strains and the scientifically analytical and creative genius of scientists and the ingenuity of political ordering.

The scientific effort of the geneticists, doctors, epidemiologists and others who have not only invented and deployed five developed vaccines, and with many more to come, but have found treatments to alleviate the symptoms of the infected.

The political efforts, subject to all manner of constraints and forces, including crass cronyism — as in Britain where jobs and public funds

are given to Tory friends and supporters — profiteering and fraud are confused and less laudable.

Here, gentle reader, are a couple of shameful statistics:

First: The International Labour Organisation estimates that the plague has cost the workers of the world a loss in earnings of \$3.7 trillion. According to Oxfam, the increase in wealth of the world's top billionaires in ten months of the plague has been \$3.9 trillion.

Next: As of January 23, 39 million people in the so-called "first world" had received an anti-Covid vaccination. The number of people who have been vaccinated in the continent of Africa, excluding South Africa, was 29. Yes, you read that correctly. No, I haven't missed out the words "thousand" or "million". There are reports, since that grim statistic, saying that subsequently other nations have allocated funds to get the vaccines across to Africa.

This isn't about generosity, it's self-preservation in a globalised world in which the enemy species has to be fought and subdued, if not annihilated altogether — through... err... globalisation?





## SHORT TAKES

GAS EXPLOSION  
IN S. GERMANY,  
MANY HURT

Berlin, Feb. 5: Several people were injured in a gas explosion on Friday in or near a building in the southern German town of Memmingen.

The explosion occurred at about 6 am and damaged the building used by the Bavarian Red Cross, which also had apartments above, authorities told the dpa news agency. Five people were injured, one seriously, police said.

The source of the explosion was a defective gas line that ran under the street in front of the building, dpa reported. Authorities warned that other explosions were possible and evacuated the area. The building was seriously damaged, police said.

COPS CHARGE  
PAIR OVER SEX  
SLAVE RING

Brisbane, Australia, Feb. 5: A man and woman in Australia were charged with drugging several women and forcing them into prostitution on Friday, with police alleging girls as young as 17 were tattooed as property and held in "sexual servitude".

A 35-year-old Brisbane man is accused of giving at least four victims "stupefying drugs" and along with a suspected female accomplice faces multiple charges relating to unlawful prostitution.

Police said raids at two properties in Brisbane's southern suburbs uncovered four female victims and authorities believe more have yet to be found.

"The investigation is still ongoing however the women are now safe thanks to the information from members of the public and the diligence of our officers," Queensland Police Service Detective Inspector Juliet Hancock said in a statement.

"We believe there are other victims who have been exploited by the man, and I encourage them to come forward and contact police."

2-YR-OLD INDIAN  
BOY BECOMES  
YOUNGEST DONOR

Dubai, Feb. 5: A two-year-old Indian boy has become one of the youngest donors of hair in the UAE, as part of a charity drive to help cancer patients, according to a media report.

At two years and 10 months, Taksh Jain is one of the youngest children to have enrolled into the Friends of Cancer Patients' (FOCP) hair donation campaign, the Gulf News reported.

His mother, Neha Jain, a housewife, said Taksh was inspired by his older sister, who donated her locks for a similar cause in 2019. "My son used to listen to that and started telling us that he too wanted to give his hair like his sister. I was touched and started growing his hair."

Jain said they are going to wait for Taksh's hair to grow a little longer, before it is finally donated. The FOCP launched the hair donation drive on Thursday, marking World Cancer Day. As of now, seven schools in the UAE are part of the initiative.

TALIBAN ATTACK  
KILLS 10 AFGHAN  
MILITIAMEN

Kunduz, Afghanistan, Feb. 5: At least 10 pro-government Afghan militiamen were killed in fierce overnight fighting after their checkpoint came under attack from Taliban fighters in northern Afghanistan, officials said on Friday.

The attack on the local militia, many of which work with overstretched security forces, came as violence surges across the country despite peace talks between the warring Taliban and Afghan government.

Insurgents attacked the checkpoint in the restive Kunduz province during the night, provincial governor Abdul Sattar Mirzakwal told reporters.

"Their attack was repelled initially but the militiamen were attacked again by Taliban fighters which led to intense fighting," Mirzakwal said.

"Unfortunately, 10 uprising forces (pro-government militiamen) were killed," Kunduz provincial council member Amruddin Wali confirmed the attack but said at least 15 militiamen were killed.

There was no immediate comment from the Taliban.

## Biden ends US role in Yemen war, calls out Russia, China

US Prez also freezes Trump's plans to redeploy troops from Germany

Washington, Feb. 5: President Joe Biden ended US support for Saudi Arabia's devastating war in Yemen and dramatically increased the welcome to refugees, ushering in a major reset in American foreign policy.

In his first major speech on foreign affairs as president, Biden also froze former president Donald Trump's plans to redeploy troops from Germany and vowed a tough approach against what he described as a rising authoritarian threat from China and Russia.

Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris traveled together to the State Department in a symbol of a renewed focus on diplomacy after Trump's tumultuous four years.

"America is back. Diplomacy is back," Biden told a socially distanced auditorium of diplomats.

In a speech shortly afterward, Biden said the United States would end all support including connected arms sales for ally Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen, which he said "has created a humanitarian and strategic catastrophe."

He appointed a US special envoy for Yemen, veteran diplomat Timothy Lenderking, who Biden said would support UN efforts to reach a ceasefire and revive peace talks between the government and Huthi rebels who control much of the country, including the capital Sanaa.

"This war has to end," Biden said.

Saudi Arabia reacted to Biden's speech by reasserting its commitment to a political solution in Yemen, according to state media.

Riyadh also welcomed Biden's "commitment to cooperate with the kingdom to defend its sovereignty and counter threats against it," the official Saudi Press Agency added.

Trump — who argued arms sales were creating US defense jobs — viewed the war as a way to hit back at the Huthis' ally Iran.

Biden backs a return of diplomacy and a nuclear accord with Iran but, strikingly, he only indirectly mentioned Tehran in what was billed as a broad-brush speech on his international priorities.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken also said he will revisit Trump's

## ON AMERICA

Biden said the United States will welcome up to **1,25,000** refugees in the first fiscal year of his administration — far above the record-low 15,000 last approved by Trump, who was a vociferous critic of non-Western immigration.

