

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2021, NEW DELHI, LATE CITY, 16 PAGES

Week later,  
five bodies  
recovered  
from tunnel,  
toll now 50

LALMANI VERMA  
DEHRADUN, FEBRUARY 14

A WEEK AFTER a flash flood struck Chamoli district of Uttarakhand and choked the intake adit tunnel of NTPC's hydro power project in Tapovan after washing away another power project establishment upstream, rescue teams Sunday recovered five bodies from the tunnel.

A total of 12 bodies were recovered on Sunday — five from the tunnel, six from the power project site 5 km upstream in Raini village, and one from the Alaknanda river, downstream in Rudraprayag.

With this, the total confirmed casualties in the flash flood climbed to 50. Over 150 people continue to be missing.

**Garhwal** Divisional Commissioner Ravin Raman told *The Indian Express* that the first body was recovered 130 metres inside the tunnel at 5.30 am Sunday, and the other four bodies were recovered 10 metres farther. Rescue teams are heading in the same direction, he said.

According to a release from DIG (Law and Order) Neelesh Anand Bharney, out of 50 bodies recovered so far, 24 have been identified. Also, one of the 23 recovered body parts has been

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

BUSINESS AS USUAL

By UNNY



CRPF personnel pay tributes to jawans killed in the Pulwama attack, at Lethpora in Pulwama on Sunday. PTI

## PM marks 2 years of Pulwama: 'No Indian can forget this day'

ARUN JANARDHANAN  
CHENNAI, FEBRUARY 14



PM handed over Arjun Main Battle Tank to Army. ANI

MARKING TWO years after the terror attack in Pulwama, Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday paid homage to the 40 CRPF jawans who were killed in the car bombing that targeted their convoy and said that their bravery will inspire generations.

"No Indian can forget this day. Two years ago, the Pulwama attack happened. We pay homage to all the martyrs we lost in that attack. We are proud of our security forces. Their bravery will continue to inspire generations," Modi said.

Speaking in Chennai, the Prime Minister also hailed the defence forces as he dedicated the indigenously designed and manufactured "Main Battle Tank Arjun Mark 1A" to the nation, and praised the farmers of Tamil Nadu for "record" grain production.

He promised to protect the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

**BJP ex-MLA among 17 held for V-Day attacks in name of 'love jihad'**

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
Bhopal, February 14



The attackers at one of the restaurants. Express

SEVENTEEN PEOPLE, including a former BJP MLA, have been arrested over at least two incidents of vandalism in Bhopal on Valentine's Day, after groups of people attacked a hookah bar and a restaurant while accusing the owners of promoting 'love jihad'.

"Based on the complaint and all those who were identified, we have arrested 17 people, including ex-MLA Surendra Nath Singh," Bhopal DIG Irshad Wali told *The Indian Express*.

The men, identifying themselves as workers of the ruling BJP's youth wing, the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha and Shiv Sena, went on the rampage on Sunday while holding saffron flags and chanting slo-

**Challenge for FCI:  
Rising stocks, cost & push to procure**

HARISH DAMODARAN  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 14

THE FOOD Corporation of India's (FCI) "economic cost" of wheat sold through the public distribution system (PDS) is budgeted to go up to Rs 29.94/kg and that of rice to Rs 42.94/kg in 2021-22, from their corresponding current levels of Rs 27.40 and Rs 39.99 per kg.

These numbers are significant, given that under the National Food Security Act (NFS) of 2013, 81.35 crore persons, accounting for over 67% of the country's population, are entitled to receive 5 kg of PDS wheat or rice per month at Rs 2 and Rs 3 per kg, respectively.

Also, the political pressure

### EXPLAINED E Distress plus protest

AT RS 42.94 for rice and Rs 29.94 for wheat, FCI faces higher cost for PDS and Covid distress schemes. Add to it the political pressure to procure given the protests over the farm laws. The subsidy bill is set to balloon.

from the farmer protests may force stepped-up procurement by the government.

At the projected economic cost of Rs 29.94/kg for wheat and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## 15 Feb Current Affairs

Q. Which online payment system has partnered with Axis Bank on the UPI multi bank model?

- A - Paytm
- B - Phone-Pay
- C - Google-Pay
- D - None of These



GRETA THUNBERG FARM PROTEST TOOLKIT

## Delhi Police arrests 22-yr-old, calls her key to foreign hand

Opposition slams arrest of activist from Bengaluru; police get custody for five days

JIGNASA SINHA & ANAND MOHAN J  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 14



Disha Ravi at a court in New Delhi on Sunday. Express

**Aarey to EIA, Goa to Dehra Dun, Ravi part of many climate causes**

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
BENGALURU, PUNE, FEBRUARY 14

THE DELHI Police's first arrest in the high-profile case of sedition and criminal conspiracy registered 10 days ago over a toolkit tweeted by Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg on the farmers' protest is a 22-year-old woman from Bengaluru — a move that has been slammed by Opposition leaders as "shocking" and "atrocious".

Police said they took Disha Ravi, who is an environmental activist, into custody in Bengaluru Saturday afternoon and "formally arrested" her in Delhi Sunday. They produced her in a Delhi court, which remanded her in police custody for five days — two less than what the prosecution had wanted.

During the hearing at the Patiala House Court before Metropolitan Magistrate Dev Saroha, Ravi broke down and told the court that she was not part of any conspiracy or group.

"I was just supporting

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

protests on humanitarian issues and religious issues and protests are very ingrained in Indian society. Social media has helped in recent days," said the business administration graduate who was arrested by the Delhi Police Special Cell Saturday for her alleged role in the dissemination of a "toolkit" on the farmers' protests shared on Twitter by teenage global climate activist Greta Thunberg.

Disha had been vocal about environment issues long before

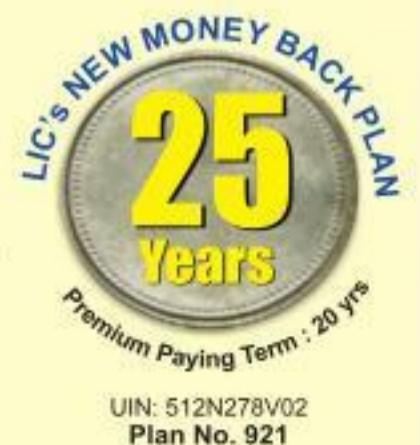
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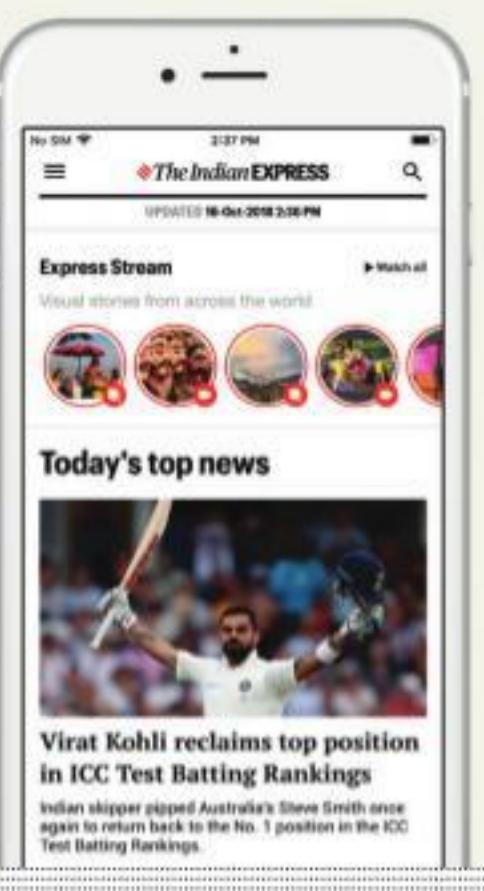
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## HOW A DELHI SCHOOL FOR FARMERS' CHILDREN ALONG THE YAMUNA RIVERFRONT WON WORLD RECOGNITION

The international Beazley Award for Architecture this year was given to a structure that not only questioned permanence in form, but also the right to the city.

### TECH



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### THE 3 LEAST POPULAR MACS

These show that Apple is an 'offbeat' company at heart

### EXPLAINED



### RARE DUCK IN UPPER ASSAM

The Mandarin duck appeared in Tinsukia after over a century

## EXPRESS AUDIO

### The recent spate of resignations from Trinamool Congress

NEW EPISODE EVERYDAY

We talk about how Rajya Sabha MP Dinesh Trivedi's resignation from the TMC could be a major setback for the party ahead of the forthcoming assembly elections

## FROM PAGE ONE

### Toolkit arrest

farmers...because they are our future, they are the ones who are providing us with our food and we all need to eat," she said, adding she did not create the toolkit and only made two edits to the document.

Ravi's arrest was slammed by Opposition leaders and the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), which demanded her "immediate, unconditional" release.

"SKM condemns the arrest of young climate change activist Disha Ravi, who stood in support of the farmers. We also demand her immediate, unconditional release," the Morcha statement said.

Congress Deputy Leader in Rajya Sabha Anand Sharma described the arrest as "most unfortunate and shocking" while his colleagues P Chidambaram and Jairam Ramesh condemned the police move.

"The arrest... is most unfortunate and shocking. Custodial interrogation of a young woman without any criminal antecedents cannot be justified. Police should recognise her right to liberty and courts must respect the Supreme Court judgment, which says bail is the rule and jail an exception," said Sharma.

Chidambaram tweeted that the "Indian state must be standing on very shaky foundations" if a 22-

year-old climate activist "has become a threat to the nation". "A 'tool kit' to support the farmers' protest is more dangerous than the intrusion by Chinese troops into Indian territory! India is becoming the theatre of the absurd and it is sad that the Delhi Police has become a tool of the oppressors," he posted.

Ramesh slammed the move as "completely atrocious" and "unwarranted harassment and intimidation".

CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury posted on Twitter that the arrest "will awaken the youth of the country" and "strengthen the struggles for democracy".

A member of Disha's defence team said he did not attend Sunday's hearing since the police did not provide clarity on where she would be produced. "We have to see the order to figure out what happened in court and then we will take a future course of action. Ideally, she should have been given a lawyer," he said.

The toolkit was posted by Thunberg—she deleted the initial version and posted another—even as a series of celebrities, including pop star Rihanna, tweeted in support of the farm protests.

According to police, the sequence of events in the farmers' protests, including the violent in-

cidents at Red Fort on Republic Day, was a "copycat" of the alleged action plan in the toolkit.

On Sunday afternoon, police alleged that Ravi "was the one who shared the toolkit document" with Thunberg. "Later, she asked Greta to remove the main document after its incriminating details accidentally got into the public domain. This is many times more than the 2-line editing that she claims," the police tweeted from its official handle.

The one that was deleted had sections that asked those interested to start a 'Twitter storm' on February 4 and 5; share a solidarity photo/video message by email; call/email government representatives and ask them to take action; divest from "monopolists and oligopolists like Adani-Ambani", and organize protests on February 13 and 14.

The updated toolkit said it was a "document meant to enable anyone unfamiliar with the... farmers protests...to better understand the situation and make decisions on how to support the farmers..."

It also asked those interested to tweet their support to farmers to use the hashtags #FarmersProtest and #StandWithFarmers. It does not mention Adani or Ambani but asks people to divest from fossil fuel industries.

On February 4, Delhi Police's Cyber Cell registered a case against

the creators of the toolkit on charges of sections of sedition, criminal conspiracy and promoting hatred.

On Sunday, police told the court that Ravi's custody was required to trace two more persons who they intend to arrest in the case. It submitted that her custody was required to ascertain her alleged "links with Khalistani networks". The police also said that the content that she edited was missing from her phone and that the data has to be recovered.

In July last year, the Cyber Unit had sent a notice to an internet service provider to block Fridays For Future's website under section 18 (punishment for conspiracy) of the UAPA. The notice was sent on a complaint by Union Minister Prakash Javadekar regarding an incident of "multiple emails with the subject name EIA 2020".

Fridays for Future had been pushing for the withdrawal of the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification 2020 draft. However, the police later said they had withdrawn the notice and dropped charges under UAPA.

(WITH INPUTS FROM MANOJ CG & ESHAROY)

## FCI challenge: Rising stocks, cost & push to procure

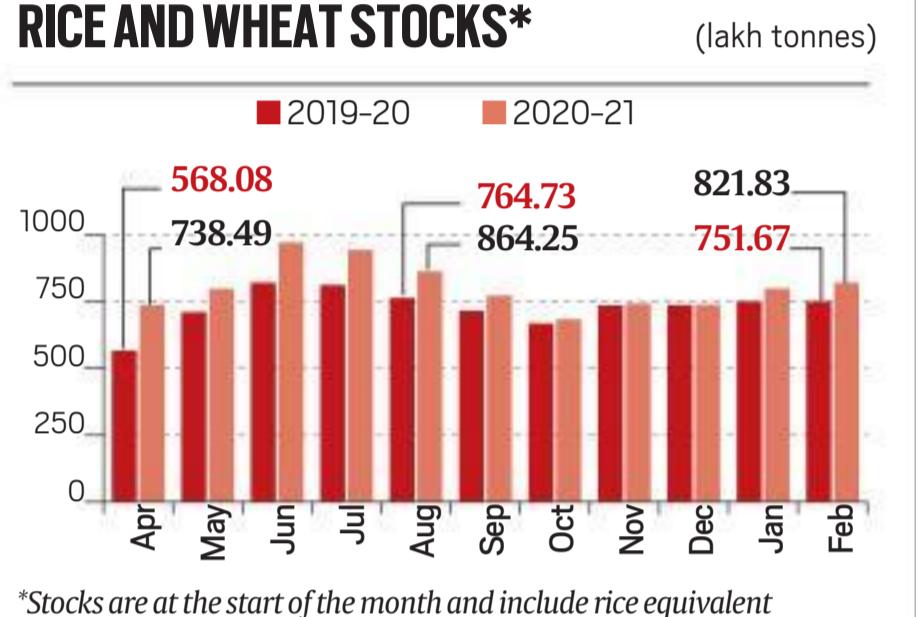
Rs 42.94/kg for rice, the corresponding per-kg PDS consumer subsidy in the coming fiscal would work out to Rs 27.94 and Rs 39.94, respectively.

The economic cost is what the FCI incurs in procuring, transporting, storing and distributing every kg of wheat or rice.

The estimated Rs 29.94/kg economic cost for wheat in 2021-22 includes a "pooled cost" of Rs 19.21 (roughly what the farmer gets); "procurement incidental" of Rs 3.20 (gunny bags, market fee, arthiya commission, labour and other mandi-level expenses); and "distribution cost" of Rs 7.53 (freight, handling, storage, interest and other administrative charges).

In the case of the Rs 42.94/kg for rice, the pooled cost is Rs 27.90, with procurement incidental at Rs 4.85 and distribution cost at Rs 10.19.

Under NPSA, enacted during the previous UPA regime, the Rs



2.3/kg PDS issue prices for wheat and rice were valid for up to three years from the date of commencement of the law on July 5, 2013.

The Modi government has not raised these rates even as the Finance Ministry's Economic Survey has pointed to the need

to consider a revision in the Central issue prices of PDS grain.

Meanwhile, rice and wheat stocks in the Central pool remain at way above necessary levels, despite the government implementing special schemes for alleviating the economic distress resulting from the Covid-19-in-

duced lockdown.

As against 65.91 million tonnes (mt) of grain offtake from public godowns in 2018-19 and 62.19 mt in 2019-20, the government has allocated 94.37 mt in the current fiscal.

But even with these liquidation measures, grain stock in the Central pool stood at 82.18 mt as on February 1, compared to 75.17 mt a year ago (see table).

The continued build-up of public stocks is largely due to procurement. Government agencies had, as on February 11, bought 63.63 mt of paddy during the ongoing 2020-21 kharif marketing season (October-September), 16.1 per cent more than the 54.80 mt in the corresponding period of 2019-20, and they may have to make large-scale purchases of wheat as well in the ensuing rabi marketing season from April.

## India must return to high growth, fast. Does the Budget help?

### EXPRESS explained.Live

with

Sajjid Chinoy

Chief India Economist, JP Morgan & Part-Time Member, PM's Economic Advisory Council

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman chose not to give money in people's hands, but to spend on infrastructure as a way out of the crisis. Will this reboot growth, generate employment and raise incomes? What is the way forward here on, and what signposts stand along the road?

Hear Sajjid Chinoy, Chief India Economist, J P Morgan, answer some of these questions at the next edition of Explained.Live.

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P Vaidyanathan Iyer

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campaign Thunberg launched by staging a protest at her school every Friday.

FFF India currently has around 150 activists with around 20-30 in Bengaluru. Its activity — organizing climate strikes in public spaces, online campaigns against projects considered detrimental to the environment — is largely volunteer-based.

One of FFF India's recent campaigns involved sending emails from hundreds of accounts to Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar to oppose the draft Environment Impact Assessment 2020 put out by the Ministry of Environment and Forests in March 2020, a campaign that led to the websites of FFF India and two other groups being blocked.

"What they are doing is only in the interest of the environment. There is no illegal activity involved. I do not know on what basis the allegations are being made," said former Karnataka environment secretary A N Yellappa Reddy, 75, an environment activist who has in the past been invited to the websites of FFF India and two other groups being blocked.

According to police, those arrested since Friday include Malik's wife Seeba, an LLM student of Kashmir University; TRF chief Zahoor Rather who is allegedly behind the killing of three BJP workers in Kulgam and a policeman in Kokernag; Al Badr supporter and nursing student Suhail Bashir Shah, who hails from Pulwama; and another Chandigarh student from Pulwama, Qazi Wasim.

IGP (Jammu zone) Mukesh Singh said J&K Police's Special Operation Group arrested Shah on Saturday night after spotting him moving around "under suspicious circumstances" on BC Road in Jammu. Police seized an IED from his bag, said Singh, adding that it had not been activated. "He had come here from Chandigarh to carry out the attack on February 14, which is the second anniversary of the 2019 Pulwama terror attack," Singh said.

According to police, Suhail was tasked by his Pakistan-based handlers to place the IED at a busy location. He was to then proceed to Srinagar by air to be received by a "high ranking" Over Ground Worker Athar Shakeel Khan of Pulwama, the IGP said.

The other student, Wasim, was also studying in Chandigarh and aware of the terror plot, the IGP said. One more associate Abid Nabi of Budgam has been arrested from Srinagar, Singh said.

Asked for her views on the government, Ravi said: "Modi's government is (of) a very right-wing party. I think one thing he (Modi) did right... he was able to make people understand about his aims.... My parents support him, I know.... He has really convinced people that what he is doing is good.... Majority of the population does support him."

Saying she wanted the government to change, she added that there were no political parties, "definitely not Congress", that had ecological sustainability as one of their priority areas. "If you had one party to pick, it would definitely be the Aam Aadmi Party. But they are not in every state," she said.