## ON GERMANY

Putting on hold plans set in motion by Trump to reduce the US troop presence in Germany, a cornerstone of NATO security since the start of the Cold War.

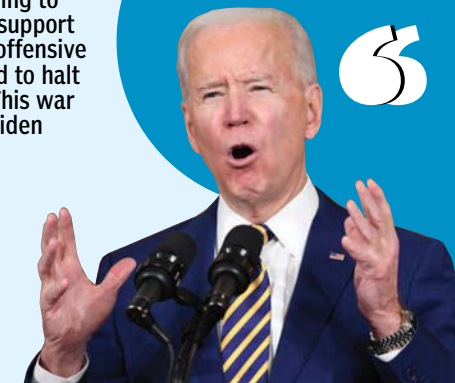
## ON RUSSIA

Biden said that he had warned Vladimir Putin that the US will no longer be "rolling over in the face of Russia's aggressive actions." "We will not hesitate to raise the cost on Russia and defend our vital interest and our people."

## ON YEMEN

US President said that the war in Yemen "has to end", pledging to terminate US support for Saudi-led offensive operations and to halt arms sales. "This war has to end," Biden said.

US will confront 'authoritarianism' of China, Russia



ment to a political solution in Yemen, according to state media.

Riyadh also welcomed Biden's "commitment to cooperate with the kingdom to defend its sovereignty and counter threats against it," the official Saudi Press Agency added.

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Secretary of State Antony Blinken also said he will revisit Trump's

last-minute designation of the Huthis as a terrorist group.

In Yemen, senior political official Hamid Assem voiced hope that Biden's plan will mark the end of a six-year war that has left tens of thousands dead.

"The Biden administration saw that the war in Yemen carries a heavy cost and that America's reputation has been tarnished by the killing of the people of Yemen," he said.

In another sharp reversal, Biden said the United States will welcome up to 1,25,000 refugees in the first fiscal year of his administration — far above the record-low 15,000 last approved by Trump, who was a vociferous critic of non-Western immigration.

"The United States' moral leadership on refugee issues was a point of bipartisan consensus for so many decades when I first got here," said Biden, who was elected to the Senate in 1972.

"We shine the light, the lamp, of liberty on oppressed people. And our example pushed other countries to open wide their doors as well." Among groups seeking asylum, Biden said his administration would welcome LGBTQ people fleeing persecution over their sexual orientation.

Biden also put on hold plans set in motion by Trump to reduce the US troop presence in Germany, a cornerstone of NATO security since the start of the Cold War.

Trump's decision was

seen as linked to his tense relationship with German Chancellor Angela Merkel — whose welcome to mostly Syrian migrants he belittled.

Defense Secretary Austin Lloyd later said he had ordered a Pentagon review of US military "force posture" around the world in consultation with allies.

Biden has pledged to keep up Trump's hard stance on China — but also to toughen the US stance on Russian President Vladimir Putin, for whom the defeated US president voiced admiration.

"I made it clear to President Putin — in a manner very different from my predecessor — that the days of the United States rolling over in the face of Russia's aggressive actions, interfering with our elections, cyber attack and poisoning its citizens are over," Biden said.

Moments before the speech, the State Department said that Blinken spoke by telephone with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and, among other issues, raised the purported poisoning of opposition leader Alexei Navalny — who was arrested last month on his return to Moscow and has inspired thousands to take to the streets.

Biden said the United States "must meet this new moment of advancing authoritarianism including the growing ambitions of China to rival the United States and the determination of Russia to damage and disrupt our democracy."

— AFP



The *USS John S. McCain* (DDG 56) destroyer is moored in a dock at the Yokosuka Naval Base on June 01, 2019 in Yokosuka, Japan.

— AFP file photo

Beijing warns off  
US warship near  
South China Sea

Beijing, Feb. 5: China on Friday warned off a US warship sailing near contested islands in the South China Sea, Beijing said, the first such encounter made public since the inauguration of President Joe Biden.

The USS John S. McCain "broke into China's Xisha territorial waters without the permission of the Chinese government," Beijing's military said in a statement, using its name for the disputed Parcel Islands.

The People's Liberation Army "organized naval and air forces to track, monitor and warn off" the warship, the Chinese military said, blasting the US for "seriously violating China's sovereignty" and "harming regional peace." The Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer on Thursday also conducted a routine transit through the waterway separating the Chinese mainland and Taiwan, which Beijing says constitutes part of its territory.

Washington has argued that such exercises are in line with international law and help defend right of passage through the region amid competing claims by China and other governments.

China lays claim to nearly all of the South China Sea, including the Parcel Islands.

Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam all also claim parts of the region, believed to hold valuable oil and gas deposits.

Further angering those countries, and the US, Beijing has moved to build reefs into artificial islands capable of hosting military planes.

The US navy in late January sent an aircraft carrier group into the South China Sea on a so-called "freedom of navigation exercise," its first routine operation in the region under the Biden administration.

China has stepped up military, diplomatic and economic pressure on Taiwan since the 2016 election of President Tsai Ing-wen, who refuses to accept Beijing's stance that the island is part of "one China."

— AFP

US House strips posts of  
'QAnon Congresswoman'US Senate okays  
\$1.9 tn Covid relief

Washington, Feb. 5: The Democratic-led US House voted on Thursday to discipline a congresswoman who embraced QAnon conspiracy theories and endorsed violence, capping weeks of mounting turmoil over holding to account a lawmaker whose extremist rhetoric caused a rupture in Republican ranks.

Conservative first-term congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene, facing bipartisan opprobrium for a series of disturbing comments and support of social media posts advocating the assassination of Democratic lawmakers, was stripped of her two assignments on the House education and budget committees.

The punishment was meted out in a modestly bipartisan vote of 230 to 199 which occurred hours after Greene, a fierce supporter of former president Donald Trump, took to the House floor to renounce the conspiracy movement and expressed regret for spreading misinformation.

Eleven Republicans defied their party to join all voting Democrats in disciplining Greene, whose alarming actions before she ran for office included posting video of herself harassing a teen school shooting survivor and casting doubt on the September 11, 2001 attacks.

"No member ought to be

permitted to engage in the kind of behavior that Representative Greene has and face zero consequences," number two House Democrat Steny Hoyer told the chamber.

"This vote can be a first step in correcting the error of those who so far have chosen to do nothing."

But Republicans blasted the action against one of their own as shattering congressional precedent,

returns to the House, where it will have to be approved again due to the changes made by the Senate.

Final passage will unlock the next phase in drafting of the virus relief bill, with the work divided among several congressional committees.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer D-N.Y., called passage of the resolution the "first big step to putting our country back on the road to recovery."

By moving on a fast track, the goal for Democrats is to have Covid relief approved by March, when extra unemployment assistance and other pandemic aid expires.

— AP

with members of leadership warning of potential political payback should they regain power.

Number three Republican Liz Cheney, fresh from surviving a challenge to her leadership after she voted to impeach Trump last month, said that while Greene's comments were reprehensible, Democrats "have no business determining which Republicans sit on committees."

— AFP



Indonesian protesters release pigeons during a protest against the military coup in Myanmar, outside the Myanmar Embassy in Jakarta on Friday.

— AFP

## Key Aung San Suu Kyi aide held

Yangon, Feb. 5: A key aide to ousted Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi was arrested on Friday, days after a coup that has sparked outrage and calls by US President Joe Biden for the generals to relinquish power.

The arrest came after the streets of Myanmar's biggest city filled for a third night with people banging pots and honking car horns, voicing their opposition to Monday's coup.

On Friday dozens of teachers at Yangon's Dagon University staged a rally where displayed a three-finger salute bor-

rowed from Hong Kong and Thailand's democracy movements, and sang a popular revolution song.

The military detained de facto leader Suu Kyi and president Win Myint early Monday, ending the country's 10-year dalliance

with democracy that had followed decades of oppressive junta rule.

Win Htein, considered Suu Kyi's right-hand man, was arrested at his daughter's house, said Kyi Toe, a press officer for the National League of Democracy.

The 79-year-old NLD stalwart has spent long stretches in and out for detention for campaigning against military rule.

Ahead of his arrest, Win Htein told local media that the military putsch was "not wise," and that its leaders had taken the country "in the wrong direction".

— AFP

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— AFP

RUSSIA EXPELS EU DIPLOMATS OVER  
NAVALNY ROW, TIES AT 'LOW POINT'

Moscow, Feb. 5: Moscow said on Friday it was expelling diplomats from Poland, Germany and Sweden for participating in unsanctioned demonstrations last month in support of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

The move comes hours after the European Union's top diplomat Josep Borrell met Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Moscow and described the bloc's ties with Russia as at a "low point" over Navalny's jailing.

Borrell "strongly condemned" the action, a spokesman said, while Sweden branded it "com-

pletely unfounded".

The Russian foreign ministry said in a statement that an unspecified number of diplomats from the three EU countries took part in "illegal demonstrations" on January 23 and had been declared persona non grata. "They were ordered to leave Russia in the near future," the ministry said, adding that Moscow expects diplomats from the countries to "strictly follow the norms of international law" in the future.

Russian police have arrested more than 10,000 people at mass demonstrations.

— AFP

## GREEN | PROJECT

Unveils \$43 billion deal, involves 33 different entities

## Korea plans biggest offshore wind farm

Seoul, Feb. 5: A \$43 billion deal was signed Friday to build what the South Korean government said will be the world's biggest offshore wind power complex, as it seeks to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

South Korea has few energy resources of its own and relies on imported coal — a cheap but dirty fuel — for around 40 percent of its electricity.

President Moon Jae-in declared the carbon neutrality goal last year but at the same time is looking to phase out nuclear power,

leaving the country depending on renewables to square the circle.

Moon oversaw the signing of the 48 trillion won (\$43 billion) agreement to build the complex off Sinan in the country's southwest, which he said would be seven times bigger than the world's current largest offshore wind farm.

With a maximum capacity of 8.2 gigawatts, the government is banking on it being the equivalent of six nuclear power stations.

Moon said that the coun-

try's position on the Korean peninsula gave it a geographical advantage.

"We have the infinite potential of offshore wind power to the sea on three sides, and we have the world's best technology in related fields," he added.

The agreement involves

33 different entities, among them regional governments, the electricity generator KEPCO, and major private firms including Doosan Heavy Industries & Construction and SK E&S.

Moon warned it could take more than five years

to start construction, although the government will try to accelerate the process.

Seoul last year announced a target of becoming one of the world's top five offshore wind energy powerhouses by 2030.

South Korea also plans to cut its existing nuclear power plants — currently the country's only significant low-carbon energy source — from 24 to 17 by 2034, reducing the sector's energy output by nearly half.

— AFP



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,731.63	0.23
Nifty 50	14,924.30	0.19
S&P 500*	3,886.96	0.39
Dollar (₹)	72.92	0.06
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.84	0.72
Euro (₹)	87.35	0.14
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,738▼163	0.34
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	59.57	1.24
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.071	-0.05
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.153	0.014

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

Forex reserves jump to record \$590.18 billion

Foreign exchange reserves rose \$4.85 billion to touch a record high of \$590.18 billion in the week ended January 29, according to RBI data. In the previous week ended January 22, the reserves rose by \$1.09 billion to \$585.33 billion. Foreign currency assets rose by \$5.03 billion to \$547.22 billion. The gold reserves declined \$164 million to \$36.29 billion. The SDRs with the IMF were down \$4 million to \$1.51 billion.

Brookfield India Reit gets 8 times subscription



The IPO of Brookfield India Real Estate Investment Trust (Reit) got subscribed 8 times on the final day of subscription on Friday. It received bids for 60,59,44,400 units against 7,62,78,200 units on offer. The category meant for institutional investors was subscribed 4.80 times and those of other investors 11.78 times. Brookfield India hit the capital market with its Reit public issue on Wednesday to raise up to Rs 3,800 crore.

Hero MotoCorp Q3 consolidated PAT rises 14%

The country's largest two-wheeler maker Hero MotoCorp has posted 13.7 per cent rise in its consolidated profit after tax at Rs 1,029.17 crore for the third quarter against Rs 905.13 crore in the year-ago quarter. Revenue from operations rose to Rs 9,827.05 crore from Rs 7,074.86 crore. On a standalone basis, the company reported a 23.17 per cent increase in its PAT at Rs 1,084.47 crore against Rs 880.41 crore.