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he identified. He said 32 FIRs have been registered at Joshimath police station in connection with

Last year, he rode with a swollen left eye after a crash. This year, during Stage 4, full of high-speed corners, he hit a rock and busted his rear fuel tank. He continued to ride with a torn quadriceps muscle and a sore knee. When he ran out of fuel, he borrowed some from other riders, to complete the stage.

He lost his way in Stage 11 and went round mountains before spotting local camel-herders. Thankfully, they pointed in the di-

rection other participants went.

Garhwal Divisional Commissioner Raman said the entire 2.5 km tunnel will be cleared of slush and checked because bodies can be anywhere inside. He said three more workers were trapped at a distance of 1.7 km inside the intake adit tunnel which has a dead end. The time to reach this distance may take several days, Raman said.

Noah, 12, is looking forward to riding along the banks of the river behind his home since he fully recovered from a surgery to remove a metal plate that had been holding his fractured collarbone.

In July last year, the Cyber Unit had sent a notice to an internet service provider to block Fridays For Future's website under section 18 (punishment for conspiracy) of the UAPA. The notice was sent on a complaint by Union Minister Prakash Javadekar regarding an incident of "multiple emails with the subject name EIA 2020".

Fridays for Future had been pushing for the withdrawal of the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification 2020 draft.

However, the police later said they had withdrawn the notice and dropped charges under UAPA.

(WITH INPUTS FROM MANOJ CG & ESHAROY)

Valentine's Day

Narendra Kumar, manager of the cafe, said in his complaint to the police that around 12:20 pm, eight people armed with hockey sticks and bats barged into the cafe and began hurling abuses at the customers and allegedly misbehaved with the staff. Then they proceeded to break the furniture inside the cafe.

Around the same time, a group of about 10 persons, including three women, barged into Cowboy Restro Bar near Bittan market, holding saffron flags, and vandalised the cafe.

In his complaint, a 28-year-old man, identified as Rahul Yadav, said the group, whose members identified themselves as workers of the Shiv Sena, began abusing customers at the restaurant.

In his statement to the police, Yadav said, "My workers in the restaurant and I tried to intervene and... we suffered minor injuries. They damaged the furniture inside and left."

Policemen identified themselves as being affiliated with Surendra Nath Singh, the former BJP MLA from Bhopal South West.

Singh had earlier led a march, after which he accused hookah bars of turning youths into addicts and calling them "breeding grounds of love jihad". He also said his teams would go out to warn restaurant owners.

Hersocial media profile shows she supported campaigns of Greenpeace in her early college days. In keeping with her interest in climate change and vegan food habits, she works as a culinary experience manager with GoodMylk, a company involved with making plant-based food accessible and affordable to people.



# THE CITY

**DELHI GOVT PUSH FOR E-VEHICLES**

## In the works, scheme for electric 3-wheelers



A charging station for e-vehicles. As per the previous policy, e-rickshaws were given a subsidy of Rs 30,000. This has now been extended to e-autos, e-carts and loaders. Archive

THE DELHI government is working on a policy to facilitate the registration of electric three-wheelers in the city, as part of its ambitious electric vehicle policy notified last year.

As per the previous policy, e-rickshaws were given a subsidy of Rs 30,000. This has now been extended to e-autos, e-carts and loaders. Under the new policy, incentives of up to Rs 7,500 will be made available for scrapping and de-registering old CNG auto rickshaws registered in Delhi. Road tax and registration fees have been waived for all electric vehicles.

"Two and three-wheelers contribute to two-thirds of the pollution in Delhi. Three-wheelers run on the road for 12-16 hours every day. The focus of Delhi EV policy towards transition in this segment will benefit Delhi's air quality," Delhi Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot said Sunday.

The EV policy has a target of ensuring that by 2024, EVs account for 25% of all new vehicle registrations in the city. It has provisions for low-interest loans for battery-run commercial vehicles like buses and trucks. The policy lays a particular emphasis in the category of two-wheelers, autos,

and goods carriers. In case of bikes, there is a maximum incentive of upto Rs 30,000 per bike. There will be no cap on the number of e-autos unlike CNG-run ones which cannot exceed 1 lakh in the city. In case of four-wheelers, the first 1,000 purchases of cars stand to get subsidies of up to Rs 1.5 lakh per vehicle.

According to a statement issued by the Delhi government under EV policy, e-rickshaws have a top speed of 25 kmph, e-autos are comparable to CNG autos and have top speed of around 50-60 kmph and can travel longer distances. "E-autos can complement e-rickshaws in providing zero pollution last-mile connectivity in Delhi. The government will soon bring out a scheme to facilitate easy registration of e-

autos," Gahlot said.

At present, 177 three-wheeler models are eligible for purchase and scrapping incentives. Tenders for installation of 500 charging points at 100 sites across the city have also been floated. These will have slow chargers that are suitable for two and three-wheelers.

"Subsidies provided by the Delhi government under EV policy on electric three wheelers reduce the total cost of ownership by up to 26%. By switching to e-autos, an individual buyer can save approximately Rs 29,000 annually. Similarly, subsidies provided on electric three wheeler e-rickshaws under the Delhi EV policy reduce the total cost of ownership by up to 33%," Gahlot said.

Speaking at a press conference, Chadha said, "Rinku's family is saying he would chant *Jai Shri Ram* and was killed because of it. If what the family is saying is correct, there should be an in-depth investigation. Are those who chant *Jai Shri Ram* not safe? Will they be killed in Delhi?"

Earlier, speaking to news channels, he had said, "The situation is such that we can't say *Jai Shri Ram* in our country. Will it be said in Pakistan, if not in India?" The video was shared by AAP on their official Twitter handle.

Meanwhile, members of the VHP and BJP held a prayer meeting and protest in Mangolpuri in the afternoon. Around 2 pm, their leaders met Sharma's brother Mannu, a VHP youth wing member, and his mother Radha Devi and demanded that the accused be hanged.

Addressing the crowd, BJP Delhi president Adesh Gupta said, "Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal calls himself 'Dilli ka beta' but he hasn't met the family yet. He can go meet



Rinku Sharma was stabbed to death on Wednesday night in Mangolpuri

Akhlaq's family but can't come here." Akhlaq was beaten to death by a mob in 2015 in Dadri over rumours that his family was in possession of beef.

"People who conspired to kill Sharma will be caught and arrested soon. We want them to be hanged. We don't want to support any Jihadi movement here," Gupta said.

Protesters blocked the main road at Mangolpuri till 4 pm. VHP national spokesperson Vinod Bansal, general secretary Ganga Mahasabha Swami Jitendranand Saraswati and international working president VHP Alok Kumar were at the meeting. The crowd later shouted slogans such as 'Desh ke gaddar ko goli maaro saalo ko' and 'Rinku ke hatyao ko, goli maaro saalo ko'.

Sharma's mother said, "I don't wish to live without my son. He was earning for all of us. I saw him being murdered by those goons. I want all of them to be hanged."

CCTV footage from the night of the murder showed 12 men entering the lane near Sharma's residence with sticks and weapons. Police have so far arrested five people — Zahid (26), Mehtaab (20), Danish (36), Islam

(45) and Tazuddin (30).

VHP's Alok Kumar said, "We should avenge his murder. He was killed for chanting *Jai Shri Ram*. We want all accused to be hanged. I am warning the police... I want all 12 men to be arrested in the next three days. Police must take strict action against the culprits."

The leaders also demanded jobs for Sharma's sibling and compensation for his family.

Chadha, meanwhile, hit out at the BJP: "Neither Hindus nor Muslims or Sikhs are safe under BJP's rule. People of Delhi have voted for the BJP at the Centre in a huge majority for the last two consecutive terms but the party has failed miserably in protecting people. BJP calls itself a party of Hindus but they are not safe under their rule."

Chadha also asked why the Home Minister or the Delhi Police Commissioner had not visited Sharma's family and why no compensation was given to them.

Delhi Police have continued to maintain Sharma's death was linked to a failed business venture. Delhi Police PRO Chintam Biswas said, "A fight broke out at a birthday party over shutting down of a restaurant. Further investigation is underway and we are looking at all angles."

A senior police officer said, "In our preliminary investigation, we found that a fight broke between Sharma and the accused at a hotel on Wednesday night. The fight was over an old business rivalry. The accused and Sharma's friends, who were at the birthday party, confirmed this. After the fight, the accused went to Sharma's house and fought with him again. During this altercation, Sharma was stabbed in the back."

The case has been transferred to the Delhi Police Crime Branch.

TOTAL CASES		Total	Vacant
6,36,946		5,765	5,330
HOSPITAL BEDS	VENTILATORS	796	710
Feb 13	Cases	126	138
Feb 14	Recoveries	150	158
Total	Deaths	1,031*	0
	Tests	6,25,024	10,891
	Total active cases	1,15,68,892	

Express News Service  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 14

## VHP issues 3-day ultimatum to police to make arrests, AAP links murder to *Jai Shri Ram* chant

Rinku was targeted, killed: MP Assembly Protem speaker



Police at Mangolpuri. Amit Mehra

the person is not there to give his side of the story."

He claimed that according to information he had received based on eyewitness accounts, Rinku was carrying out a donation drive for the construction of Ram Temple when he was surrounded and killed. "He was a Bajrang Dal worker and would carry out its work. It is our duty to protect him. People will go about killing workers like this and then say there was a business feud and other issues; but the point remains that he was killed."

Claiming that was systematic targeting of workers carrying out the "work of Hindutva", Sharma said: "I can give you 10 names of those who were murdered from Rinku Sharma, Ankit Saxena, Chandan Gupta, Anikita Tomar, Dilwar Negi to Prashant Puraji, these people were, somewhere down the line, doing the work of dharma or working for Hindutva."

### BRIEFLY

Rs 1 lakh reward for info on Lakha Sidhana

New Delhi: The Delhi Police Sunday announced a reward of Rs 1 lakh for information on the whereabouts of gangster-turned-activist Lakha Sidhana, who is under investigation for his alleged role in the tractor rally violence on Republic Day. Teams of Special Cell are conducting raids in Delhi-NCR, UP, Punjab and Haryana to look for Sidhana, who had uploaded videos demanding release of Punjabi actor Deep Sidhu.

Man held for property fraud after 8 years

New Delhi: The Economic Offences Wing of Delhi Police arrested a 42-year-old man who allegedly cheated Rs 7 crore from a family after selling them DDA plots with forged documents. Police said the accused, Suresh Sharma, was nabbed on Saturday after eight years. ENS

**South MCD releases list of 780 for teaching posts**

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 14

## North MCD school teachers seek funds to buy smartphones for online teaching

SUKRITA BARUAH  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 14

come which is for my family and their future and I strictly refuse to spend any penny for the department..."

A teacher in a Northeast Delhi school said all teachers in his school have sent these letters to officials. "We last received salaries for August and September together. With our strapped resources, we don't want to spend our personal salaries for department work... Most teachers want an allowance for the internet but I don't even have a smartphone. Last year, I sent worksheets to my students from a friend's phone," the teacher said.

Teachers have been protesting against the North MCD for the last year over repeated delays in release of salaries. A recent order requiring them to download and use an app to mark their attendance has now led to a demand to put further pressure on the body.

A letter with a common template is being sent out many teachers to their respective assistant and deputy directors. It reads: "I request you to kindly provide sanction for purchase of smartphone, SIM card, Internet pack, AMC and insurance of mobile phone from Boys' Fund or any other fund, as in today's education system deployed in our department online classes, training and seminars are supposed to be done digitally. Even online attendance has to be marked."

North MCD education committee chairperson Garima Gupta said: "As of now, there is no such plan of providing phones. There is no budget and we're already very strained financially."

Farmers said those who

ASHNA BUTANI  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 14

NARELA ROAD near the Singhu border, which had tractors parked end to end earlier, has emptied out over the past few days. Police posted at the site said the number of protesters on the road has come down to 30-40% of what it was earlier. However, farmers said this is temporary and more protesters are set to reach the border on February 22.

Locals working in the area said the numbers have reduced gradually since January 26. Said Naveen (22), an auto driver, "There are still many protesters on the main road, but the crowd has reduced in the last 10-15 days. Earlier, there was no space to drive our autos on this road. That is not the case anymore."

However, spirits of farmers who have stayed put at the spot still ran high. Jaspaal Singh (30) from Punjab's Moga district, who has been at the border since the protests started, said a few farmers might have gone home for personal reasons. "This does not mean that the protest has lost its strength. It is only getting stronger... only one person from each family is here now, another nine people are waiting. When they are called, they will come too," he said.

The MCD Teachers' Association has also written to the mayor asking that teachers be provided with official phones before being asked to download the app.

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It goes on to state, "... due to non-payment of salary by the department for many months I am unable to make expenditures from my personal salary. Sir, my salary is my in-

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# Cong won't allow CAA in Assam: Rahul at poll rally

ABHISHEK SAHA  
GUWAHATI, FEBRUARY 14

THE CONGRESS will not allow the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act if elected to power in Assam, party leader Rahul Gandhi said Sunday at an election rally in Sivasagar district.

Rahul and other senior state and national Congress leaders, including Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel, appeared on stage with the traditional Assamese gamusa (towel) on their shoulders with the letters CAA crossed out. "Whatever happens, we will not let the CAA be implemented," said Rahul.

Assam is expected to go to polls in April. Sunday's event was the first big-ticket rally by the Congress. Several top BJP leaders have already visited the state multiple times since December.

On Sunday, Rahul also said the Congress will defend the Assam Accord—the 1985 agreement that set a cut-off of midnight of March 24, 1971 for identifying "foreigners", signed after a six-year-long anti-foreigner movement. "I want to assure you that the Congress will always defend and protect the principles of the Assam Accord—and not recede even an inch on that," he said.

"We want to save Assam—



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel and others in Sivasagar district on Sunday. PTI

we will not allow any power to divide Assam. If anyone wants to even touch the Assam Accord, and wants to spread hatred here, they will be taught a lesson jointly by the people of Assam and the Congress party," he said.

While the NRC in Assam uses the same cut-off as the Assam Accord, the provisions of the CAA extend the date for accepting non-Muslim migrants up to December 31, 2014—a measure that has been widely protested in Assam.

Rahul also promised that if the party comes to power, the daily wage of the tea garden workers will be increased from Rs 167 to Rs 365.

Assam Finance Minister

Himanta Biswa Sarma recently said the government will soon announce an increase in wages.

Rahul referred to former Assam CM and veteran Congress leader Tarun Gogoi, who died last year, as his "guru". Gogoi was conferred the Padma Bhushan this year. Rahul said he was very "hurt" that the list announced Gogoi also had the name of a "bureaucrat of the Prime Minister's Office".

Rahul also repeated his "hum do humare do" jibe. At one point, he asked the crowd to name the corporation that was handed the contract to operate the Guwahati airport. "Hum do, humare do, baki sab marlo... India is run by four persons. And in Assam, there is an extension, there are two additional persons."

# Disengagement was on China's terms, Indian interests surrendered: Cong

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 14

THE CONGRESS today stepped up its offensive against the BJP government over the disengagement agreement between India and China, with former Defence Minister A K Antony saying the "terms of disengagement" and the "creation of a buffer zone" at Pangong Tso and Galwan areas in eastern Ladakh are "surrender" of Indian interests.

Alleging that the disengagement was at China's terms, he asked the government to explain its plan to restore the status quo ante in eastern Ladakh.

"If this pattern of disengagement and creation of buffer zones happens in other areas also—Depsang, Hot Springs, Gogra, Arunachal, Sikkim... I don't know what will happen. The Government is not realising the danger... they are creating this precedent of disengagement and buffer zone creation... surrendering our interests," he said.

"All peace-loving people will always welcome reduction of tension at the border... disengagement. But at what terms and at what cost. That is im-

portant. Both the disengagements—Galwan disengagement and also Pangong Tso disengagement—are a surrender. It is surrender. Disengagement is good, reduction in tension is good but it should not be at the cost of national security," Antony told reporters in his first comments on the disengagement. He said the disengagement was at China's terms.

Asked whether he felt Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has lied in Parliament, he said, "I have my own language, you have your own language."

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi had last week called Prime Minister Narendra Modi a "coward" who could not stand up to the Chinese. Antony made no mention of the Prime Minister at the press conference.

He said the government has surrendered areas which have been traditionally under India's control.

Arguing that Galwan Valley was never a disputed point, he said, "If the Indian Army is there at the Galwan Valley... after the completion of the new road... at any moment we can go up to Karakoram Pass and many strategically important areas of China. Now we have withdrawn



Government is not realising danger, says A K Antony

from Patrol Point 14, a buffer zone is created. In this situation, if China wants to create mischief, China can help Pakistan to capture Siachen glacier," Antony said.

"So disengagement in Galwan Valley is surrender. Creation of buffer zone is surrender of Indian interests. Chinese are there where they were. But we have gone back. We cannot patrol up to Patrol Point 14. Ten months are over," he said.

On Pangong Tso, he said, "Our brave Army had taken the strategically important Kailash ranges. It was a miraculous thing, heroic thing... In the negotiations... we have agreed to withdraw from

the strategically important Kailash range. And Pangong lake... our forces used to patrol up to Finger 8. The Chinese Army also used to patrol up to Finger 4... So Finger 4 to Finger 8 was a disputed area. Both armies used to patrol."

"Sometime, scuffle takes place, some pushing, some showing banners... but India never accepted. Our claim is up to Finger 8. Our LAC is Finger 8. Now after the disengagement, first we have vacated the strategically important Kailash range, second the disengagement terms say Chinese will go back to Finger 8, their area, our Army will come back to Finger 3, where we have the permanent base."

"According to the Defence Minister's statement, our Army troops will be based at their permanent base at the Dhan Singh Thapa post near Finger 3, forgetting the fact that we have a post at Finger 4. Indian Army has a post at Finger 4. That fact you ignored. Now you have agreed to withdraw up to Finger 3. Very clear it is surrender. The Chinese gained," he added.

He said the occupation of the Kailash range was strategically significant as "sitting there our

Army can observe what is going on in the Chinese side. That opportunity we lost." He said India could have used that as a bargaining chip. "Because the Indian Army sitting on the Kailash range is a danger for China. It would have been a bargaining point for us. But we agreed to withdraw," he said.

Antony asked the government to explain the "actual position on the India-China border from Arunachal, Ladakh, Sikkim, Himachal and Uttarakhand".

"What is the plan of the government to restore status quo ante on the entire India-China border, especially in Pangong Tso, Galwan, Depsang, Hot Springs, Gogra, is what I want to know."

He said there were similar incidents in Depsang and Chumar during the UPA time as well. "It took many days and weeks. At the end of the day, ultimately, there was disengagement... but at what terms? Status quo ante. But this time, no status quo ante... disengagement at the cost of India agreeing to withdraw our forces from areas where we had been there all through and were within our control. That is the difference between our time and this time."

## Himanta: CAA non-issue, Ajmal 'enemy' of Assam

ABHISHEK SAHA  
GUWAHATI,  
FEBRUARY 14

YOUNG MEN in Assam were more preoccupied in discussing whether or not the state government will launch a scheme to distribute motorcycles among them, like the one it has for meritorious girl students, than the contentious Citizenship Amendment Act, senior state minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday. He also targeted AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal, saying the perfume baron-MP was an "enemy" of Assam.

The Assam government has a scheme to distribute two-wheelers to girl students who secure first division in Class 12 exams. Sarma said that young men were now considering whether the government will consider distributing motorcycles to them as well. "That's what the topic [of discussion] is... and not the CAA," Sarma told reporters here.

Sarma continued that he held Ajmal to be an "enemy" of the state. Ajmal's AIUDF, which has tied up with the Congress for the upcoming state elections, enjoys a large support base amongst the state's Bengali-origin Muslim community.

"Congress is conducting Assam Bachao campaign... but bachao from whom? Assam has to be saved from the immigrant Muslim people who came from Bangladesh and are destroying Assamese culture and Assam's identity..

But through the bus journey, they are going only to those areas, then how will they save Assam. If they want to save Assam, let them take a step against immigrant Muslims and say we will protect Assam's culture," Sarma said.

Sarma's comments come weeks after he said that the BJP did not need votes of the Bengali-origin Muslim community in Assam — often colloquially referred to as 'Miya' Muslims — to win over 100 seats in the state elections.

Sarma said that if anyone calls him the extreme

**युवा शक्ति की क्षमता अपार  
अब सपने होंगे साकार**  
हर प्रयास, सफलता की ओर...

**उत्तर प्रदेश सरकार की अभिनव पहल**

**युवाओं को प्रतियोगी परीक्षाओं के लिए निःशुल्क कोचिंग की**

**तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु**  
**अभ्युदय**  
योजना का

**शुभारंभ**

**योजना में पंजीकृत अभ्यर्थियों से संवाद  
योगी आदित्यनाथ  
मुख्यमंत्री, उत्तर प्रदेश द्वारा**

**दिनांक : 15 फरवरी, 2021 | समय : पूर्वाह्न 10:00 बजे | स्थान : 5, कालिदास मार्ग, लखनऊ**

**योजना की मुख्य विशेषताएं**

- सिविल सेवा, नीट, जेईई, एसएससी, एनडीए व सीडीएस, बैंकिंग व टीईटी सहित अन्य प्रतियोगी परीक्षाओं के लिए मेधावी छात्र-छात्राओं को लाभ।
- अभ्यर्थियों का चयन पात्रता परीक्षा के आधार पर।
- चयनित अभ्यर्थियों के निःशुल्क प्रशिक्षण के लिए मंडल मुख्यालयों में प्रशिक्षण केन्द्रों की व्यवस्था।
- ऑफलाइन व ऑनलाइन प्रशिक्षण के माध्यम से विभिन्न परीक्षाओं के पाठ्यक्रम व परीक्षा पैटर्न की जानकारी की सुविधा।
- गुणवत्तापूर्ण पाठ्य सामग्री उपलब्ध कराने के लिए ई-लर्निंग कंटेनर प्लेटफार्म का सृजन।
- विष्ट आईएस और आईपीएस अधिकारियों से लेकर भारतीय वन सेवा, पीसीएस, पीपीएस एवं अन्य संवर्ग के अधिकारियों/सेवानिवृत्त अधिकारियों एवं विषय विशेषज्ञों से अध्ययन एवं मार्गदर्शन का अवसर मिलेगा।
- वेबिनार, लाइव सेशन और सेमिनार के माध्यम से अभ्यर्थियों की समस्याओं के समाधान की सुविधा।

**अभ्युदय योजना का लाभ लेने के लिए <http://abhyuday.up.gov.in> पर अभ्यर्थी अपना पंजीकरण कराएं**

## Adityanath unveils projects worth Rs 411 cr in Vrindavan

Lucknow: Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath Sunday inaugurated schemes worth Rs 411 crore during his visit to Vrindavan in Mathura district.

Adityanath said the government wants to develop Vrindavan and Mathura like Ayodhya, which is also a religious and pilgrimage centre.

In Vrindavan, the chief minister attended the Vaishnav meeting in which priests in Vrindavan hold talks before the Vaishnav Kumbh. The festival will begin on February 16 and end on March 25 in Vrindavan.

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## Classifieds

## PERSONAL

I Abhishek Alias Abhishek Arora S/o Ravindra Kumar Hiteshi R/o House No-345, Bharthal, Dwarka Sector-26, Delhi-110077, have changed my name to Abhishek Hiteshi.

0070731748-1

I Anju D/o Pire Ram and W/o Gurpal Singh R/o VPO Hambram, Distt Ludhiana, Punjab-141110, have changed my name to Anupreet Kaur

0070731695-1

I Usha Rane W/o Ishar Singh R/o VPO-Dholan, Tehsil-Jagraon, Distt.-Ludhiana, Punjab-142026, have changed my name to Usha Rani

0070731684-1

I K.M.RAKHITAGRAWAL,D/O RAKESH AGRAWAL,R/O-GANDHI-NAGAR, NEAR VIDHYAPATI

SCHOOL,HATHRIS, UTTAR PRADESH-204101.HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO RAKHITAGRAWAL,for all Purposes

0040564180-3

I Anuj S/o Sh. Sehdev R/o-15-402,Emar Palm Hills,Sec-77, Gurgaon Haryana-122004,have changed my name Anuj to Anuj Tyagi for,all Purposes.

0040564180-1

I Anbar Husen,S/o Rasid Khan Hussain,R/o K-II 07, Madangir, Dr. Ambedkar Nagar, New Delhi-110062,have changed my name to Anwar Hussain, permanently.

0040564180-2

I SHIVANI W/O ROHIT SINGH R/o 21/5 Kalyan Puri Delhi-91.After Marriage have changed my name to Shivani Singh for all Purposes vide Affidavit dated (24/01/2021).

0040564082-1

I,Pooja Chauhan W/o-Autl Kumar R/o-Aterna (44), Aterna, Sonipat Haryana-131023,have changed my name from Pooja Chauhan to Pooja Rani.

0040564181-1

I,Nandkumar Madhukar Deo S/O Madhukar Pandlik Deo Age 56 Yrs, R/O 8-B, Pocket-C, Sidharth Extension, New Delhi 110014 have changed by name from Nandkumar Madhukar Deo to Nandkumar Deo vide Affidavit No. 05/2021 Dated 9- Feb-2021 before Notary by Rakesh Kumar Saini

0050175483-1

I,Mahinder Pal Singh S/o- Charan Jeet Singh R/o: WZ-15,Plot No- 46, Upper First Floor, Ravi Nagar, Tilak Nagar New Delhi-18 Have Changed My Name to Mahender Pal Singh.

0070731746-1

I,Jyothi Kumari Chette D/o Mutyal Rao Chette and W/o Shaik Abdul Amied, residing at 9-6-105, Qrt No-1-3, Shivajipalem, Doctors Colony, LB Colony, Vishakhapatnam, AP-530017, have embraced ISLAM and renounced HINDUISM with effect from 15.12.2006 and also have changed my name from Jyothi Kumari Chette to Haseena

0070731682-1

I, ALKA GUPTA W/O Manoj Kumar R/O H-1, Vijay Chowk, Laxmi Nagar, Delhi-110092 do hereby declare Alka Gupta, Alka Agarwal and Alka are one and the same person. In future I shall be known as Alka Gupta.

0050175716-1

I,Rashid Hussain Khan real brother of Army No 9114183P,Rfn Javid Ahmad Khan residing of vill-Gudder,Tehsil-Pahloor,District-Kulgum (J&K)& pin192231 have changed my name from Rashid Hussain Khan to Raashid Ahmad Khanvide affidavit 0002971256 dated 13Feb-2021 before Add.Spl MobileMagistrate Kulgam.

0020417976-1

I, SANJAY PANWAR S/o Sh. Dharam Pal R/o H. No:- E-185, GALI NO- 7, Near Shukar Bazar Chowk Ashok Nagar Delhi-93 have changed my name from Sanjay to Sanjay Panwar both name belongs to same person

0070731741-1

I,Karan Nath,S/o Late Shr. Kailash Nath,R/o-M2/32 DLPHASE 2 Gurgaon,have lost my Punjab National Bank Jor Bagh Branch,New Delhi,original-Fixed Deposit Receipts,I have filed an online NCR.The FDR numbers are 017500PU00034476,017500PU00010157, 017500PU00018609,017500PU00021393, 017500PU00034467,017500PU00016966, 017500PU00017266,017500PU00017275, 017500PU00017284,017500PU00017293, 017500PU00017309,017500DP0006287, 017500DP00007277,017500DP0007523, 017500DP00007851,017500PR0028113.Finder pls contact-9891074999.

0040564181-3

I,Vinay Kumar S/o-mevaram R/o.h.no-74 dist,jhansi village joura tehsil moth. Have lost my original certificate/marksheet class-10th year-2014 Rollno-5177497 CBSE-DEHRADUN.

0040564180-7

I,PALLAVI SHARMA D/o Sanjay sharma R/o-2455,Naiwara chawri-Bazar,DELHI-06,have lost my original certificate class-12th year-2006 and-2007Rollno-6602433 CBSE-DELHI

0040564180-6



## DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



## REMEMBERING SUSHMA

FORMER External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, who passed away in August 2019, was remembered on Sunday on her birth anniversary. While External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar tweeted that he "fondly remembered" and "deeply missed" her, former diplomat Syed Akbaruddin posted: "Remembering the late @SushmaSwaraj - a leader who went head to head with other global diplomats in pursuit of India's interests". Union minister Smriti Irani recalled how she would call Swaraj every February 14, and wish her Valentine's Day and both would then break into laughter.

## VIEW FROM THE TOP

AS CRICKET finally begins to draw back crowds to stadiums in India, the Chennai Test match between England and India got an unexpected onlooker. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday posted on Twitter: "Caught a fleeting view of an interesting test match in Chennai". Along with it, the Prime Minister posted a photo – an aerial view of the MA Chidambaram Stadium where the match is being held.

## JOB ISSUE

THE RAILWAYS has been shutting down its printing presses, a decision that has irked its powerful trade unions. On Sunday, the largest union, All India Railwaymen's Federation, held a national workshop on how to revive the printing presses so that people working there are not rendered jobless. The union members were heard wondering why an organisation would shut its own printing presses while outsourcing all printing jobs that cost more. Officials, however, were of the view that the unions were perhaps not willing to see the writing on the wall.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi is greeted by Kerala Governor Arif Mohammad Khan and Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on his arrival in Ernakulam, Sunday. PTI

## Opportunity for local tourism: PM in Kerala

SHAJU PHILIP  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,  
FEBRUARY 14

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi on Sunday said the local tourism industry has a great opportunity as international travel has been hit by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Inaugurating the International Cruise Terminal Sagarika in Kochi, the Prime Minister said, "I have been seeing something in the last few months. A lot of people are writing to me and sharing pictures on social media about their travels locally. Since the pandemic has affected international travel, people are going to nearby places. This is a great opportunity for us."

"On one hand, this means added livelihood to those in the local tourism industry. On the other hand, it makes the connection between our youth and our

culture stronger. There is so much to see, learn and discover. I urge our young start-up friends to think about innovative tourism related products," he said.

The International Cruise Terminal at Cochin Port will enhance the capacity of the port to handle cruise ship passengers. With the terminal, the port can handle 5,000 passengers at a time.

Apart from the cruise terminal, the Prime Minister inaugurated a few other key infrastructure projects in Kochi, including the Rs 6,000-crore Propylene Derivative Petrochemical Project at Cochin Refinery. He said the petrochemical project would help strengthen India's journey towards being atma nirbhar (self-reliant) as it will save foreign exchange. A wide range of industries would gain and employment would be generated.

He also inaugurated Ro-Ro Vessel service between Wellington Island and

Vallaparadam in Kochi, which would reduce a road distance of 30 km to 3.5 km through waterways. Another key project unveiled by the PM was Vigyan Sagar, the knowledge campus of Cochin Shipyard, which will develop human resource in marine engineering.

Modi said the country is embarking on an ambitious programme of broadband connectivity to every village. Likewise, India is devoting topmost importance to develop Blue Economy, he said. "Our vision and work in this sector includes more ports, improving infrastructure in current ports, off-shore energy, sustainable coastal development and coastal connectivity."

Governor Arif Mohammad Khan, CM Pinarayi Vijayan, Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, and Ministers of State Mansukh Mandaviya and V Muraleedharan were present on the occasion.

## LETTER TO RS CHAIRMAN

## TMC says Trivedi misused Rajya Sabha floor, seeks inquiry

ATRI MITRA  
KOLKATA, FEBRUARY 14

THE TRINAMOOL Congress (TMC) on Sunday demanded an investigation into how its former Rajya Sabha MP Dinesh Trivedi was allowed to speak in the Upper House during a Budget discussion on Friday despite the party not recommending his name. Trivedi resigned from the Rajya Sabha on the floor of the House during the discussion.

The TMC alleged that Trivedi took the "House for a ride" and was "allowed" to use the floor of the House for his "devious political ends". The Mamata Banerjee-led party claimed Trivedi spoke on its behalf, consuming the time allotted to it.

The complaint and the demand for an investigation were mentioned in a letter that the TMC's Rajya Sabha chief whip Sukhendu Shekhar Roy wrote to the Rajya Sabha chairman on Saturday. "When the Hon'ble Finance Minister was about to give reply to Budget discussion, one member of AITC (All India Trinamool Congress) Sri Dinesh Trivedi, since resigned, was allowed to speak for about four minutes from 1.25 pm to 1.29 pm. Although his name was not recommended by the AITC as a speaker in the budget discussion and no time left for the party," Roy said.

He added, "Sri Trivedi's seat was allotted in the Rajya Sabha Gallery, but he came down inside the council chamber and started to speak, rambling about his personal political motives etc from a seat of his choice and the chair did not take any action to



Dinesh Trivedi while announcing his resignation in Rajya Sabha. PTI

stop such unauthorised intervention in the Budget discussion. Yet he spoke against the party he belonged to and made certain wild allegations against the AITC to substantiate his proposed resignation from the House."

It appealed the chairman "to immediately constitute an inquiry into the matter..."

Trivedi quit the Rajya Sabha, where he was sent last year following his failure to win the 2019 Lok Sabha election, saying he feels "suffocated" in the TMC. The former railway minister and two-time Lok Sabha rued the alleged lack of conversation around violence in West Bengal.

Taking a veiled dig at his former party colleague, TMC secretary-general Partha Chatterjee on Sunday said, "How come [Trivedi] stayed so long if [he] was feeling suffocated? Even swimmers also fail to do so."

A senior Rajya Sabha secretariat official said Trivedi "did not speak as a TMC member or was given time as a TMC member." As for other issues being raised in the letter, the official said the letter is being examined by the Rajya Sabha Secretariat.

INPUTS FROM ENS DELHI



The mahapanchayat at Indri town of Karnal district.

## Don't vote for those who don't stand by you: BKU's Chaduni at Karnal rally

SUKHBIR SIWACH  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 14

ADDRESSING A massive 'Kisan Mahapanchayat' at Indri town of Haryana's Karnal district on Sunday, senior BKU leader Gurnam Singh Chaduni urged farmers not to vote for those not standing by them during the ongoing agitation.

"We request you not to vote those leaders – who don't support you and the society in this dharma yudha or struggle, if they fight any election – be it an election for panchayat member

or Member of Parliament," he said, as farmers applauded.

Chaduni did not name the political parties he was referring to in his statement. "Make such an atmosphere that there is nobody to seek their tickets when elections approach in the state. They should not find anybody who is willing to contest on their ticket."

Chaduni said, "We have to maintain peace and we don't have to fight with any policeman or officer but those who have made these (farm) laws are guilty. Teach them a lesson, whenever they come to hold rallies and seek votes"

## 71% turnout in Punjab civic polls, clashes at many places

RAAKHI JAGGA  
LUDHIANA, FEBRUARY 14

CLASHES WERE reported from various parts of Punjab as the state witnessed a turnout of 71.39 per cent in local body polls held Sunday.

Elections were held in 117 urban local bodies (ULBs) – including eight municipal corporations, 109 municipal councils and nagar panchayats – of Punjab. Bypolls were held in four wards. In 2015, elections were held in 123 municipal councils with 69 per cent of consolidated voting.

This time, 9,222 candidates are in the fray, of which 2,832 are independents.

Mansa recorded the maximum turnout of 82.99 per cent, followed by Bathinda at 79 per cent, while Sangrur witnessed a turnout of 77.39 per cent. Mohali witnessed the lowest turnout at 60.08 per cent.

Out of the state's 22 districts, 15 had a turnout of above 70 per cent. The bottom seven districts are Mohali (60.08 per cent), Tarn Taran (63.12 per cent), Hoshiarpur (66.68 per cent), Muktsar (68.65 per cent), Moga (69.50 per cent) and SBS Nagar (69.71 per cent).

In Muktsar, the turf of the Badals, clashes happened between Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and Congress workers in the wee hours of Sunday and in Giddarbaha, where SAD boycotted elections a week back.

Hoshiarpur, Moga and Mohali were having municipal corporation elections, municipal councils and nagar panchayat elections. The three, which recorded low turnout, have a higher urban population.

While a BJP candidate in Sangrur alleged that his wife's votes were cast by someone else, in Jalalabad, SAD workers alleged that the voting list had no pictures of voters, which



Clashes between Congress and AAP workers at Samana in Patiala district. PTI

could lead to bogus voting. In Muktsar, SAD workers were accused of attacking the Congress candidate while Hoshiarpur, a BJP leader's vehicle was allegedly attacked by unidentified people. Complaints also came from Bathinda, Abohar as well as Punjab's 117 Urban local bodies (ULBs). Farmers also staged protests outside some polling booths. The SAD alleged that Congress "misused civil and police machinery to capture booths".

'Visibly tired' Rupani faints during address

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
VADODARA, FEBRUARY 14

Chief Minister Vijay Rupani, who was in Vadodara on Sunday to campaign for the Vadodara Municipal Corporation elections, fell unconscious at the third venue of his rally, while addressing the gathering.

BJP leader and former mayor of Vadodara, Dr Jigesh Seth, rushed to Rupani's aid and helped stabilise him, while a medical team rushed him to UN Mehta Hospital in Ahmedabad.