Paypal to shut payment services within India

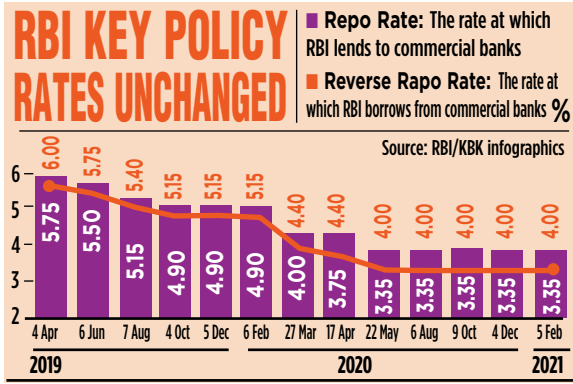
Digital payment solutions provider Paypal said it will stop offering domestic payment services within India from April 1. The US-based firm will instead focus on enabling more international sales for Indian businesses. "We will continue to invest in product development that enables Indian businesses to reach nearly 350 million PayPal consumers worldwide, increase their sales internationally," a PayPal spokesperson said.

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RBI sees growth at 10.5% in FY22, inflation in 5-5.2% range in H1 Rate cut cycle seems over

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 5

In order to revive "durable" growth in the economy, the Reserve Bank of India kept the record low repo and reverse repo rate unchanged while continuing its accommodative stance to ensure enough liquidity in the system. The RBI has also projected a real GDP growth of 10.5 per cent for the next fiscal. The six members of monetary policy committee (MPC), which ended its three-day deliberations on Friday, unanimously voted to leave the policy repo rate unchanged at 4 per cent. The repo rate had been slashed by 115 basis points since late March last year when the pandemic hit the economy. The reverse repo rate stands unchanged at 3.35 per cent. This is the fourth time in a row that the MPC



has decided to keep the policy rate unchanged. "MPC also decided to continue its accommodative stance of monetary policy as long as necessary-at least through the current financial year and into the next year to revive growth on a durable basis and mitigate the impact of Covid-19, while ensuring that inflation remains within the target going forward," RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said. Finding inflation within the tolerance band, the RBI projected 10.5 per cent real GDP growth for 2021-22 in the range of 26.2 to 8.3 per cent in the first half (H1) and 6 per cent in Q3. Consumer Price Index inflation has been revised to 5.2 per cent for January-

March (Q4) of FY21 from 5.8 per cent predicted earlier. CPI inflation could be 5.2 per cent to 5.0 per cent in H1 of FY22 and 4.3 per cent for Q3 of FY22. "After breaching the upper tolerance threshold continuously since June 2020, CPI inflation moved below 6 per cent in December for the first time in the post-lockdown period, supported by favourable base effects and a sharp fall in key vegetable prices," the RBI said. "Today's upbeat policy statements on growth and inflation restate our view that the rate cut cycle is over. Even as headline inflation trends lower, with economic recovery being underway, services gradually starting to open up, and pricing power coming back in some segments, core inflation will likely see some upside pressure

through the year," said Suvodeep Rakshit, vice president and senior economist at Kotak Institutional Equities. Ensuring liquidity, the marginal standing facility (MSF) rate and the bank rate were left unchanged at 4.25 per cent. Further, signalling a rollback of pandemic-era policies, the RBI said it would gradually restore the cash reserve ratio (CRR) in two phases in a non-disruptive manner to 3.5 per cent from March 27 and 4 per cent from May 22, 2021. "CRR normalisation will open up space for a variety of market operations of the RBI to inject additional liquidity," Das said. CRR—the amount of deposits banks must set aside as reserves—of all banks was reduced by 100 basis points to 3 per cent for a period of one year ending on March 26, 2021.

Soon, retail investors can directly buy gilts



Shaktikanta Das RAVI RANJAN PRASAD with agency inputs MUMBAI, FEB. 5

The RBI on Friday announced online access to government securities for retail investors directly through the bank in a path breaking reform. It also sought to ease the worried bond market by extending statutory liquidity ratio (SLR) holdings under the held to maturity (HTM) category for one more year till March 2023. In a major move, the central bank opened an infinite source of lending to the government through the retail bond programme. The RBI said it will allow retail investors to directly buy government debt, making India the first Asian country to do so and among a handful globally. The central bank, tasked with managing Rs 12 lakh crore in government borrowing target next fiscal, hopes the move will allow greater depth to the gilt market in particular and the overall debt market in general, thus deepening the financial markets as lack of depth has been the biggest bane of the domestic debt market all this while. In effect the RBI has opened a long, endless tap

for the government to borrow from—just as is done in the domestic stock market now, with the only difference being this will be under direct watch of the RBI. Currently, the RBI allows small investors to buy government bonds via the Gobid platform on BSE and NSE, but it has not gained any traction. While no country allows a direct retail participation as the RBI has done now, Britain, Brazil and Hungary allow small investors to buy/sell via third-party controls. This is the second major step that the RBI is taking to encourage retail investors to enter the gilt market after it had allowed entry through the stock exchanges a few years back but did not elicit the intended result. Further, the RBI allowed FPIs' investment in defaulted corporate bonds outside the short-term limit set from time to time. "In order to further promote investment by foreign portfolio investors (FPI) in corporate bonds, FPI investment in defaulted corporate bonds will be exempted from the short-term limit and the minimum residual maturity requirement under the Medium-Term Framework," RBI said.

Easier credit for micro units

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 5

Pandemic-hit micro units, which largely rely on informal channels for funds, have something to cheer, as the RBI has incentivised credit flow to new borrowers. In order to reach out to the stressed sectors, banks can now provide funds under the on-tap targeted long-term repo operation (TLTRO) scheme to NBFCs. The Reserve Bank of India also wants to come out with a regulatory framework for the micro lenders. "In order to incentivise new credit flow to the

micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) borrowers, scheduled commercial banks will be allowed to deduct credit disbursed to new MSME borrowers from their net demand and time liabilities (NDTL) for calculation of Cash Reserve Ratio. New MSME borrowers are those who have not availed any credit facilities from the banking system as on January 1, 2021. This exemption will be available for exposures up to Rs 25 lakh per borrower for credit extended up to the fortnight ending October 1, 2021, RBI said.

"Banks can deduct credit disbursed to new MSME borrowers from NDTL, for CRR calculation. This should give a boost to further lending to the MSME sector," said Padmaja Chunduru, MD and CEO, Indian Bank. However, Rs 25 lakh loans are largely meant for micro units and very few of such units have exposure to formal credit system. "The RBI could have been bolder by raising the borrowing limit to Rs 1 crore. This would have helped a lot of small and medium enterprises as well. There are several small and medium enter-

prises which are not eligible for ECLGS scheme as that is meant for only those who have a loan outstanding," said Anil Bhardwaj, secretary general, Federation of Indian MSMEs (Fisime). RBI further finds that supporting revival of activity in specific stressed sectors that have both backward and forward linkages have multiplier effects on growth. For this it has proposed to provide funds from banks under the TLTRO on-tap scheme to non-banking finance companies for incremental lending to the specified stressed sectors.

DEMAND NOW ACTUAL, NOT PENT-UP: DAS

Mumbai, Feb. 5: RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said demand in the economy has moved from being of pent-up nature to actual one, and the momentum is likely to sustain. "Demand has now moved beyond pent-up demand to actual demand coming up. I think the demand curve is expected to be now much more sustained," Das told reporters during the post-policy conference call. He said high-speed indicators are pointing towards a growth in demand. —PTI

Oil nears \$60 on growth hopes and Opec+ cuts

ALEX LAWLER LONDON, FEB. 5

Oil hit its highest in a year on Friday, closing in on \$60 a barrel, supported by economic revival hopes and supply curbs by producer group Opec and its allies. New orders for US-made goods rose more than expected in December, pointing to continued strength in manufacturing. President Joe Biden's drive to enact a \$1.9 trillion coronavirus aid bill also gained momentum on Friday. Brent crude was up 85 cents, or 1.4 per cent, at \$59.69 by 1438 GMT after hitting its highest since February 20 last year at \$59.79. US crude was up \$1.02, or 1.8 per cent, at \$57.25. "The conditions still remain supportive for oil markets," said Jeffrey Halley, an analyst at brokerage Oanda. "Oil should find plenty of willing buyers on any material dip." Brent is on track to rise more than 6 per cent this week. The last time it traded at \$60 a barrel, the

pandemic had yet to take hold, economies were open and people were free to travel, meaning demand for gasoline, diesel and jet fuel was much higher. The rollout of Covid-19 vaccines, however, is fuelling hopes of lockdowns being eased, boosting fuel demand. But even demand optimists such as Opec do not expect oil consumption to return to pre-pandemic levels until 2022. Oil also gained support from supply curbs by producers. Opec and its allies, collectively known as Opec+, stuck to their supply tightening policy at a meeting on Wednesday. Record Opec+ cuts have helped to lift prices from historic lows last year. "Opec+ discipline has been a real positive," said Michael McCarthy, chief market strategist at CMC Markets. Further boosting the market, a weekly supply report showed a drop in US crude inventories to their lowest since March. —Reuters

KOREAN MINISTER DROPS WTO BID, CLEARS WAY FOR NIGERIAN CANDIDATE

SAM KIM FEB. 5

South Korean Trade Minister Yoo Myung-hee withdrew her bid to lead the World Trade Organization, leaving former Nigerian Finance Minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as the only remaining candidate for the job. Yoo made the decision after discussions with the US and other major nations, and took various issues into account "comprehensively" including the need to revitalise the multilateral organisation, according to a statement from Korea's trade ministry on Friday. The withdrawal comes after dozens of former US government officials urged President Joe Biden to endorse Okonjo-Iweala after the Trump administration blocked her selection. The opposition halted the selection process because WTO decisions are made on the basis of a consensus of its members. —Bloomberg

Centre to induct more pvt sector specialists in depts

New Delhi, Feb. 5: In a major move, the Centre has decided to induct more private sector specialists into different government departments at the crucial decision-making level of joint secretaries and directors. As per the requisitions received from the Department of Personnel & Training (DoP&T), talented and motivated Indian nationals willing to contribute towards nation building are being invited to join the government at the level of joint secretary on contract basis in the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance and

Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, a statement issued by the Personnel Ministry said. Private sector individuals would be appointed at the level of director on a contract basis in the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Department of Financial Services, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, Ministry of Law & Justice, Department of School Education & Literacy, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Ministry of Road

Transport & Highways, Ministry of Jal Shakti, Ministry of Civil Aviation and in the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, it said. The detailed advertisement and instructions to the candidates will be uploaded on the Union Public Service Commission's website on 6th February, the statement said. Interested candidates can apply from 6th February to 22nd March, it said. Candidates will be short-listed for interview on the basis of the information provided in their online application, the statement said. —PTI

PNB clocks ₹506 cr profit in Q3

New Delhi, Feb. 5: Punjab National Bank (PNB) reported a standalone net profit of Rs 506.03 crore for December quarter 2020-21. It had posted a net loss of Rs 492.28 crore in the year-ago period. Total income during the

quarter rose to Rs 23,298.53 crore as against Rs 15,967.49 crore a year ago. On a consolidated basis, there was a profit of Rs 585.77 crore during the latest quarter. The lender had posted a net loss of Rs 501.93 crore in same period

of 2019-20. Consolidated income rose to Rs 23,639.41 crore from Rs 16,211.24 crore. PNB said the current results are not comparable with the year-ago period since the previous figures are of pre-amalgamated period. —PTI

TAXPAYERS TO BE INFORMED OF REVIEWS

New Delhi, Feb. 5: Taxpayers will be informed upfront about the reasons their I.T returns are getting reopened for scrutiny and only in case of non-satisfactory reply would the case get opened up again, CBDT chief P. C. Mody said on Friday. The 2021-22 Budget has lowered the time limit for reopening of tax cases to three years from six years. For serious tax fraud cases involving income concealment of Rs 50 lakh and above, 10-year old cases can be reopened. The chairman of Central Board of Direct Taxes said the rationalisation of reopening of cases announced in Budget would bring in more certainty to taxpayers. "What was a heavily litigated area, we have tried to rationalise it to the extent that it is no longer left to the discretion of assessing officer. It would be more of information-based attempt to reopen the cases," he said at a CII event. —PTI

MAHINDRA Q3 CONSOLIDATED PAT DOWN 6%

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, FEB. 5

Mahindra & Mahindra for Friday reported 6 per cent drop in its consolidated profit after tax from continuing and discontinued operations at Rs 159.60 crore for the third quarter ended in December. It had posted a consolidated PAT of Rs 170.69 crore in the same period last year, the automaker said. The maker of Scorpio and Bolero models' consolidated revenue from operations stood at Rs 21,625.95 crore during the quarter against Rs 19,430.29 crore a year ago. Out of the net loss, M&M said Rs 563.84 crore is attributable to its bankrupt arm Ssangyong Motor Company.