Sunil Solanki, Vadodara BJP general secretary, said, "He was visibly tired but he had not complained of any uneasiness... He had stabilised and was conscious when he left with the medical team to Ahmedabad from Vadodara airport. He will head to UN Mehta Hospital there, where he will undergo a detailed check-up. We cannot speculate on the cause of what happened."

## PM on Pulwama

# EXPRESS NETWORK

## BRIEFLY



The mishap site. PTI

### ANDHRA PRADESH

**14** pilgrims die in mishap, four children survive

**Kurnool:** Tragedy struck a group of pilgrims on their way to Ajmer Dargah as 14 of them, including a child, were killed in a road mishap in Kurnool district in Andhra Pradesh early on Sunday, police said. The only survivors were four children, all of whom are in hospital, said police. One of them is in critical condition. The mini-bus of the victims, all relatives from Chittoor district, collided with a lorry at Madapuram at around 4 am, Kurnool SP K.Fakirappa said. The passengers were on their way to the Ajmer Sharif Dargah in Rajasthan, he said. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S.Jagan Mohan Reddy announced an ex-gratia of Rs two lakh each to the kin of the deceased and Rs 1 lakh to the injured. Preliminary investigation suggested the driver lost control. The bus first crashed into the road median, rolled to the other side and hit the lorry.

PTI

### MAHARASHTRA

**For power theft 12 yrs ago, court fines Rs 19 lakh**

**Mumbai:** A Thane court has ordered a hefty fine and imprisonment in a case of electricity theft, observing that the accused should be made to pay double the theft amount committed as a 'civil liability'. In the order last week, a 58-year-old man was told to pay a fine of Rs 19 lakh along with spending two years in jail for electricity theft in a factory in Bhiwandi over 12 years ago. "...since last twelve years the accused kept denying allegations and matter is prolonged till today," the court said.

ENS

### WEST BENGAL

**Eminent Maithili poet goes missing**

**Kolkata:** Maithili poet Ramlochan Thakur has been missing from his residence in the city for the last three days, police said Sunday. Thakur (72) has been suffering from Alzheimer's disease for a couple of years. He went out of his residence on Friday, his family said. "Because he has speech difficulty due to his condition, it is difficult to locate him," a policeman said. Thakur is known for translating many Bengali books into Maithili.

PTI

## VANDANA KALRA

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 14

**HOME TO Kochi-Muziris Biennale, one of India's biggest art events, Kerala is now aspiring to become the museum hub of India. "It's time we came out of the notion that museums are places where history sleeps. They should be able to converse with visitors, more so youngsters," stated Dr Venu V, Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Kerala, who oversees the departments of Archaeology, Archives and Museums.**

Under the initiative, mini

epaper.indianexpress.com



At the Ernakulam District Heritage Museum in Bastion Bungalow at Fort Kochi



## SLIPPING UP

Bihar's Covid containment measures lapsed into complacency. Irregularities must be probed, systemic deficits addressed

**E**ARLY IN THE COVID-19 pandemic, medical experts and policymakers recognised that accurate information holds the key to taking on the infectious coronavirus. Acknowledgement of the imperative did not translate into practice immediately. Medical authorities in the country were hobbled by the paucity of testing kits, lack of information about contact tracing protocols and shortage of trained healthcare personnel. To their credit, epidemiological establishments in most states showed an awareness of these shortcomings and worked in earnest to iron them out. The government machinery put in an incredible amount of work to contain the surge. As the pandemic ebbs, however, it is also revealing some aberrations. An investigation by this paper has revealed a string of irregularities in COVID testing data in Bihar. Fudged mobile numbers, fake names and dodgy entries were used to plot the downward curve of the state's COVID curve. In some cases, multiple unrelated persons were listed under one number — this would make contact tracing very challenging if the cases were positive. The infringement of protocols seems to have begun in November last year, when the caseload started dipping — in other words, the state appears to have relaxed its guard at a time when the imperative to remain vigilant was being constantly underlined by a range of authorities, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In July and August, when infections began to soar, testing was ramped up across the country, including in Bihar. The complaint of several district magistrates in the state about the paucity of lab equipment and technicians was addressed and more than 3,000 doctors and 4,000 nurses were appointed. The augmentation of facilities and personnel had a significant bearing on the state's COVID situation. Though Bihar reported about 3,000 cases daily on most days in August, the fevered pace of political activity in October-November in the run-up to assembly elections in the state did not lead to an upsurge in the state's caseload. Officials now say that once the expected spike did not happen, people stopped turning up for testing and some district-level government functionaries began to manipulate data to make up for the numbers.

Of course, complacency in the face of an apparently retreating pathogen is not new or confined to COVID. There's now a substantial body of evidence detailing how well-established disease containment protocols, including communication drives at the grassroots level, were compromised in the weeks preceding the 2018 AES outbreak in Bihar. One of the key lessons of the pandemic is that this state of affairs needs to change, and societies need to be in a constant state of medical preparedness. Moreover, the battle against the novel coronavirus is by no means over — the vaccination drive is barely a month old and it will be months before a substantial section of the country's population is inoculated. The Bihar government has acknowledged the irregularities and begun a probe. It would do well to extend this exercise to the systemic deficits of the state's healthcare system.

## INJUDICIOUS IMPASSE

CJI Bobde-led collegium has not ensured an appointment to SC — this apparent incapacity calls for court to look within

**W**ITH HIS RETIREMENT due in just over a month, Chief Justice of India SA Bobde is likely to be the first CJI since 2015 who did not make a single appointment to the Supreme Court. The collegium he heads to appoint his colleagues has not made any recommendations in the 13 months since he took office. This lack of urgency was in spite of the fact that the top court last appointed a judge in September 2019 and currently has four vacancies, with five more expected this year. This impasse also comes at a time when high courts across the country are short of over 400 judges and the judicial system has been struggling to keep pace since the COVID-19 pandemic. The restricted functioning of the judiciary for over a year has increased the burden on the institution to protect the rights of citizens and keep government in check.

Five years ago, when the Supreme Court struck down the National Judicial Appointments Commission, the restatement of its faith in the collegium system of appointing judges to the higher judiciary was accompanied by a promise of transparency and efficiency. The fact that the issue of appointment of judges has been taken up on the judicial side by every CJI since then, hauling up government law officers on why names have not been cleared, to no ostensible effect, shows the lack of efficiency in the process. In a hearing on January 27, a three-judge bench headed by CJI Bobde asked the Centre whether there was a timeline for government clearance of recommendations made for high courts. During the hearing, the bench also questioned other high courts on the working of the collegium at the high court level — the number of times it met and why the number of recommendations did not correspond to the number of vacancies, although the same can be asked of the apex court too. Incremental reforms on transparency, such as the practice of disclosing the reasons while announcing the collegium's decision, introduced in 2017, were quickly rolled back without any explanation. Now, the collegium only puts out a public statement on who it has recommended but does not disclose who dropped out.

The hearing to address delay in appointments has resulted only in an unseemly blame-game between the government and the collegium through sworn affidavits on who caused more delay in the process. Institutional reform of the judiciary cannot be any one chief justice's burden, but every chief justice has allowed the court to slide back on transparency and efficiency. If CJI Bobde retires without a successful collegium meeting, the compulsions that lie behind this apparent incapacity of a vital institution must be made known.

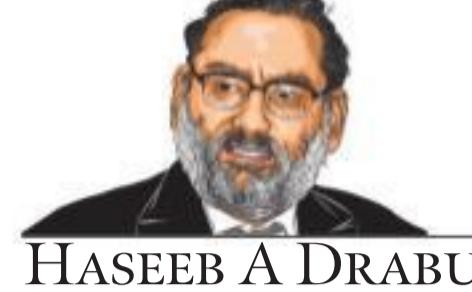
## FREEZE FRAME

EP UNNY



## A partisan federalism

Finance Commission dips into states' share for Centre's expenditure, makes system more discretionary



HASEEB A DRABU

IN THE FIREWORKS of the Union budget, little attention has been paid to the recommendation of the Fifteenth Finance Commission (XVFC). The report was laid before the Parliament and the finance minister announced the acceptance of its recommendation of retaining the share of states in central taxes at 42 per cent. She also stated that on its recommendation revenue deficit grants of Rs 1.18 lakh crore to the states have been provided for in the budget.

To its credit, by retaining the existing share of states in taxes, the XVFC has been principled and pragmatic. It has done so despite serious prodding by the Centre (through the terms of reference) to revise it downwards. Having said that, though, there is much more to a finance commission report than the vertical distribution.

Some of the recommendations, and even the obiter dicta, have far-reaching implications on government finances, both of the Centre and the states. Which is why it is strange that in an otherwise trendsetting transparent budget, the recommendations of the XVFC have been obfuscated. Sample this from the budget documents: "Keeping in view the extant strategic requirements for national defence in a global context, XVFC has, in its approach, recalibrated the relative shares of the Union and the states in gross revenues receipts."

As it turns out, "recalibration" is actually a 1 per cent reduction in the grants to states, which enables the Union to set aside resources for special funding on defence. The states have been made to pay Rs 7,000 crore to "bridge [the] Centre's gap between projected budgetary requirements and budget allocation for defence and internal security defence" — an expenditure that the Centre is obliged to fund.

For the first time, a finance commission has carved out resources meant for distributable statutory grants and dipped into the states' revenue share, as against the tax share, in order to finance the Centre's exclusive expenditure obligation. What has been done is not in line with

Consider the issue of horizontal distribution. The criteria used by successive finance commissions for devolving taxes across states have always been linked to need — based on equity, tempered by efficiency. The XVFC has moved the balance sharply: From 92.5 per cent of funds to a state being devolved based on need and equity, the XVFC has reduced these two components to 75 per cent. The remaining 25 per cent are to be devolved on considerations of efficiency and performance. This is the lowest weightage for equity, making the XVFC transfers potentially the least progressive ever.

the system envisaged in the Constitution. The Constitution is very clear on the charge of revenues collected: The first charge on taxes collected is devolution and statutory commitments, not the Centre's expenditure.

While the amount is just about 0.5 per cent of the total transfers of Rs 14 lakh crore to the states, it is really the thin edge of the wedge that will eventually put the fiscal federal system under systemic strain.

In operational terms, too, this move is a significant departure. So far, the Centre has been used to pre-empting resources from the kitty to be distributed among the states but only to finance expenditures in areas earmarked for states. This was done through the centrally-sponsored schemes, but at least the states' money was being used in the states, even if on a discretionary rather than a criteria basis. Now, with this move of earmarking and financing of funds for sectors, it is the states' money that is being used to finance the Centre's expenditure. This is certainly not cooperative federalism.

If anything, it is heading towards partisan federalism. Consider the issue of horizontal distribution. The criteria used by successive finance commissions for devolving taxes across states have always been linked to need — based on equity, tempered by efficiency. The XVFC has moved the balance sharply: From 92.5 per cent of funds to a state being devolved based on need and equity, the XVFC has reduced these two components to 75 per cent. The remaining 25 per cent are to be devolved on considerations of efficiency and performance. This is the lowest weightage for equity, making the XVFC transfers potentially the least progressive ever.

Apart from these issues arising from what the XVFC has done, there are equally severe problems arising out of what it has not done. While the report is comprehensive in diagnosing and understanding the issues, it has made no effort to prescribe solutions. Far from it, it has not even made any

serious effort to review the existing scheme of transfers in light of the changed federal landscape. For instance, the existing criteria have evolved in, and for, a production-based tax system. The XVFC should have reformulated the distributional criteria for a consumption-based tax system. The structural change from production to consumption will make a significant difference to inter-state distribution as well as the need, nature and distribution of equalising grants.

Instead, what does the report offer? It merely notes: "Such structural issues may be required to be identified and readjustment may be done to minimise the fiscal and economic impact of GST." Who is to identify these structural issues? And who is to make the readjustment? The only institution that is constitutionally empowered to do it and ideally positioned to take a technically correct and operationally practical view is the Finance Commission. By rolling the can down the road, the XVFC has abdicated its responsibility.

This is the same manner in which the revenue deficit grants have been carried forward. Ideally, the "gap-filling" approach should have been redesigned in light of the compensation law providing a minimum-guaranteed revenue of 14 per cent to every state. The result of not doing so is that the total grants, statutory and non-statutory, account for almost 55 per cent of the total transfers — up from less than 50 per cent in recent years. The share of tax devolution in aggregate transfers has dropped to 45 per cent, making the system more discretionary.

To conclude, the XVFC's substantive award is status quoist, its design is regressive even though its obiter dicta is reformist. In not being aligned with the new landscape of federalism, it is like a red herring prospectus, which contains most of the information pertaining to the operations, but does not address the key issues.

The writer is the former finance minister of Jammu and Kashmir



PRAGYA AKHILESH

THE GOVERNMENT HAS focussed on the vaccination of frontline sanitation workers, but the most vulnerable among them, the manual scavengers, have not got the attention they deserve. When it comes to understanding who sanitation workers are and what are their different categories, India has always been far behind.

The "lowest" denominator in the work of sanitation are the manual scavengers, who are by far the most unprotected. While the sanitation worker who works in a hospital or school may have limited safeguards, the manual scavengers are left to clean dry latrines and enter septic tanks. To many, manual scavenging has already been eradicated since it is legally prohibited and the practice of dry latrines is dying out. But the ground reality is very different.

To name a few categories, sanitation workers can be classified into faecal sludge handlers, sewage treatment plant sanitation workers, toilet sanitation workers (community, hospital, public, school, domestic household), public transportation site sanitation workers (railway, roads), sewer and drain sanitation workers, septic tank sanitation workers, waste recovery sanitation workers (household-community-landfill), operational sanitation workers, sanitation-waste intersection workers. Workers who manually discard human excreta in any form do the work of manual scavenging. For instance, sewer and drain cleaners and septic tank workers do more often than toilet sanitation workers. Similarly, the risk involved in septic cleaning is the highest, killing one sanitation worker every five days. A toilet sanitation worker forced to clean human excrement because of lack of water supply is also said to be doing the work of manual scavenging. Even waste recovery sanitation workers perform the work of manual scavenging as they come in regular contact with unprotected bio-medical waste, animal carcasses and faeces. The implementation of the many laws banning this practice has always been the weakest. Sewer deaths continue to happen. Caste and economics are complicit in the deprivation of the most deprived.

In the initial days of the pandemic, the absence of policy for the protection of the sanitation workers resulted in the loss of many lives, cases that you cannot even find in the records of the National Commission of the Safai Karmachari (NCSK). The Safai Karmachari Andolan (SKA) has had a far better grasp of this data. Politicians have washed the feet of sanitation workers but, in effect, left them to die. Toilet infrastructure is of much more value to the government than the toilet cleaners. There is no social security, no accountability in the

actual expenditure of the rehabilitation schemes, no definite provision for healthcare or pension. Lastly, no importance is given to the representation of a sanitation worker during formulation of policies for them. The many layers of sanitation work make them prone to long-term diseases, as in most cases they do not even live till the age of retirement. Their children suffer from malnutrition, TB and cholera because they live in settlements on the periphery of the waste generated by the cities. During the pandemic, the sanitation workers worked full time to ensure safety to the people of the land. The manual scavengers have kept entering septic tanks because we failed to provide them a safety net. Some migrant labourers also took up the work of scavenging because of lack of work. Therefore, it does not matter to the sanitation worker if the person to first get vaccinated in India is a sanitation worker or not.

What matters is how many of them have actually been vaccinated without the argument that they have already developed "herd immunity". The government must urgently prioritise vaccination for manual scavengers.

The writer is the national convener of RRI, India, and secretary of the Bhim Safai Karmachari Trade Union

## MOST VULNERABLE FIRST

The vaccination of manual scavengers must be prioritised

During the pandemic, manual scavengers kept entering septic tanks because we failed to provide them a safety net. Some migrant labourers also took up the work of scavenging. It does not matter if the person to first get vaccinated in India is a sanitation worker or not. What matters is how many of them have actually been vaccinated without the argument that they have already developed 'herd immunity'.

## FEBRUARY 15, 1981, FORTY YEARS AGO

## SIXTH PLAN APPROVED

THE SIXTH FIVE-YEAR Plan, providing for a total investment of Rs 1,72,210 crore including Rs 97,500 crore in the public sector and covering the period 1980-85, was approved by the National Development Council. The Planning Minister, N D Tiwari, told a news conference that the approval was by consensus but the three leftist states — West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura — expressed dissent at the NDC. The reservations of the three states, the minister said, were based on ideological grounds but they had assured him that the targets laid down in the Plan programmes would be fulfilled in a spirit of competition.

## NAM DECLARATION

THE DECLARATION OF the nonaligned foreign ministers' conference has made two important points: One, formulation of principles of the movement in relation to the Iraq-Iran war and two, economic cooperation among developing countries, including OPEC countries. The principles are: No state should acquire or occupy territories by the use of force, and whatever territories have been acquired in this way should be returned. For the first time, the conference has nominated a team to seek a solution to the Iraq-Iran war in the context of these principles. India, Zambia, Cuba and the PLO are the members of the "fact-finding" team.

## MINE COLLAPSE

ABOUT 100 WORKERS are feared buried under the debris of a coal mine at Bhadua four km from Giridih town in the Chhotanagpur tribal belt, according to unofficial reports received here. The mine was reportedly being operated illegally.

## BARODA UNREST

AT LEAST SEVEN persons were injured when the police fired 22 rounds at five places in Baroda and burst nearly 300 teargas shells to quell rioting and arson. District superintendent of police, M M Mehta, said one more person was injured by a teargas shell, while over 30 others were hurt in lathi-charge.