COURSE | TO SUCCESS If you're not loved and supported, you're not going to be very productive Coursera CEO and the science of well-being

CHERYL LU-LIEN TAN NEW YORK, FEB. 5

Jeff Maggioncalda, CEO of online education provider Coursera, knows what it is like to put his professional life on pause. In 2015, Maggioncalda took a break from working in financial services and ended up travelling the world with his wife for two-and-a-half years, spending four weeks at a time in South Africa, China, Southeast Asia and more. "We drove from Berlin to Munich. We went through all the Indonesian islands. We went to Komodo and saw komodo dragons—it was really extraordinary," said Maggioncalda, 52, whose Mountain View,

California-based company has offered online courses and degrees from universities and experts to more than 75 million people. And what did he take away from the journey that is applicable now? "I realised I'm a learner," said Maggioncalda, who joined Coursera in 2017. "Adopting a growth mindset, being open-minded, being curious, being open-hearted to new people and new ideas and learning is important right now. The world is going to look fundamentally different—and that will help you become a pioneer in the new normal." Maggioncalda shared his thoughts on the course to success with



Jeff Maggioncalda Reuters. Edited excerpts are below.

What courses can help people the most professionally right now? If you don't feel centred, confident, loved and supported, you're not going to be very productive. Taking care of your men-

tal and physical health is the foundation for good performance and a strong career. On Coursera, I'd suggest "The Science of Well-Being," which is all about how we make choices that make us happier and mentally healthier, and "Finding Purpose and Meaning in Life," which is about how to find a centred, meaningful path in a chaotic life. And then I'd suggest "AI For Everyone," which teaches everyone with any background the basics of AI. What will help us stay ahead of the curve? Employers are going to be looking for employees who are well-balanced

and multidisciplinary—people who know about a number of different domains. Try to develop a balanced skill set. Make sure you can increasingly communicate visually, with data. Learn basic data fluency skills, math, statistics, computers—G Suite, Microsoft, the basics of programming. What work equipment is invaluable now? A wire Ethernet cable—I do not rely on Wi-Fi. I use it at home. When I've had to travel, I'll bring a 100-foot (30.5 m) Ethernet cable because you just don't know what the Wi-Fi is going to be like. What will work look like

once the pandemic is over? My dream in the new normal is to become a nomadic CEO, to travel with my wife everywhere around the world where we have offices—Bulgaria, London, India—and see our customers, our employees and partners. Rather than just be there for a few days, I'll stay there for two or three weeks. Also, in a world where we're not all tethered to offices, we can spend more time with people that we love. I'm really into creating family traditions where you don't have to take vacations in order to spend time with people you love. —Reuters



SHORT TAKES

Shastri pitches for break post IPL

**Chennai:** Indian cricketers must get a two-week break after this year's IPL to recover from fatigue since staying in bio-bubbles is "mentally draining", head coach Ravi Shastri said on Friday.

The Indian players have not taken a break since the IPL 2020 in September in the UAE. The IPL was followed by a challenging Australia tour comprising four Tests, three ODIs and three T20Is.

With the final spot in the World Test Championships at stake, India is currently hosting England in a bilateral series consisting of four Tests, five T20Is and three ODIs.

"I do believe you need a break from international cricket at some point. After the England series, yes they go into the IPL. Again after the IPL, a couple of weeks off is a must," Ravi Shastri told *Star Sports*. — *PTI*

Sthalekar in Oz Hall of Fame

**Sydney:** Former Australia women's cricket team captain Lisa Sthalekar has been inducted into the Australian Cricket Hall of Fame, the country's board (CA) announced on Friday. One of the world's elite spin-bowling all-rounders, the Pune-born cricketer has represented Australia in eight Tests, 125 ODIs and 54 T20Is in a career spanning 12 years from 2001-13, scoring almost 4,000 runs. Sthalekar was a member of four Australian World Cup-winning teams across the ODI and T20 formats and captained Australia in three ODIs against New Zealand in 2006.

She was named Women's International Cricketer of the Year in 2007, and was awarded the Belinda Clark Medal recognising Australia's best women's international cricketer in 2007 and 2008. — *PTI*

Seto wins 1st race after suspension

**Tokyo:** Japan's top Olympic swimmer Daiya Seto thanked his wife for standing by him after winning his first race following a suspension for having an affair. Seto, a medal hopeful for the virus-postponed Tokyo Games, was banned in October from competitions and official training until the end of 2020 after a tabloid exposed his extramarital affair.

The 26-year-old star, who quit as captain of Japan's swimming team and was dropped by a sponsor in the wake of the scandal, returned to the pool at the Japan Open in Tokyo on Thursday, his first competition since September.

"My wife and I confronted it seriously and talked about a lot of things," Seto was quoted by local media as saying after winning the men's 400 metre individual medley. — *AFP*

Lakers munch on bland Nuggets

**Los Angeles:** LeBron James had a triple double of 27 points, 10 assists and 10 rebounds as the Los Angeles Lakers rallied from a double digit halftime deficit to pull away in the second half for a 114-93 victory over the Denver Nuggets. James recorded his second triple double of the season and 96th of his career as the Lakers opened their five-game homestand with an impressive come-from-behind win. Schroder scored 21 points, Talen had 17 for the defending NBA champions who improved to 17-6 on the season.

With his third basket in the third quarter, James surpassed Wilt Chamberlain (12,681) for number three on career field goals made list. — *AFP*

Live on TV

CRICKET

India vs England: First Test, Day 2 from 9.20 am on Star Sports 1, HD

Big Bash League: The Final — from 1.45 pm on Sony Six, HD

TENNIS

ATP Cup: Day 5 from 11.30 am; Semifinals from 4 am (Saturday) on Eurosport, HD

HOCKEY

FIH Pro League (men): Spain vs Belgium from 5.30 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

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Sweeping success

Root sweeps his way to 20th Test ton, puts England on top

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR  
CHENNAI, FEB. 5

With a ringside view from behind the stumps, Rishabh Pant could easily see it. Shoulders dropped and heads bowed — the team's body language, at one time, was as flat as the surface. The wicket-keeper's constant egging, urging his teammates to lift themselves, summed up Team India's frustrating opening day on the field.

Joe Root (128 not out) and Dom Sibley (87) gave a masterclass on how to play spinners in subcontinental conditions with a brilliant 200-run stand for the third wicket as England stole a march over India on a featherbed in the opening Test here. At stumps, England, who won the toss, were 263/3 for 89.3 overs. Opener Sibley was dismissed lbw by Jasprit Bumrah in the last over of the day.

While Root, playing his 100th Test, unleashed his most potent weapon, sweep, in all possible ways — reverse, slog and even switch hit — to slam his 20th Test hundred, third in as many matches, Sibley personified resilience and proved to be the perfect foil for his in-form skipper.

The pitch had little to offer the bowlers, but the England batsmen had to show a lot of patience. Sibley's marathon stay in the middle — 286 balls and 382 minutes — was significant as the 25-year-old not only absorbed the pressure early on, but also wore the Indian bowlers out with his dogged defence. With classic old-school technique, Sibley used his long strides effectively. He got closer to the pitch of the ball, didn't have any qualms in defending good deliveries and rotated the strike diligently to keep the Indian spinners at bay.

Root joined forces with Sibley after Rory Burns (33) and Dan Lawrence (five-ball duck) fell to R. Ashwin and Bumrah, respectively, before lunch.



England's Joe Root celebrates after scoring a century against India on the first day of their first Test match at MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Friday.

SCORECARD	
<b>England 1st Innings:</b> Rory Burns c Rishabh Pant b Ravichandran Ashwin 33, D. Sibley lbw b Jasprit Bumrah 87, D. Lawrence lbw b Bumrah 0, J. Root not out 128. Extras (LB-4, NB-11) 15. <b>Total (for 3 wickets in 89.3 overs) 263.</b>	
<b>FoW:</b> 1-63, 2-63, 3-263.	
<b>Bowling:</b> Ishant Sharma 15-3-27-0, Jasprit Bumrah 18.3-2-40-2, Ravichandran Ashwin 24-2-68-1, Shahbaz Nadeem 20-3-69-0, Washington Sundar 12-0-55-0.	

Burns, who made a solid opening stand of 63, plotted his own downfall when he played a reverse sweep to lob a simple catch to Pant. It was Ashwin's slowest ball of the first session. When Bumrah trapped new batsman Lawrence with the help of a reverse swing, England were two down for 63.

India had the visitors

under the pump, but Kohli may be guilty of letting the guard down later. His decision to take both Ashwin and Ishant off the attack post-lunch was inexplicable. The packed leg-side field which had proved effective against the Aussies couldn't stop the England batsmen from scoring.

Root who averaged more

than 100 in the recent Sri Lanka Tests continued his purple patch. The contest between Ashwin and Root was fascinating. The England skipper cleverly negated the offie by not employing sweep shot. As Root grew in confidence, the sweeps were a delight to watch.

More than three years after making his Test debut, Bumrah got to play his first match at home. He bowled just a three-over opening spell before Ashwin was introduced as early as in the eighth. Left-arm spinner Shahbaz Nadeem who made it to the side following a knee injury to Axar Patel couldn't trouble the batsmen and bowled a bunch of no-balls.

NUMBERS GAME

**JOE ROOT SCORES HUNDRED IN 100TH TEST MATCH:**

- Joe Root became the 15th Englishman and 69th player overall to complete a century of Test matches after appearing in the Chennai Test on Friday (February 5).
- The England skipper who made his debut in India, at Nagpur in 2012, also played 50th Test match on Indian soil, at Visakhapatnam, in 2016..
- After making an unbeaten 128 off 197 balls with 14 fours and one six in England's first innings, the right hand top-order batsman, also became the ninth batsman to score hundred in 100th Test match.
- Australian Ricky Ponting is the only batsman to make two hundreds in 100th Test match. England's Colin Cowdrey, Alec Stewart, South African Graeme Smith and Hashim Amla, Pakistan's Javed Miandad and Inzamam-ul-Haq and West Indian Gordon Greenidge also scored a century in their 100th Test match before Joe Root..
- The 200-run stand between Joe Root and Dom Sibley is England's second best third wicket stand in India and fifth best overall. Alastair Cook and Kevin Pietersen's 206-run stand is England's best third wicket stand in India.
- Anil Choudhury became the 63rd Indian umpire to officiate in Test cricket. He made his debut as a Test umpire after stood in 20 one day internationals and 28 Twenty-20 internationals.
- Nitin Menon and Anil Choudhury are the two Umpire in this Test match. The last time two Indian umpires stood in a home Test was in the Ahmedabad Test against Sri Lanka in February 1994, when Kapil Dev went past Richard Hadlee's record of most wickets in Tests. The umpires then were A.L. Narsimhan and V.K.Ramaswamy.

— S. PERVEZ QAISER

We bowled well in patches: Bumrah

Root targets a total of 600-700 in 1st innings

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, FEB. 5

It turned out to be a challenging 'home' debut for Indian speedster Jasprit Bumrah. Operating in short spells, Bumrah picked up two England wickets, but found the dry conditions difficult for a pacer.

"It was an interesting first match for me here. The pitch was on the flatter side and there was no lateral movement. The ball got scuffed up as the wicket was hard and dry. We are not trying to complain about the wicket. We are trying to figure out the options and resolve the issues," said Bumrah.

As the ICC has banned the use of saliva in the wake of Covid-19, bowlers have found it difficult to shine the ball. "When the ball becomes soft, it doesn't shine as well as we want it to. In India, the ball gets scuffed up easily. So to make the ball heavy, you have to shine one side sometimes, with sweat, and it doesn't really serve

the purpose. You can't make one side heavy with sweat and it doesn't really work that way. But these are the rules and we have to make do with what we have at the moment," said Bumrah.

Bumrah said India bowled well in patches. "I felt we created a lot of pressure. We didn't give too many runs except in the last session. In the beginning of the last session, I think our body language was a bit down with not many wickets coming in. And also, it's not easy to keep yourself going in the searing heat. After a while, we started putting in more effort to get back into the game," he added.

Left-arm spinner Shahbaz Nadeem's selection over wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav surprised many, but Bumrah backed the decision. "In hindsight, you can say a lot of things. As a team we went in, and backed all of them to perform well. Maybe after the game, we can discuss what could have been done better," he said.