# THE IDEAS PAGE

## Farm lessons from China, Israel

Agri-market freedom and strict water accounting could address some of the longstanding problems of agriculture in India



**FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH**  
BY ASHOK GULATI

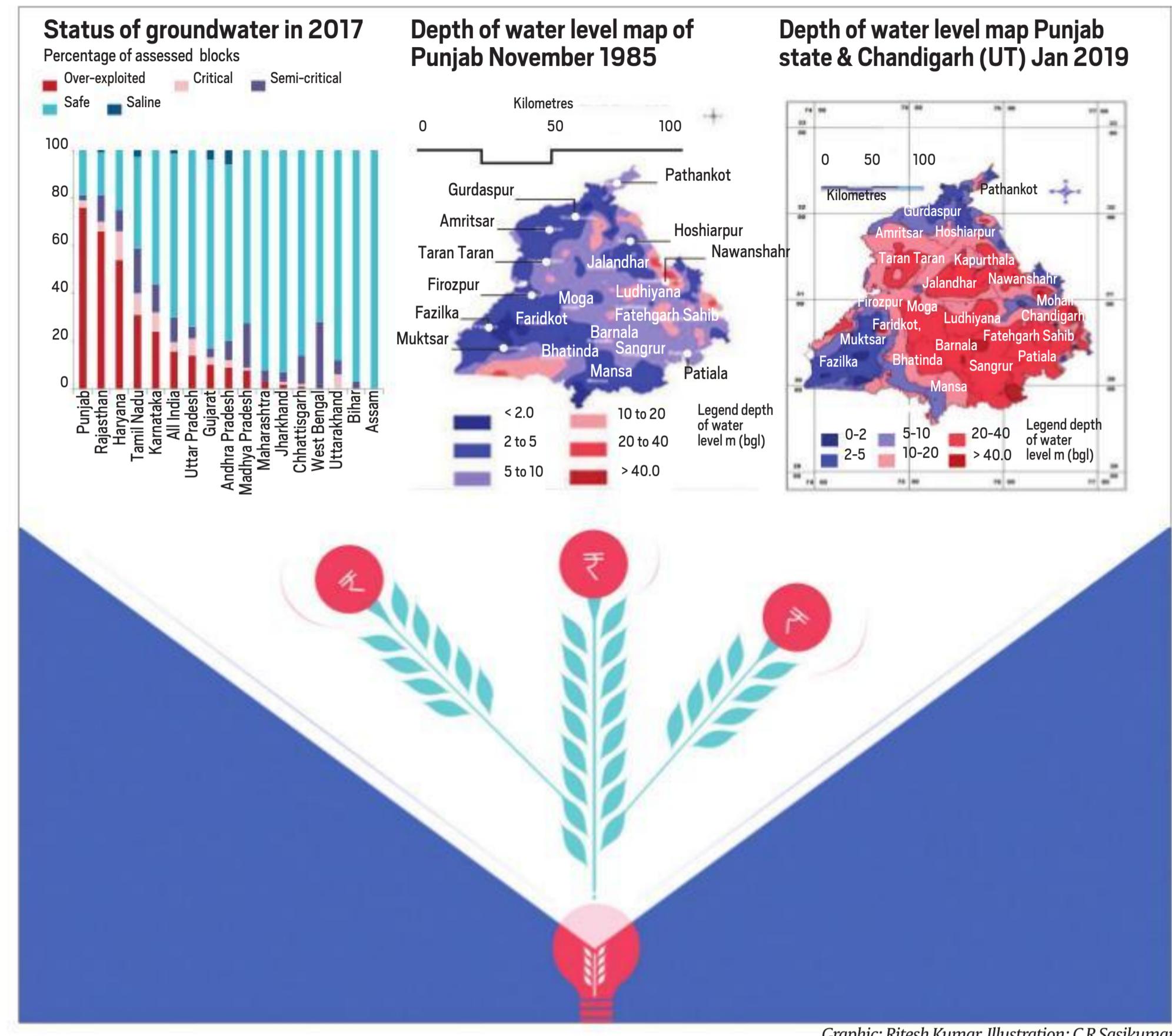
I SAY THAT Indian agriculture has the potential to double or even triple its output in the next 15-20 years, many people will laugh it away. But the reality is that many countries have done it and we can do it, too, provided our agri-food policy framework takes a dramatic turn, from being subsidy-led to investment-driven, from being consumer-oriented to producer-oriented, and from being supply-oriented to demand-driven by linking farms with factories and foreign markets, and, finally, from being business as usual to an innovations-centred system. At least this is what we can learn from a comparative study of Indian, Chinese and Israeli agriculture in a just released book, *From Food Scarcity to Surplus – Innovations in Indian, Chinese, and Israeli Agriculture* by Ashok Gulati, Yuan Zhou, Jikun Huang, Alon Tal, and Ritika Juneja (Springer Nature, 2021).

China, for example, produces three times more agri-output than India from a smaller arable area. The average holding size in China was just 0.9 ha in 2016-18, smaller than India's 1.08 ha in 2015-16. So there is no doubt that small holders can do wonders, if they are given the right incentives, good infrastructure and research support, and the right institutional framework to operate. As a result, the absolute poverty head count ratio at \$1.9 per day (2011 purchasing power parity) definition was only 0.7 per cent in China as against 13.4 per cent in India in 2015, as per the World Development Indicators.

All the three countries – India, China and Israel – started off their new political journey in late 1940s, but today China's per capita income in dollar terms is almost five times that of India, and Israel's almost 20 times higher than India. Agriculture contributes just 8 per cent of overall GDP in China compared to about 17 per cent in India, and only 1 per cent in Israel. Over a period of time, people have moved out of agriculture. About 26 per cent of China's workforce is in agriculture, in Israel this is less than 1 percent while India is still stuck with 42 per cent of its workforce in agriculture.

China, as many would know, started off its economic reforms in 1978 by taking up agriculture first. It dismantled its commune system of land holdings and liberated agri-markets that allowed farmers to get much higher prices for their produce. As a result, in 1978-84, farmers' incomes in China increased by almost 14 per cent per annum, more than doubling in six years. This gave political legitimacy for further reforms as masses gained, and also generated demand for industrial goods, sowing the seeds of a manufacturing revolution in China led by the Town and Village Enterprises (TVEs).

In India, the 1991 reforms bypassed agriculture. There was only some indirect effect when tariffs on manufactured goods were reduced. But Indian agri-food policies remained more consumer-oriented with a



Graphic: Ritesh Kumar; Illustration: CR Sasikumar

view to "protect the poor". In the process, they never allowed farmers to enjoy the best prices they could get from free markets within India or abroad. Export controls, stocking limits on traders, movement restrictions, etc all continued at the hint of any price rise. The net result of all this was farmers' incomes remained low and so did those of landless agri-labourers. Today, Indian agriculture is saddled with more agri-labourers (55 per cent) than cultivators – all except a few in the northwest of the country, who have much bigger holdings and are supported by huge subsidies, are in a low-level equilibrium trap of poverty.

Israel offers something unique: How to turn a desert into cultivating high-value crops for exports (citrus fruits, dates, olives) by using every drop of water and recycling urban waste water for agriculture, by desalination of sea waters. Water accounting in Israel is something exemplary. Our Prime Minister and several Chief Ministers have often visited Israel and brought back the same message: Save water and use every drop to produce more crop. But when I talk to Israeli experts, they categorically say that until India breaks away from the policy of free power for agriculture, there would be no incentive for farmers to save water. Can we learn something from Israel on this? This is my biggest worry as we are depleting our groundwater table.

Remember the famous proverb, "We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children". The accompa-

In India, the 1991 reforms bypassed agriculture. Agri-food policies remained consumer-oriented with a view to 'protect the poor'. In the process, they never allowed farmers to enjoy the best prices they could get from free markets within India or abroad. Export controls, stocking limits on traders, movement restrictions, etc all continued at the hint of any price rise. The net result of all this was farmers' incomes remained low and so did those of landless agri-labourers.

nying infographics show how we are robbing the rights of our own children to precious groundwater. And this is so alarming in a state like Punjab where almost 80 per cent of blocks are over-exploited or critical, meaning the withdrawal of water is much more than the recharge.

As the wise man of Punjab, SS Johl, often remarked, this is a disaster in the making, and a business-as-usual scenario will lead to the desertification of Punjab. The reasons are well known: Paddy cultivation on more than 3 million hectares. The paddy-wheat cycle in Punjab, which was a boon at one time, is increasingly becoming Punjab's bane. How did we come to this situation where we are depriving our own children of the sweet ground water of Punjab?

Free power, highly subsidised urea and open-ended procurement have become a deadly cocktail that are eating away the natural wealth of Punjab. Out-of-box thinking is needed to break this regressive cycle for a brighter future for Punjab, for our own children. It is a hard nut to crack, but it is very much possible provided our policymakers have a five-to-seven-year vision to transform this region into a belt of high-value fruits, vegetables, dairy, poultry, fishery, and even pulses and oilseeds, in line with the emerging demand pattern. Can the Centre and Punjab government join hands to deliver a better future for our children?

The writer is Infosys Chair Professor for Agriculture at ICRIER

## A toolkit for change

State must not defame youth standing with farmers. It's the future they are fighting for



**ASHISH KOTHARI**

YOUTH ACTION THROUGHOUT history has shaken the status quo. In recent times, young people have been the heart of citizen mobilisations across the world – against authoritarian regimes in the Arab world and Chile, global finance and corporate impunity in the Occupy movement, racism in the US and elsewhere, mining and pipeline projects in North and South America, and the climate crisis with networks like Fridays for Future. In India, they have mobilised against communalism and religious hatred, abrogation of democratic rights by the state, and environmental violations.

In all these cases, there is state backlash, often siding with powerful corporate interests. And in this, it has ample support from a pliant media and reactionary forces aligned with it or forming its base.

Environmentalist youth across India have legitimately supported the ongoing farmers' movement, recognising the intricate connections between environmental, social, economic issues. Now, the government has used the violence that marked one day of the farmers' movement (which the farmers' coalition, even if not directly responsible, has denounced and apologised for) as an excuse to defame this multi-pronged movement.

At the centre of the controversy is a "toolkit" and an exhortation to "action" that were contained in a tweet by climate activist Greta Thunberg. What does this call to action contain? It asks supporters of the farmers' movement to take up Twitter storms,

physical actions wherever relevant, solidarity messages, and so on.

Delhi's Special Commissioner of Police reportedly believes that: "If you go by the unfolding of events, including the violence of January 26, it reveals a copycat execution of the action plan." If indeed he did say this, it is a stretch of the imagination that would make a rubber band blush. Any call for protests, digital and physical, and a toolkit that lists out such actions, cannot be automatically assumed to be a call for violence. The actions recommended are a time-honoured part of non-violent dissent for centuries, including Gandhi's during India's independence struggle and Martin Luther King's in the black rights movement in the US. All political parties have at some point been out on the streets protesting, blocking roads, doing gheraos and dharnas, to voice their dissent. Many in the current government were on the streets in the India Against Corruption movement. The right to dissent non-violently, including physically, is a fundamental part of democracy. The Supreme Court and many high courts have upheld this in many judgments. Toolkits, for all the official and media bluster, are not weapons of mass destruction!

Heavy-handed state actions are an attempt to scare dissenters, create a "chilling effect". Over the last few years, the state has used laws like UAPA arbitrarily and spitefully, or tried to defame movements by linking them to "anti-national" or "terrorist" elements like "Maoists" or "Khalistanis", and

now the Prime Minister's coinage, "andolan-jeevis". This is an easy but illegitimate way to defame entirely legitimate citizens' movements acting within the bounds of India's Constitution.

These are also deliberate diversions from issues of substance. Recently, young people have been vocal on environmental issues, pointing to the folly of government decisions allowing mining, industrialisation, expressways through ecologically-fragile areas, and its inadequate attention to air and water pollution that kills or maims millions. Every political party has in its manifesto or other documents admitted the seriousness of the environmental (including the climate) crisis. And yet, here is what a news site close to the current dispensation, which attacked young environmentalists, is saying: "India cannot afford to pay heed to environmental concerns... cannot afford the lack of sustainability and high production costs of currently available sources of sustainable energy, and also hope to raise 50 million people out of extreme poverty. India also has the fifth highest coal reserves in the world, which should be utilised for the development of India, not discarded in favour of renewable energy."

Apart from factual distortions (renewable energy worldwide is now cheaper than fossil fuels if full costs are integrated), does this contradict the environmental concern shown by the BJP as the party in power? On paper, yes. In actuality, no. This government's actions over the last 6-7 years have shown it

to be least concerned about the massive loss of livelihoods, hunger and malnutrition, displacement and other impacts caused by environmental damage. The grossly unscientific draft EIA notification of mid-2020 and the 2021 Budget exemplify this. In decisions relating to projects of several big corporations, environmental laws have been blatantly bypassed. Having inherited a legacy of unsustainable "development" from the Congress, the BJP is taking it to new depths. Crony capitalism continues to rear its ugly, undemocratic, corrupt, head.

In a "business-as-usual" scenario, today's youth will inherit a world with all rivers and lakes polluted or drained out, air in cities not fit to breathe, no prospects for satisfactory and dignified livelihoods (given the "jobless growth" that India has witnessed for over two decades), so-called "natural" disasters waiting for them at every turn, and complete subservience to the diktats of powerful corporations and the state. Why should they not protest? They have every right to do so, and if activists abroad support them, this is not evidence that there is an international conspiracy, or that anything is threatening India's security. Indeed, the real anti-national here is a government that undermines the country's ecological present and future, and the democratic rights of its citizens.

The writer is with Kalpvriksh, an environment research and advocacy group in Pune. Views are personal

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"To excuse Trump's attack on American democracy would invite more such attempts, by him and by other aspiring autocrats. The stakes could not be higher. A vote for impunity is an act of complicity."

— NYT

## Fields of the future

In the backdrop of the challenges of fourth industrial revolution, agriculture needs disruptive digital thinking



**MAHESH ZAGADE**

continuously trying to improve the economic status of farmers; however, these efforts do not get translated into a sustainable increase in the per capita income of the farmers.

Instead of addressing the problem faced by the farmers alone, there is a need to take a comprehensive view for a new economic model in the backdrop of the highly distorted economic inequality, impending large-scale job losses sealing opportunity for shifting people from agriculture to other sectors. The country needs to adopt pragmatic, disruptively innovative thinking commensurate with the currency of the time. From this perspective, many new innovative models could be designed.

I am proposing one such solution that could be employed to address the issues haunting the agrarian economy and pave the way for retention of the population in the agriculture sector by bringing rural average household income closer to those engaged in manufacturing and services sectors without making any reference to the farmers' agitation, or the new farm laws, continuance or abolition of APMCs, MSP, DBT, subsidies etc.

The proposal is simple. However, it would require the deployment of digital technologies that are being used commercially on a large scale. It would not be an impediment as the country is blessed with the availability of such technologies.

My proposal involves fixation of prices of all the agricultural primary goods on a day-to-day basis or periodically by the local farming community. Once such prices are discovered and fixed, the first trader will have to procure that commodity at a price not below the price so fixed. The subsequent sales or trades can happen depending on the market forces. I propose a name for this scheme: "First Trade Minimum Price" (FTMP).

The exercise of fixing prices could be enabled through the use of robust digital technologies that are easily available. The organisational structure, statutory/regulatory mechanisms, the use of technologies are the aspects of detailing and not at all difficult to conceptualise and implement. As the proposal is extremely simple, it wouldn't take a long gestation period to operationalise it. It also doesn't take away anything currently available to the farmer and, hence, I do not apprehend any resistance from them or for that matter from any other quarter.

This proposition is perfectly aligned with the existing accepted practices. It's a fact that the GDP contribution of the secondary and tertiary sectors combined is more than 80 per cent and it's also a fact that the prices of products or the services of this 80 per cent economy are determined and decided by the manufacturers of the products or the service providers. My proposition is to enable the farming community also to decide the prices of their products like the secondary and tertiary segments of the economy.

And, therefore, the doors that were historically open during the last two centuries are closing down to assimilate the huge population from agriculture.

Against this backdrop, it has become imperative to rethink the economic order to contain the turmoil caused by the scarcity of livelihood opportunities, especially in agriculture.

The central and state governments are

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### POLITICAL HYPOCRISY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial 'Wealth of nations' (IE, February 12). A demographically-stable country with access to ample resources and cutting-edge technology cannot stand on its feet unless enterprising individuals acknowledge the true potential of the available factors of the economy, and put everything at their disposal to work. The vilification of the private sector has been an easy tactic for opportunist politicians to rally the working class. The hypocrisy of the political class to overtly despise corporates and covertly engage with them during elections has bred political corruption.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata

### AFTER DRAWDOWN

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Standing at ease' (IE, February 12). With China signalling it will disengage at the LAC, India needs to lead the way to restore the status quo before April 2020. The testing of waters by China in eastern Ladakh to fulfil its military aspirations, and expansionist approach has boomeranged. India will have to be vigilant to not let the history repeat itself.

Nischai Vats, Sultanpur

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Standing at ease' (IE, Feb 12). The significant development on the Eastern Ladakh front is due to shrewd military leadership and resolute political direction. Capturing

the tactically advantageous heights in Chushul sector pre-emptively was the key that ultimately opened the deadlock. Caution should be the leitmotif for all future dealings with China, especially in the security arena.

N Bhagwat, Chiplun

### HIMALAYAN LESSON

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Tread softly' (IE, February 11). The fragile Himalayan belt, under stress from global warming, has also to cope with the recklessness of development, leading to repercussions like the floods in Chamoli. It should be taken as a warning. Unfortunately, tragedies like these are forgotten with no lessons learnt.

Vijai Pant, Hempur

AJAY BHUSHAN PANDEY, FINANCE SECRETARY

# ‘Should govt be in the business of business? It should be a catalyst, enabler... Budget indicative of this strategy’

Pandey talks about challenges and opportunities of the Feb 1 Budget, says 6.7% tax collection gap will be “narrower” by year-end, asserts investments are coming and discussions are on at various levels, and explains the government’s plan for a bad bank. The session was moderated by Special Correspondent Aanchal Magazine

AANCHAL MAGAZINE: What were some of the key areas that you wanted to focus on in this Budget?

We are all aware that the last one year has been difficult. We tried to intervene through various packages, and each one of them can be called a mini-budget. Around November-December, when we started preparing for the (February 1) Budget, the thought within the Finance Ministry and the PMO was that this is both a challenge and an opportunity. Also, we thought about measures that would make us capable of not just handling the present challenge but would also put India on the reform trajectory. It was our attempt to make a quantum leap into the new decade. Intense deliberations took place in December-January within the Finance Ministry, with other ministries, as well as stakeholders outside the government. We got a lot of inputs and ideas, and then you saw the result...

In this Budget, one of the things that we have attempted is transparency... We were quite forthright in admitting that our fiscal deficit will be in the range of 9.5% (of the GDP), and then next year it will be 6.8% (of the GDP), and so on. All our expenditure and revenue statements also were very realistically assessed.

As far as the application of money is concerned, we thought about where we can put the money to ensure a multiplier effect. So, there is a quantum jump in capital investment, infrastructure allocation. Then, considering the current crisis, you can see allocation to the health sector, vaccines etc.

It is normally believed that at the time of the Budget, rates are changed, either in personal income-tax, corporate income-tax or in indirect tax. I think this Budget is a far bigger statement than just a few changes in the tax structure. Another statement that we made is that we need stability in the tax rate.

AANCHAL MAGAZINE: What is your view on the overall recovery process of the economy in the coming year?

In December, our gross tax collection was down by 12-13%. By the end of January, the gross tax collection, compared to the actual collection in January 2020, came down by 6.7%. Now, with the situation improving, by the end of the year this gap of 6.7% will be narrowed. This year, we have also been very, very prompt in giving refunds to the taxpayers. The total income-tax refund that has been given is almost Rs 1.91 lakh crore. Our net revenue collection by the end of January was short by 9.5% of the actual revenue... In a pandemic situation, we need to compare how much was collected last year to how much we are going to collect this year. Our estimate is that the gap will further reduce by the end of March...