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, FEB. 5

Skipper Joe Root who scored a scintillating century in his 100th Test and guided England to a commanding position against India wants to make it count. England had made 477 in the first innings the last time they played a Test here in 2016, but eventually they lost by an innings. So, Root knows the importance of a big total.

"I think we have to try and get as many runs as we can. We want to bat the whole of tomorrow and possibly a bit into the third day, then things could fall in place. We will try and score 600-700," said Root.

Root knows it's not easy to bat long in the humid conditions here. "But, I am ready for more. We have to try and consolidate our position. It's an impressive start, but we have to make it count. That's the most challenging part for us," he added.

**I think we have to try and get as many runs as we can. We want to bat the whole of tomorrow and possibly a bit into the third day, then things could fall in place. We will try and score 600-700.**

— **JOE ROOT**  
England Test captain

**● Joe Root became only the third Englishman to score a century in his hundredth Test match, following in the footsteps of Colin Cowdrey and ex-England captain Alec Stewart.**

The flat surface had nothing for spinners on Friday, but Root expects the track to wear out. "It's an unusual looking surface but it played pretty well. I think it's going to spin as the game goes on. With a bit of reverse swing, it was a good contest against India's bowlers. I was just trying to get used to the surface, get used to the bounce, and as I got in, I found it easier," added Root.

Root was all praise for his opener Dom Sibley. "It was a fantastic innings. He had a few question marks over his game after the Sri Lanka series. To go

out there and put a performance early on in the series is amazing. It's a high quality attack and we had to deal with spin and reverse swing," he added. Root became only the third Englishman to score a century in his 100th Test, following in the footsteps of Colin Cowdrey and Alec Stewart. "It was very special. I had a wonderful evening last night with the teammates, who had a little surprise for me and Ben Stokes in particular said some very nice words. So to turn up today and play the way we have, it's really important."

Blues boss over wobbling Spurs

**London, Feb. 5:** Chelsea climbed into the Premier League top six as Thomas Tuchel earned the first major victory of his short time in charge of the Blues with a 1-0 win at Tottenham on Thursday.

Jorginho's penalty midway through the first-half was scant reward for Chelsea's dominance on another damaging night for Spurs boss Jose Mourinho against his former club.

Since a 2-0 victory over Arsenal in early December took Tottenham top of the table, they have won just twice in their last 10 league games to not only see hopes of a first league title in 60 years disappear, but their chances of even making the top four rapidly recede. Spurs now sit eighth, seven points off the Champions League places, and behind Chelsea, who saw fit to make a managerial change last week after a drastic dip in form under Frank Lampard.

Chelsea did not concede a single shot on target to Burnley or Wolves and quickly established complete control of the ball once more with Tottenham happy to sit deep and wait for their chance to counter-attack.

However, Spurs' defensive resolve was undone on 24 minutes when Eric Dier unnecessarily swept away Werner's legs from under

THE RESULTS	
Chelsea (Jorginho 24)	1
Tottenham Hotspur	0

him inside the box. Jorginho had missed three penalties already this season, but cut out his usual stutter-step run-up and smashed the ball low past Hugo Lloris.

**BILBAO MAKE COPA DEL REY SEMIS**

Ral Garca scored a last-gasp equaliser to force extra time and goalkeeper Unai Simn made two penalty saves as Athletic Bilbao defeated Real Betis 4-1 in a shootout to reach the Copa del Rey semifinals.

Garca also scored one of the penalties after a 1-1 draw to help keep Athletic in contention for consecutive Copa titles. Later this year it will face Basque Country rival Real Sociedad in the postponed final from last season.

"I'm proud of this team. We were in a complicated situation, losing until the last minute, but we always believed that we could come back," Garca said.

Iaki Williams, Morcillo and Berchiche also scored for the 23-time Copa champion in the shootout. Simn stopped penalties taken by Sergio Canales and Juanmi Jimnez.

— *Agencies*



Serena Williams of United States plays a shot during her match against compatriot Danielle Collins in a tune-up event ahead of the Australian Open tennis championships in Melbourne on Friday. Serena won 6-2, 4-6, 10-6. — *AP*

Injury dampens Serena's victory

**Melbourne, Feb. 5:** Serena Williams pulled out of a semifinal clash against world number one Ashleigh Barty with a shoulder injury Friday, days before the Australian Open, while Simona Halep and Sofia Kenin both crashed to defeat.

Williams, 39, had ousted fellow American Danielle Collins 6-2, 4-6, 10-6 in the Yarra Valley Classic but withdrew from the tournament hours later despite showing no ill effects during the match.

Barty now has a bye into the final where she will meet either two-time Grand Slam winner Garbine Muguruza or Marketa Vondrousova.

World number three Naomi Osaka recovered from a shaky start to power past Irina-Camelia Begu 7-5, 6-1 in 76 minutes in the Gipsland Trophy, and will face fifth-ranked Elina Svitolina or Elise Mertens in the last four.

World number two Halep, however, slumped out after being thrashed by Ekaterina Alexandrova 6-2, 6-1 in the Gipsland Trophy.

Muguruza has been in aggressive form in Melbourne, dropping just four games in two matches prior, and impressively hit the lines to run Australian Open champion Kenin ragged 6-2, 6-2.

— *AFP*

DJOKOVIC ZIGS PAST ZVEREV; NADAL INJURED

**Melbourne, Feb. 5:** Novak Djokovic fought past Alexander Zverev but it wasn't enough to stave off defeat for Serbia in the ATP Cup Friday, with Germany making the semifinals alongside a Spanish team missing injured Rafael Nadal.

Novak, who is ramping up preparations to defend his Australian Open crown, was tested in his singles rubber before outlasting Zverev 6-7 (3/7), 6-2, 7-5.

But the German got revenge in the deciding doubles, teaming with Jan-Lennard Struff to edge Djokovic and Nikola Pietrangeli 7-6 (7/4), 5-7, 10-7 and ensure they made a last four clash against Daniil Medvedev's Russia. Struff earlier beat Dusan Lajovic in the other singles tie.

Meanwhile, Nick Kyrgios smashed a racquet and tossed it in the stands on his way to defeat in the Murray River Open as he struggled with injury ahead of the Australian Open. He was hampered by left knee pain during his 6-3, 6-4 loss to Croatia's Borna Coric.

— *AFP*