Now, for next year, what we have estimated for both indirect and direct tax — which was also predicted in the Economic Survey, by the RBI — is that there could be a nominal growth rate of 14.5%. On 14.5%, we applied a tax buoyancy of 1.16, and that is why the revenue growth in the next year comes to 16.7%. Now, is that an underestimate? My own view is that it is neither an underestimate nor an overestimate, it is a realistic estimate based on sound logic.

ANIL SASI: The Finance Minister was quite emphatic in saying that the government has spent through the year to boost growth. In the government expenditure figure of 28% for the current fiscal — if we were to discount the Food Corporation of India borrowings — the increase comes to about 17%, roughly. And, this 17%, if compared to the previous fiscal, 2019-20, which was about 16%, shows that there isn't a big incremental push.

Also, in the first three quarters, the spending has incrementally been about 8%. Which means that in the last quarter, which is the current quarter, there will have to be a big spending push. How will that happen, even to achieve the 17%?

The special cess will allow us to plan expenditure, particularly in agri infrastructure and development. We didn't want to burden taxpayer



WHY  
AJAY BHUSHAN PANDEY

**H**e was at the centre of the February 1 Budget that marked a shift in the govt's financial strategy, with the economy still reeling from the shock of the pandemic and the lockdowns. He also holds the post of Revenue Secretary



Illustration: Suvajit Dey

of the key themes of the Budget. There was a specific focus on strategic disinvestment, but the only sort of strategic change we have seen in the recent past is one Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) taking over another. Right now, what is it that indicates to the government that the private sector is ready to take over large PSUs?

If you see the major disinvestment processes that are currently going on, particularly Air India and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited... these are the indications that we have got. A large number of private players have either participated or they are in the process of participating when the date of the bid comes... This Budget is a statement. The Finance Minister of the country has said that we will privatise two banks and one insurance company; we will monetise the assets, and we will invite the private sector...

The Prime Minister's statement in the Lok Sabha... he said that the role of the private sector in economic development needs to be appreciated. The principle of minimum government, maximum governance... you can see this reflection in the Budget speech.

The whole idea is that in the third decade of the 21st century, should the government be in the business of business? The government should act as a catalyst, as an enabler, and a source to facilitate economic development. This is something that we have said too. Privatisation and disinvestment will happen, but these statements are indicative of a larger strategy which shows the direction in which the government will be moving forward... In a country of 1.38 crore people, can these things be done only by the government?... Take for instance vac-

cine development, or PPE kits, or ventilators... The role of the private sector has to be encouraged and the government has to be a facilitator, that is the broad principle which will be pursued, not one PSU buying another PSU. It could have happened in a few cases, but that's not the direction of what has been laid down in this Budget.

**HARISH DAMODARAN:** What would be the total mobilisation of the agriculture infrastructure and development cess? It is applicable on petrol, diesel, palm oil, soya oil, all big-ticket items. For diesel, it is Rs 4, and our consumption is around 10 crore kilolitres per year. That itself will be Rs 40,000 crore. So, the total collection will be in excess of Rs 1 lakh crore. Where is the scope for spending Rs 1 lakh crore on agriculture infrastructure? States are not going to get any of this money either. How will these funds be used?

Our estimate is that we will get around Rs 30-35,000 crore. While planning the Budget, there are competing priorities from various sectors, and many times there are budgetary constraints. So, we thought that why not have this special cess which will allow us to plan expenditure, particularly in the areas of agriculture infrastructure and development. Our other objective was not to burden the taxpayer. So, wherever possible, we adjusted the Customs duty... And about petrol, diesel, that you have mentioned, a large part of that comes from reduction in additional excise duty... The additional excise duty was a kind of general purpose cess which was coming only to the Centre, which could be spent on any item. So, we reduced that also and replaced that reduction with the agriculture development cess part. We have made the estimate, it is about Rs 30-35,000 crore... Definitely not Rs 1 lakh crore... Again, a significant amount of this money will go to state governments through various schemes.

**PRASANTA SAHU:** Tax disputes have been on the rise in the country. What does the government propose to do about this?

We have been grappling with tax disputes for decades. We tried to look into the reasons for it. One is legacy cases. Now, last year, before the pandemic, for indirect tax, we brought in this Sabka Vishwas (Legacy Dispute Resolution) scheme. It was particularly for disputes linked to excise duty because excise was subsumed in the GST. It got a very good response and disputes of over Rs 80,000 crore got settled under that scheme.

Now, for income-tax, we brought in the Vivad se Vishwas scheme last year. It was passed by Parliament in the third week of March and, soon after, the pandemic struck. We faced some setbacks in the initial months. Now, by the end of January (2021), the results are very, very encouraging. More than 1.25 lakh cases concerning Rs 97,000 crore have been settled under the Vivad se Vishwas scheme.

... The faceless random tax assessment scheme was launched by the Prime Minister on August 13 last year. In the last five months, around 50,000 cases have been decided under the scheme... Of these cases (additional tax demands) were large in only 4,000 or 8% of the cases. If we compare that to the earlier non-faceless, manual system, large additions were made in almost 60% of the cases... Ultimately what is going to happen? Those cases will end up in appeal, there will be disputes and litigation. Faceless assessment system actually strikes at the root of the problem of tax disputes.

**SUNNY VERMA:** The government

sharply reduced the corporate tax rate in September 2019. The objective was to kickstart investment and capital expenditure cycles. Have you carried out an assessment to find out if the objectives were achieved?

We brought in the tax rate in September 2019. The objective was to kickstart the investment cycle... and be competitive in the world... We have to see what is the optimal tax rate in a developing country. And, the tax rate should also meet our revenue requirement... We should be competitive so that people make investments here. In this digital world, investments will flow into places which are more tax-friendly and have a congenial environment.

In the first year itself (of the tax reduction) the coronavirus pandemic hit. This posed a serious challenge to people's investment plans... The current trends that we are seeing (in terms of) investment, domestic

tion is that it should have its currency.

There is a lot of misconception. Cryptocurrency is sometimes confused with digital currency. The RBI can come out with digital currency. Today, when one is making a payment through UPI or NEFT, is it not digital currency? If one has money in the bank account, without being able to see the currency, one can make transactions. The money which is there in your bank account is actually digital currency. If you see the growth of UPI in last two years, it is mind-boggling. Almost Rs 4 lakh crore has been transacted through UPI, and 250

crore transactions have taken place. So, is this not digital currency?

Currency is in the Union list. Every sovereign country is allowed to have its currency. If any other currency is being introduced in some form, which does not conform to the constitutional principle, then it is a violation of the Constitution. Every policy, whether the government will allow (cryptocurrency) or not, will have to be dictated by this principle...

**ANANT GOENKA:** The Prime Minister had said that the Budget will happen in several parts, that there will be many mini-budgets. Can you elaborate?

In the Budget, we have given a statement about expenditure and revenue collection. Now we have to implement what the Prime Minister referred to was before the Budget we had several mini-budgets. Every time when we are taking certain reformative steps, particularly involving the expenditure of money in desired sectors, the impact is going to be much more than a small implementation step. So it acquires this character of a mini-budget. Before the Budget (on February 1), we had several budgets. And the (February 1) Budget is truly reformative.

**GEORGE MATHEW:** The Finance Minister mentioned forming a bad bank to tackle bad loans. How is the government planning to take it forward?

Today, every bank, in the public or private sector, is in the business of advancing loans. It is in the nature of the business that every loan that a bank advances cannot always be successful. So, some loans are going to turn bad. When a certain loan turns bad, how do we dispose of the asset? How do we derive the remnant value from that particular asset, which was created out of the loan which has become bad?

The concept of bad bank was being debated for the last several years. Now, in this Budget, one proposal has been mooted to Parliament. We will provide certain details on how the bad bank will function and what will be the shareholding pattern. At this point in time, some details have been worked out and some are being worked out. At an appropriate time and through an appropriate Bill, if required, it will be placed before Parliament... The intent is to create certain agencies that will help dispose of the assets. If we don't dispose of these assets or take care of them, then, over a period, their value will decline. That is not good either for the banks, depositors or the economy.

**ISHAN BAKSHI:** The Finance Commission has laid down the fiscal consolidation roadmap for the government for the next five years. Is this roadmap constraining the Centre from spending more next year?

In a pandemic year, we have projected expenditure of around Rs 34 lakh crore. The next year, we have projected Rs 34,86,000 crore. This is the estimate we have made. Sometimes people say that we have estimated far more expenditure than we have the capacity to spend. Again, some have the view that we could have spent more. There can be a debate on this. But we have taken a call that next year we will be again required to spend.

This year, we will spend a huge amount. Therefore, even though the budgetary estimate of the current year is around Rs 30 lakh crore, it has gone up to more than Rs 34 lakh crore. This is because we had to come out with several Atmanirbhar packages due to the coronavirus crisis. We also had to spend money on various welfare programmes and other activities... Revenue has shown a growth of 16.7% and that is why the fiscal deficit has become 6.8%.

The Finance Commission has in its report laid down a certain roadmap. Of course, it is a very important input. When the government plans a Budget, we have to take various professional opinions from various quarters. Based on its requirement, the government takes a call and places it before Parliament, which is finally approved.

or foreign, all point out that there are plans and people are engaged in discussions with us at various levels... So, investments are taking place.

**AVISHEK G DASTIDAR:** The Finance Ministry delayed a loan of around Rs 80,000 crore this fiscal to the Railways. This has helped the Railways meet, among other things, its pension liability. Is the Ministry open to sharing the Railways' pension burden in the future?

When we prepare the Budget, every ministry submits a statement to the Finance Ministry regarding how much revenue it is going to get and how much will be its expenditure commitment under various heads, including pensions. Now, the Railways is part of the Union Budget and therefore these things will have to be decided holistically. Everything (the funds) comes from the Consolidated Fund of India and then the money is given. All departments are part of the government and when we conduct a pre-Budget exercise, we take full stock of how much revenue a department can generate, and how much expenditure it is going to incur — the gap or surplus, and how the gap will be met.

**ANANT GOENKA:** How will cryptocurrencies affect revenue calculations of the government?

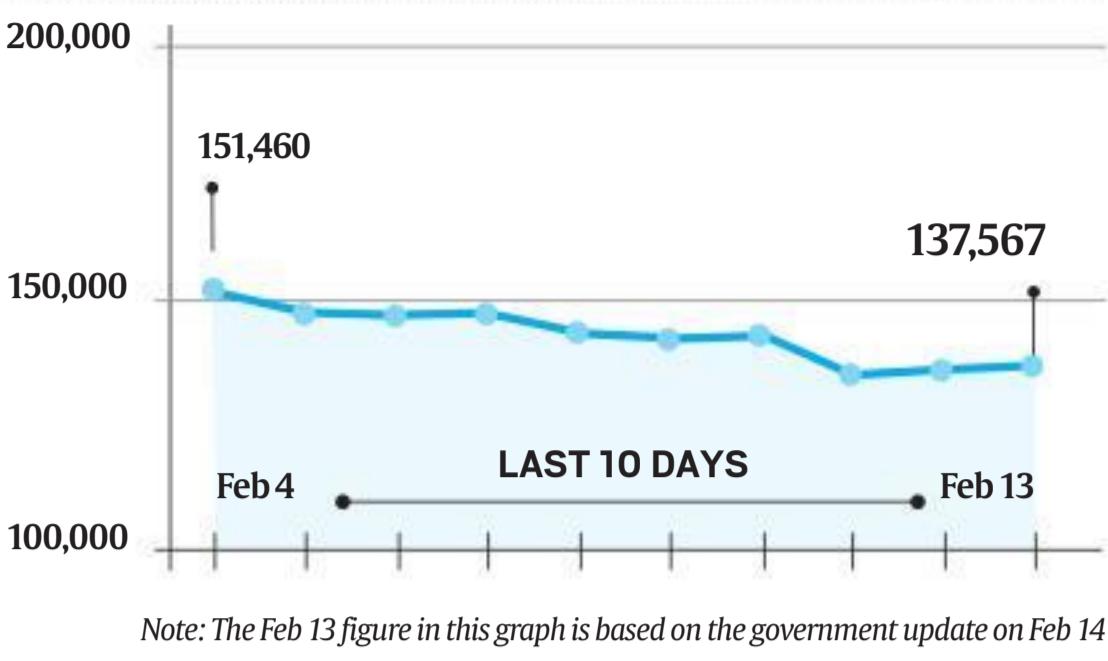
Cryptocurrency is being debated within the government and also on various international fora. Currency is the sovereign function of every country... If some private entity starts developing and circulating its own money, will that be permissible by any country? A basic feature of a sovereign na-

50,000 cases have been decided under faceless random tax assessment scheme. The system strikes at the root of the problem of tax disputes

## CORONAVIRUS DASHBOARD

## INDIA ACTIVE CASES

137,567



INDIA TOTAL CASES 10,904,940

Source: Ministry of Health &amp; Family Welfare, updated at 11 pm on Feb 14

## The Andhra-Odisha dispute over 21 border villages

AISHWARYA MOHANTY

BHUBANESWAR, FEBRUARY 14

ON SATURDAY, Andhra Pradesh held panchayat elections in three villages in the Kotia cluster, which is at the centre of a dispute between Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.

**THE VILLAGES:** These villages, with a population of nearly 5,000, are located on a remote hilltop on the inter-state border and are inhabited by Kondh tribals. The region, once a Maoist hotbed which still reports sporadic incidents of violence, is also rich in mineral resources like gold, platinum, manganese, bauxite, graphite and limestone.

**THE DISPUTE:** Prior to April 1, 1936, villages under Kotia panchayat were part of Jeypore Estate. In the Constitution of Orrisa Order, 1936, published in the Gazette of India on March 19 that year, the Government of India demarcated Odisha from the erstwhile Madras Presidency with the latter including the present-day Andhra Pradesh.

In 1942, the Madras government contested the boundary and ordered re-demarcation of the two states. In a joint survey of Odisha, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, seven villages of Kotia gram panchayat were recorded as revenue villages and revenue was collected by the Odisha government, but the exercise left out the 21 villages now under dispute.

When the state of Andhra Pradesh was created in 1955, the villages were not surveyed by the Andhra Pradesh government either.

**IN BOTH WORLDS:** This is the first time Andhra has held panchayat polls in any of these villages. But the villages participate in Assembly and Lok Sabha elections for both states. They are registered as voters for Salur Assembly and Araku Lok Sabha seats of Andhra, and Pottangi Assembly and Koraput Lok Sabha seats of Odisha.

The villagers enjoy benefits from both states under various schemes. For instance,



Odisha constructed a gram panchayat office, a village agricultural centre, the office of an agricultural overseer, a boarding school, and a 380-bed hostel; it has also implemented MGNREGA, and distributed BPL cards to over 800 families and job cards to 1800 families.

The Andhra Pradesh government has built roads, supplied electricity and provided rations to BPL families.

**CURRENT STATUS:** In the early 1980s, Odisha filed a case in the Supreme Court demanding right and possession of jurisdiction over the 21 villages. In 2006 however, the court ruled that since disputes belonging to the state boundaries are not within the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court, the matter can only be resolved by Parliament and passed a permanent injunction on the disputed area.

A day after Andhra notified the panchayat elections here, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik inaugurated projects worth Rs 18 crore. The Odisha government moved the Supreme Court, which posted the matter for hearing on February 19, according to a PTI report.

In Andhra, Vizianagaram District collector M Hari Jawaharal said the three villages are separate gram panchayats and fall under Salar Mandal, hence elections were held.

**INPUTS FROM SREENIVAS JANYALA**  
IN HYDERABAD

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EXPLAINED DEFENCE

## Why Kailash Range matters

The Kailash Range was the theatre of conflict during the 1962 Chinese offensive, with key battles at Rezang La and Gurung Hill. In 2020, Indian troops secured Kailash Ridge in an operation that took the Chinese by surprise. A look at the strategic importance of the mountain range, and the lessons learnt.

## EXPERT EXPLAINS



MAJOR-GENERAL (RETD)  
G G DWIVEDI

From The Indian Express panel  
of specialists, exclusive insight



Jawans patrol an area near Pangong lake during the 1962 war. Express Archive

IT WAS in early October 1962 that Chairman Mao Zedong decided to launch a large-scale invasion to severely punish India. While the main offensive was to be in the Eastern Sector, coordinated operations in the Western Sector were to be undertaken to capture areas up to the 1960 Claim Line in eastern Ladakh, which entailed elimination of 43 Indian posts. Gaining control over entire Aksai Chin was essential to guarantee security of the Western Highway, linking Kashgar in Xinjiang to Lhasa in Tibet.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) offensive began on October 20, 1962, simultaneously in the Eastern and Western Sectors. The operations in Aksai Chin were executed in two phases. During Phase One (October 20-28, 1962) PLA went on to clear Indian posts at Daulat Beg Oldie, Galwan, astride both banks of Pangong Tso and Dungti-Demchok areas. Phase Two was launched after a tactical pause of three weeks on November 18, 1962 to capture the strategically important Kailash Range.

## Reorganising India's defences

The Karakoram Range ends on the northern side of the Pangong Tso. The Kailash Range originates from the southern bank and runs northwest to southeast for over 60 km. The Kailash Ridge is characterised by rugged, broken terrain with heights varying between 4,000-5,500m, and its key features include

Helmet Top, Gurung Hill, Spanggur Gap, Muggar Hill, Mukhpuri, Rezang La and Rechin La. The Ridge dominates Chushul Bowl; an important communications centre.

The full following Phase One was utilised by the Indian Army to reorganise its defences. The 3 Infantry Division was raised at Leh on October 26, 1962 under Major General Budh Singh. The HQ of 114 Infantry Brigade was moved to Chushul, the 70 Infantry Brigade took over the responsibility of Indus Valley Sub Sector, and the 163 Infantry Brigade was inducted for the Defence of Leh.

## Deployment at Chushul

The 114 Infantry Brigade responsible for Chushul area was holding a frontage of around 40 km, and was deployed as under:-

■ 1/8 Gorkha Rifles covered the northern side of Spanggur Gap. Its two companies were deployed on the Gurung Hill, another company was deployed to the North, and a fourth company was in the Spanggur Gap itself with Battalion HQ along with an ad-hoc company at the Chushul airfield.

■ 13 Kumaon was on the southern side of the Spanggur Gap with two companies on the Muggar Hill, one company at Rezang La, and a fourth company along with Battalion HQ south of it.

■ Brigade HQ along with 1 JAT and two troops AMX 13 tanks of 20 Lancers were located at Chushul. 13 Field Regiment less a battery, equipped with 25 Pounder guns, was in support.

## Chinese plan of attack

The plan duly approved by the Central

Military Commission (CMC) envisaged capturing both Rezang La and Gurung Hill simultaneously. Troops comprising three battalions of the PLA's 4 Infantry Division along with supporting units were concentrated in Retuzong area, about 40 km from the border. All these units had been in action during Phase One as well. As per instructions from the CMC, operations were to be confined to the positions on the ridge line only.

## Battle of Rezang La

The C Company of 13 Kumaon, responsible for the defence of Rezang La, was deployed two platoons up (Strong Points 7&9) with a third platoon and Company HQ on Point 5150 (Strong Point 8) in the centre. Besides, there were supporting detachments of 3-inch mortars, heavy machine guns and rocket launchers.

The Chinese, having carried out detailed reconnaissance of Rezang La, planned to outflank the position at night and attack simultaneously from the northern and southern directions at first light. Accordingly, the attacking troops were divided into two task forces. One task force, composed of 3rd Battalion less company of 11th Regiment, was to attack Strong Point 9 from the south. The second task force, composed of two companies (one each from the 3rd Battalions of 10th & 11th Regiments), was to attack Strong Point 8 from the North.

The 3rd Battalion less company ex-10th Regiment, and 3rd Cavalry less two companies, were to act as reserves.

The two task forces started from Retuzong at 8 pm November 17 and were in their respective firm bases by 6 am on November 18.

Following brief artillery bombardment, the attack commenced from both directions at

9:15 am. A fierce battle ensued, with the defender beating back successive Chinese attacks. With communication snapped and the position encircled, leaving no possibility of the C Company being reinforced, it was "do or die" situation. Major Shaitan Singh, the Company Commander, even launched a local counterattack. Finally, by employing reserves, the Chinese did manage to break through and Rezang La fell by 10 pm November 18.

It was an epic battle, literally fought to the "last man, last round". Of the total 141 personnel at Rezang La, 135 fought to the finish and 5 were taken prisoners, with one lone survivor. Major Shaitan Singh was posthumously awarded the Param Vir Chakra. The Chinese suffered 21 killed and 98 wounded.

**Battle for Gurung Hill**

Gurung Hill was held by two companies of 1/8 GR (Strong Points 16, 5 & 6) located northeast at Spanggur Gap. Strong Point 16, the most dominating feature, was at a height of 5,100 m. It was held by a company minus a platoon. The defences were well coordinated and covered by a protective minefield. The position was supported by a troop of AMX 13 light tanks.

The task to capture Gurung Hill was assigned to Ali Detachment, the holding formation. A force of eight sections was mustered and duly reinforced by a platoon each of engineers and flame throwers, one heavy machine gun, one 57 mm recoilless gun and twelve 82mm mortars for fire support. One company of 3rd Cavalry was to act as reserve.

The operation to capture Gurung Hill began at 9:22 am November 18, coordinated with the attack on Rezang La. It was preceded

by a company minus a platoon. The defences were well coordinated and covered by a protective minefield. The position was supported by a troop of AMX 13 light tanks.

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The operation to capture Gurung Hill began at 9:22 am November 18, coordinated with the attack on Rezang La. It was preceded

by a brief artillery bombardment. In the face of stiff resistance from Gorkhas with tanks in a direct shooting role, the Chinese suffered heavy casualties and the attack was stalled. On regrouping and reinforcements joining in, the PLA resumed the offensive at 11 am. After repulsing repeated attacks with no reinforcements coming by, the position was captured by PLA towards last light on November 18. The intensity of fighting can be gauged from the casualties – 1/8 GR suffered 50 killed and several wounded while the Chinese sustained over 80 (killed and wounded). The PLA could not capture the remaining part of Gurung Hill i.e. Strong Points 5 & 6.

While only Rezang La and part of Gurung Hill had been captured, a decision was taken at the highest level to pull back from the Kailash Ridge and redeploy West of Chushul on the night of December 19. The Chinese did not follow the withdrawing troops or go for Chushul airfield. The PLA had only division-plus at their disposal for the operations in Aksai Chin, and hence were severely constrained to undertake any further operations. On the other hand, India's 3 Infantry Division had the capability to launch a limited counteroffensive. After declaring ceasefire on November 21, Chinese troops fell back to depth positions due to logistics constraints.

## August 2020: the present

The course of history was set to reverse 58 years later when, on August 30, 2020, the Special Frontier Force (SFF) troops secured Kailash Ridge as a pre-emptive operation, taking the PLA by surprise. This action proved a game-changer, neutralising gains made by the Chinese along the northern bank of Pangong Tso and rendering PLA positions east of Spanggur Gap-Maldo Garrison totally vulnerable. Why the PLA did not go for Kailash Ridge initially as part of its aggression in May 2020 could be because of two plausible reasons: first, paucity of infantry as 4 Infantry Division, now motorised, not suited to hold ground, and second, a presumption that Indian Army will not venture to undertake proactive countermeasures.

In 1962, it was on the Kailash Ridge that Indian soldiers proved their mettle and made the PLA pay a heavy price, despite being poorly equipped and ill-prepared. Today, given a rich experience in high altitude-cum-glacial warfare, coupled with vastly improved equipment and infrastructure, the Indian Army is well positioned to hold the Kailash Range for good. The Chinese, on the other hand, are beginning to realise the harsh realities of winters at the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Aware of the inability to regain Kailash Ridge with the current force level, and with the window for launching major operations already foreclosed due to the onset of winter, the Chinese may use all ploys to negotiate the Indian Army's pull-back from south of Pangong Tso. India should be wary of past mistakes and avoid falling into the Chinese trap. The PLA's current aggression, wherein it flouted a series of agreements signed between the countries over last three decades to unilaterally alter the status quo along the LAC, is a case in point.

The Kailash Ridge marks a tryst with history, a turning point, as it is the first piece of territory that has been recovered from Chinese illegal occupation, but definitely not the last one as India's claim line is the Johnson Line of 1865. External Affairs S Jaishankar recently said that India was being tested in the seven-month-long stand-off with China in eastern Ladakh. Therefore, it is time to convey a stern message to the Chinese leadership that India will not compromise on its sovereignty.

## Women in Nepal: growing voice, now against proposed restriction

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE

KATHMANDU, FEBRUARY 14

PROTESTERS, MOSTLY social activists, writers and journalists, and a large number of them women, are out on the streets in Nepal against a proposed law that puts restrictions on foreign travel for women below age 40.

## The law

The proposed law requires that any woman below 40, if travelling abroad, needs to present a letter of consent from the guardian of her family — implying a male member — or from the ward office, specifying the reason of travel. The protesters call their agitation an assertion of their right to justice from "an establishment controlled by males and insensitive towards women rights and dignity". The placards they hold display slogans laced with sarcasm, such as "E Hajar, euta prashna sodhna painchha? hamie le sas lina kasko anumati chahiunchha?" (Do I please have the right to ask a question? Who do I need to get permission to breathe from?)

## Vulnerable government

Nepal is currently in a political crisis with



course around women's justice has centred on the rape and murder of three teenagers. Amid a series of agitations, Oli repeatedly assured that the guilty would be punished, but the investigation has made little progress. Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa Badal upset protesters further when he said about the first of these three cases: "This was neither the first case of rape and murder, nor will it be the last in the country."

## Trafficking context

Besides rape cases, a larger number of

"Once they get there, their passports are seized, and they are literally captives. We appreciate the concern shown by women groups, but as a government we cannot close our eyes to the fate of these Nepalis who went on their own, without immigration ever getting the chance to check their documents," the official said.

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TJ Ducklo

UNITED STATES  
White House  
press aide quits  
over abusive call

New York: T J Ducklo, a deputy White House press secretary, resigned Saturday after reports that he used abusive and sexist language with a female reporter working on an article about his romantic relationship with a journalist from another publication. Jen Psaki, White House press secretary, announced the resignation in a statement Saturday evening, a day after saying Ducklo would be suspended without pay for a week. "We accepted the resignation of T J Ducklo after a discussion with him this evening," Psaki said, noting that Ron Klain, White House chief of staff, agreed with the decision. Ducklo, 32, had served as national press secretary during Biden's presidential campaign. **NYT**

SPAIN  
Catalans vote in  
test of separatist  
movement

Barcelona: Voting was underway in Spain's northeastern Catalonia on Sunday as 5.3 million voters were called to cast ballots in a regional election that will test the region's secessionist movement. Polls predict a tight race between the Socialists and the two leading pro-secession parties, the left-wing Republic Left of Catalonia and the center-right Together for Catalonia. **AP**

TURKEY  
Govt says found  
bodies of 13 killed  
by militants in Iraq

Istanbul: Turkish soldiers conducting an operation against PKK militants in northern Iraq have found the bodies of 13 kidnapped Turks executed in a cave, Defence Minister Hulusi Akar said. Forty-eight PKK militants were killed in the operation, while three Turkish soldiers were killed and three wounded, Akar said in a statement released on Sunday. **REUTERS**

GUINEA  
Ebola outbreak  
declared by govt  
after 3 deaths

Conakry: Guinea declared a new Ebola outbreak on Sunday, as tests came back positive for the virus after at least three people died and four fell ill -- the first resurgence of the disease there since the world's worst outbreak in 2013-2016. **REUTERS**

Heavy clashes rage in  
Yemen; dozens killed

**ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
SANAA, FEBRUARY 14

HEAVY FIGHTING between forces of Yemen's internationally recognised government and Houthi rebels raged again on Sunday, extending a week of violence in the strategic province of Marib, Yemeni officials said.

With dozens killed, the fighting has cast major doubt over UN-led efforts to restart negotiations to end years of civil war.

More than 48 fighters were killed and over 120 were wounded in the past two days,

**paper.indianexpress.com**

## THE WORLD

Impeachment trial: Senate acquits  
Trump of inciting insurrection

Tally falls 10 votes short of two-thirds majority, but bipartisan majority votes 'guilty'

**NICHOLAS FANDOS**  
WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 14

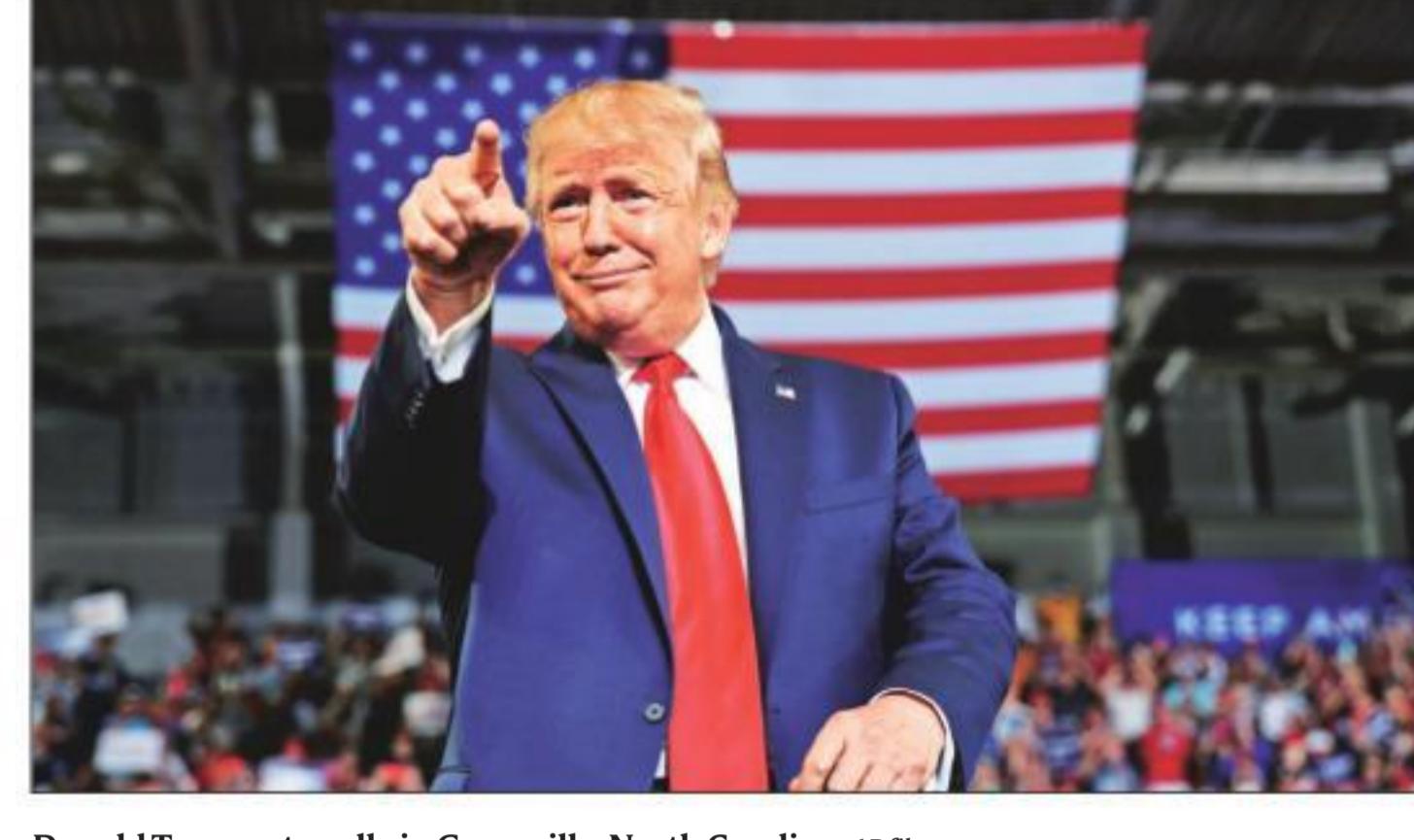
A US Senate still bruised from the most violent attack on the Capitol in two centuries acquitted former President Donald J Trump on Saturday in his second impeachment trial, as all but a few Republicans locked arms to reject a case that he incited the January 6 rampage in a last-ditch attempt to cling to power.

Under the watch of National Guard troops still patrolling the historic building, a bipartisan majority cast votes finding Mr. Trump guilty of the House's single charge of "incitement of insurrection." They included seven Republicans, more members of a president's party than have ever returned an adverse verdict in an impeachment trial.

But with most of Mr. Trump's party coalescing around him, the 57-to-43 tally fell 10 votes short of the two-thirds majority needed to convict, and allow the Senate to move to disqualify him from holding future office.

Among the Republicans breaking ranks to find the guilty man who led their party for four tumultuous years, demanding absolute loyalty, were Senators Richard Burr of North Carolina, Bill Cassidy of Louisiana, Susan Collins of Maine, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, Mitt Romney of Utah, Ben Sasse of Nebraska and Patrick Toomey of Pennsylvania.

The verdict brought an abrupt end to the fourth presidential impeachment trial in American history, and the only



Donald Trump at a rally in Greenville, North Carolina. AP file

one in which the accused had left office before being tried. But it was unlikely to be the final word for Mr. Trump, his badly divided party or the sprawling criminal and congressional investigations into the assault.

It left behind festering wounds in Washington and around the country after a 39-day stretch unlike any in the nation's history — encompassing a deadly riot at the Capitol, an impeachment of one president, the inauguration of another and a brief but rancorous trial in the Senate.

It took only five days to reach a verdict, partly because Democrats and Republicans were united in their desire to avoid a prolonged proceeding and partly because Mr. Trump's

allies made clear before it even began that they were not prepared to hold him responsible. Most of the jury of senators had themselves witnessed the events that gave rise to the charge, having fled for their own lives as the mob closed in last month while they met to formalize President Biden's victory.

Party leaders and even the president's most loyal supporters in the Senate did not defend his actions — a months-long campaign, seeded with election lies, to overturn his decisive loss to Mr. Biden that culminated when Mr. Trump told thousands of his supporters to "fight like hell".

But their overriding political calculation was clear. After party leaders briefly entertained using

the process to purge Mr. Trump from their ranks, Republicans doubled down on a bet made five years ago: that it was better not to stoke another open confrontation with a man millions of their voters still singularly embrace.

Republican Senator Mitch McConnell and the minority leader, embodied the tortured balancing act, denouncing Mr. Trump on Saturday, minutes after voting to acquit him, for a "disgraceful dereliction of duty." In blistering remarks from the Senate floor, Mr. McConnell, who had openly considered voting to convict Mr. Trump, effectively argued he was guilty as charged, while arguing that there was nothing the Senate could do about it. **NYT**

Biden reflects on acquittal, says 'democracy is fragile'

**REUTERS**  
WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 14

US PRESIDENT Joe Biden said on Saturday that the Senate's acquittal of former President Donald Trump for inciting an insurrection was a reminder that democracy was fragile, and every American had a duty to defend the truth.

"This sad chapter in our history has reminded us that democracy is fragile," Biden said in a statement issued hours after the Senate failed to muster the two-thirds majority needed to convict Trump.

Biden noted that a 57 senators voted to find Trump guilty, following a bipartisan vote by the House of Representatives by a slim margin to impeach the Republican former president.

"While the final vote did not lead to a conviction, the substance of the charge is not in dispute. Even those opposed to the conviction, like Senate Minority Leader (Mitch) McConnell, believe Donald Trump was guilty of a disgraceful dereliction of duty" and "practically and morally responsible for provoking the violence unleashed on the Capitol," he said.

He lauded the courage of those who made efforts to protect the integrity of US democracy, including Democrats and Republicans, election officials and judges, elected representatives and poll workers.



Anti-coup protesters hold posters as they gather outside the UN Information Office in Yangon. AP

## Thousands protest in Myanmar as army faces workers' strike

**REUTERS**  
YANGON, FEBRUARY 14

HUNDREDS OF thousands of protesters took to the streets in Myanmar for a ninth day of anti-coup demonstrations on Sunday, as the new army rulers grappled to contain a strike by government workers that could cripple their ability to run the country.

Soldiers were deployed to power plants in the northern Kachin state, leading to a confrontation with protesters who said they believed they intended to cut off the electricity to carry out nightly arrests. Aung Kham, a local politician, said, "They might be able to control the power during the night while they are doing their business at night."

Several power departments in Yangon said in Facebook posts that they would refuse to cut the power and expressed support for the protesters. "Our duty is to give electricity, not to cut," said one staffer, who asked not to be named for fear of retribution.

Richard Horsey, a Myanmars-based analyst with International Crisis Group, said the work of many government departments had effectively ground to a halt. "This has the potential to also affect vital functions — the military can replace engineers and doctors, but not power grid controllers and central bankers," he said.

The junta ordered civil servants to go back to work, threatening action. The army has been carrying out nightly mass arrests and on Saturday gave itself sweeping powers to detain people and search private property.



Participants form a human chain during a rally in support of jailed Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny. Reuters

## Prachanda-led group announces fresh agitation against House dissolution

**SHIRISH B PRADHAN**  
KATHMANDU, FEBRUARY 14

THE NEPAL Communist Party faction led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' on Sunday announced a fresh agitation programme against the dissolution of the House of Representatives by Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli.

Nepal plunged into a political crisis on December 20 after Oli, in a surprise move, recommended dissolving the 275-member House, amidst a tussle for power with the chairman of the Prachanda faction.

At a press conference on Sunday, a committee led by the leader of the faction Narayan Kaji

Shrestha said a human chain will be formed on February 19 around Tundikhel Open Ground in Kathmandu as a symbolic protest against the dissolution of the House and corruption.

Protest rallies will be staged in various districts across the country including Kathmandu from February 17 to 24. The party will also launch a campaign to collect signatures against the dissolution from February 19 to 27 at various public places.

The agitating faction had earlier staged protests from January 26 to February 10.

Both Oli and the rival group claim to control the NCP and the issue is being disputed at the Election Commission. **PTI**



## THAI COUPLES MARRY ON ELEPHANTS

Fifty-two couples in Thailand got married while riding elephants on Sunday, in an annual Valentine's Day mass ceremony. A band led the procession of elephants and couples and a local official, also on an elephant, oversaw the signing of the marriage licence.

## UK's Johnson to host virtual meeting of G7 leaders

**ADITI KHANNA**  
LONDON, FEBRUARY 14

UK PRIME Minister Boris Johnson is to host fellow G7 leaders for a virtual meeting on February 19 ahead of its presidency of a summit in June of the Group of Seven countries including the UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the US, Downing Street said on Sunday.

The virtual meeting, the first hosted by Johnson as part of the UK's G7 Presidency this year and the first gathering of G7 leaders since April 2020, will bring together the world leaders to dis-

cuss how leading democracies can work together to ensure equitable distribution of coronavirus vaccines around the world and prevent future pandemics.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to attend the G7 Summit in Cornwall in June after India was invited as a guest country by the UK, alongside South Korea and Australia.

"The solutions to the challenges we face — from the colossal mission to get vaccines to every single country, to the fight to reverse the damage done to our ecosystems and lead a sustainable recovery from coronavirus — lie in the discussions we



Boris Johnson

have with our friends and partners around the world," said Johnson.

"Quantum leaps in science have given us the vaccines we need to end this pandemic for

good. Now world governments have a responsibility to work together to put those vaccines to the best possible use. I hope 2021 will be remembered as the year humanity worked together like never before to defeat a common foe," he said.

The G7 leaders' meeting on February 19 will be attended by the leaders of the UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the US, and the Presidents of the European Council and the EU Commission.

Downing Street said Johnson plans to use the virtual meeting, which will also be US President Joe Biden's first major multilateral engagement, to call for leaders to work together on a "joined-up global approach" to pandemics that brings an end to the nationalist and divisive politics that marred the initial response to coronavirus.

He will argue that putting citizens first should not come at the expense of working on a unified response, and that the last 12 months of the pandemic have shown that no country can be safe until every country is safe from the pandemic. The rollout of vaccines offers a fresh opportunity to demonstrate the value of international cooperation, he is expected to highlight. **PTI**

## Archaeologists unearth ancient beer factory in Egypt

**SAMY MAGDY**  
CAIRO, FEBRUARY 14

AMERICAN AND Egyptian archaeologists have unearthed what could be the oldest known beer factory at one of the most prominent archaeological sites of ancient Egypt, a top antiquities official said Saturday.

Moustafa Waziri, secretary general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, said the factory was found in Abydos, an ancient burial ground located in the desert west of the Nile River, over 450 kilometers south of Cairo.

He said the factory apparently

dates back to the region of King Narmer, widely known for his unification of ancient Egypt at the beginning of the First Dynastic Period (3150 BC- 2613 BC).

Archaeologists found eight huge units — each is 20 meters long and 2.5 meters wide. Each unit includes some 40 pottery basins in two rows, which had been used to heat up a mixture of grains and water to produce beer, Waziri said.

The joint mission is co-chaired by Dr Matthew Adams of the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, and Deborah Vischak, assistant professor of ancient Egyptian art history and ar-



Mission co-chair Dr Matthew Adams said the factory was likely built in Abydos, an ancient burial ground, to provide royal rituals with beer. Courtesy: Egypt's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities

chaeology at Princeton University.

Adams said the factory was apparently built in this area to provide royal rituals with beer, given that archaeologists found evidences showing the use of beer in sacrificial rites of ancient Egyptians.

British archaeologists were the first to mention the existence of that factory early 1900s, but they couldn't determine its location, the antiquities ministry said.

With its vast cemeteries and temples from the earliest times of ancient Egypt, Abydos was known for monuments honoring Osiris, ancient Egypt's god of

underworld and the deity responsible for judging souls in the afterlife.

The necropolis had been used in every period of early Egyptian history, from the prehistoric age to Roman times.

Egypt has announced dozens of ancient discoveries in the past couple of years, in the hope of attracting more tourists.

The tourism industry has been reeling from the political turmoil following the 2011 popular uprising that toppled longtime autocrat Hosni Mubarak. The sector was also dealt a further blow last year by the coronavirus pandemic.

POLICY WATCH  
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

## PLI-style push for software products planned; focus on digital payments

AASHISH SARYAN  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 14

AFTER ITS Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for mobile phone, allied components, computer-related hardware and other electronic products, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has now turned its focus on the domestic support infrastructure for software products.

The domestic digital payments ecosystem has now been shortlisted and as a part of this effort, the IT Ministry will use the Rs 1,500 crore earmarked in Budget 2021-22 to augment safety and infrastructure of the digital payments systems, IT Secretary Ajay Prakash Sawhney said.

"Our effort will be to ensure that whatever needs to be done to promote the use, popularity, safety and infrastructure for digital payments will be done. We will work towards keeping the cost of digital payments low," Sawhney told *The Indian Express*.

The Unified Payments Interface (UPI), which has received wide appreciation, will be a focus area for the Centre, especially with respect to the challenge of reducing transaction costs. The IT Ministry will be looking at supporting the existing public digital payment instruments present in the UPI ecosystem and enhancing their reach among masses, Sawhney said. "The MDR (merchant discount rate) for RuPay and UPI is already kept at zero. We will have to look at other ways in which we can keep the cost of transaction low. We are yet to formulate the exact scheme but there will be some support," he added.

Apart from the public digital payments instruments, home-grown private digital payments instruments also may get some support from the Centre in the upcoming fiscal. While keeping the cost of transaction low will be a priority for the government, the ministry will also work at improving the acceptance infrastructure for digital payments systems, Sawhney said.

"Banks have already put in a lot of effort for PoS (point-of-sale) machines. We will be bringing the QR (quick-response) codes into a much larger pool of merchants. The aim will be bringing smaller merchants into the arena of acceptance of digital payments through these instruments such as PoS machines or QR codes," he said, adding that the ministry would also look at ways to support startups that would bring other innovative products in this space.

To improve the acceptance of digital payments instru-

## ₹1,500 CR TO BE USED: IT SECY

**■** The IT Ministry will use the Rs 1,500 crore earmarked in Budget to augment safety and infrastructure of the digital payments systems, IT Secretary Ajay Prakash Sawhney said

**■** Apart from the public digital payments instruments, home-grown private digital payments instruments also may get some support from the Centre

ments, government systems such as booking of tickets in the public transport system such as buses and railways may start accepting payments through such instruments much more. "FASTag is a success model. We are looking at what else can be done by working with the concerned ministry to link such payments to digital payments infrastructure," Sawhney said.

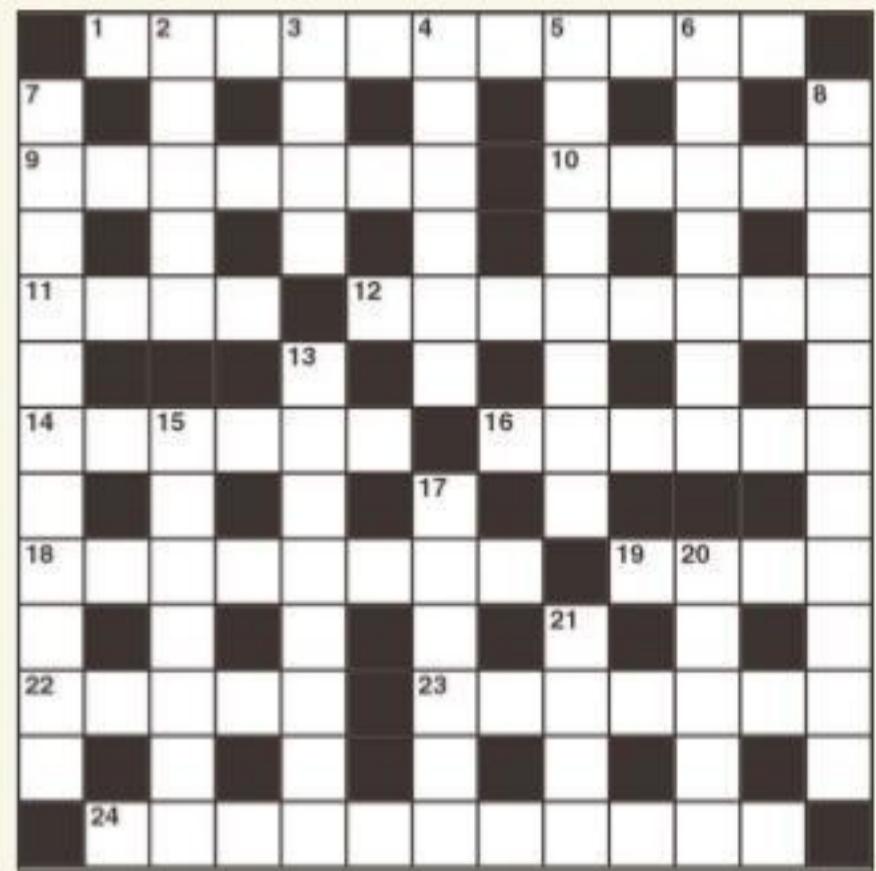
Fraudulent transactions, a major area of concern in the digital payments space, is also being looked at. The ministry will also reach out to other stakeholders, such as the Reserve Bank of India and National Payments Corporation of India, to work on ways which can stop such transactions.

The support for software products will extend beyond digital payments space to encourage startups and small companies to innovate in other areas such as language research. Over the last year, the IT Ministry has launched several programmes to identify and award home-grown products such as video calling, office productivity, social networking, e-learning, agri-tech, fintech, entertainment, and speech translation, among others.

These initiatives are likely to continue in the coming fiscal as well, Sawhney said, adding that speech translation and language technology research would be the focus.

"We are trying to pool whatever relevant data sets are there with us from our earlier projects, which are relevant for language technology as such. Those we are trying to bring into a national portal and make all those data sets available to everyone. We would be happy to see some of the large generators of such data including multi-nationals, join this effort and put up their data set in the national data repository," he said.

## CROSSWORD 4354



- ACROSS**
- Uhwelcome extra duty (3,8)
  - Top clue put out eight times (7)
  - He may have the lot or about three quarters (5)
  - Pea jackets? (4)
  - A product of good stock (8)
  - Regions unite concerning charity (6)
  - Ernest goes out and comes in (6)
  - Rarely it is about books (8)
  - Heroic tale in The Pickwick Papers (4)
  - Correct signs (5)
  - Note blazing outdoor conflagration (7)
  - Where people may drive after the service (5)
- DOWN**
- Cadet behaved badly (5)
  - One politician's naughty children (4)
  - He takes orders to break the circle (6)
  - Feelings shown by people put into some distress (8)
  - Screen I wrenched open (7)
  - Sort of writing that may be highly polished (11)
  - Piece of expertise - guarded by private industry (5,6)
  - Put away for safety? (8)
  - Just the thing (7)
  - Place that was hellish before getting public transport (6)
  - Former churchman? (5)
  - Free from any sound of disturbance (4)

Solutions Crossword 4353: Across: 1 Wolves, 4 Schooner, 9 Nabbed, 10 Engraved, 12 Lilt, 13 Ducat, 14 Bede, 17 Step on the gas, 20 Joint concern, 23 Rock, 24 Piano, 25 Otto, 28 Overlook, 29 Cobweb, 30 Shoe off, 31 Tended. Down: 1 Windlass, 2 Labelled, 3 Even, 5 Convalescent, 6 Oars, 7 Navies, 8 Redeem, 11 Putting it off, 15 Colon, 16 Paint, 18 Bestowed, 19 Entombed, 21 Crooks, 22 Forgo, 26 Floe, 27 Rome.

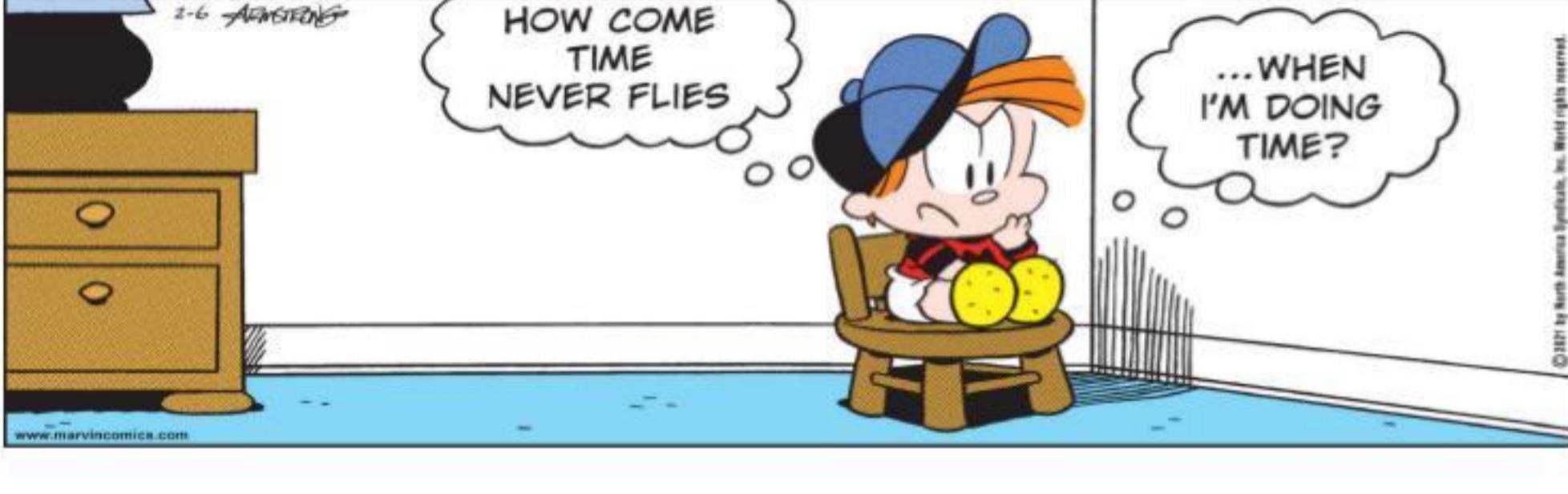
## OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry &amp; I Lewis



## CALVIN &amp; HOBBES by Bill Watterson



## MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



## JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

If I had only known, I would have been a Einstein (9)

GMIOS

LNOUCM

EINLT

EELSHIK

ANSWER: If I had only known, I would have been a Einstein - Einstein

## SUDOKU 4384

**Difficulty Level 4s**  
**Instructions**  
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.



**Difficulty Level**  
1s = Very Easy; 2s = Easy;  
3s = Medium; 4s = Hard;  
5s = Very Hard; 6s = Genius

## SOLUTION SUDOKU 4383



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# England's head in a spin

On a pitch helping the tweakers, visitors show weak technique and resolve as India take control

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY  
CHENNAI, FEBRUARY 14

**WICKETS** FELL in a heap in the first session on Sunday. India lost their last four wickets for 29 runs to be all out for 329. England took lunch on 39/4. A total of eight wickets for 68 runs in the first session of the second day of a Test wasn't easy on the eye. The Chepauk pitch didn't hold itself in good stead.

This pitch is certainly not ideal for Test cricket. It's not a stinker either. India scored in excess of 300 in their first innings, although they had the advantage of batting first. A magnificent hundred and two half-centuries were scored in that innings. Even on Day 2, Rishabh Pant treated England spinners with disdain on his way to a fine, and very important, 58 not out off 77 balls.

For England, Ben Foakes showed that adversity could be countered through right technique and application. He stayed low and played straight for his 42 not out. The majority of his teammates, though, gave a 'cat on a hot tin roof' kind of impression. They didn't show the technique and temperament to get the better of the conditions.

Unlike the England teams of the past, this side doesn't consider an Ashes win as the be-all and end-all of cricket success. The Ashes remains their Holy Grail, but there's a refreshing change in England's perspective – a wholesome approach has been taken under the present cricket establishment.

Joe Root's England now takes pride in winning matches in any conditions and as their chief selector Ed Smith said ahead of the second Test – over the last three years, the team's success rate across formats has been over 70 per cent. And yet, away from home, especially on subcontinental turners, England remain overly reliant on Root. The England captain had scored a daddy hundred and a double hundred in his team's 2-0 series win in Sri Lanka. In the first Test against India, his double century in the first innings was the difference between the two sides. On Sunday, he departed for six and England's batting collapsed like a pack of cards.

## Root falters

The sweep has always been Root's go-to shot against spin. He plays it beautifully because he picks length early, gets to the pitch of the ball and rolls the wrists.

But on Sunday, even Root seemed to have allowed the conditions to get into his head. In the first Test, for the first 15 overs that Ravichandran Ashwin had bowled during England's first innings, Root didn't



Ashwin finished with 5/43 on Sunday, his 29th five-wicket haul in Tests. BCCI

sweep once. But on Sunday, his first scoring shot was a sweep, a single against the Indian off-spinner.

He appeared to be following Rohit Sharma's batting template on this pitch, where the ball was turning, going up and down and puffs of dust becoming even more prominent with time.

On the first day, during his sumptuous 161, Rohit swept with authority. The England batsmen, it felt like, were sweeping in desperation. That their batting coach Graham Thorpe described the surface as "the most challenging second-day pitch against spin" somewhat encapsulated the tourists' uncertainty.

England's inability to gut out the odds became their bugbear. To be fair to them, the Indian spinners led by Ashwin asked far more difficult questions. Root attempted a sweep against Axar Patel but was done in by the extra bounce.

The top edge went to Ashwin at short fine-leg, giving the left-arm spinner his maiden Test wicket. England didn't keep a short fine-leg for Rohit, allowing him to sweep with more freedom. Virat Kohli was smarter. England were wonderfully dis-

plined in their bowling efforts, taking extras completely out of the equation during India's first innings.

But their spinners, Moeen Ali in particular, bowled far too many boundary balls. Ali got four wickets, but giving away 128 runs in 29 overs on this pitch was pretty average. And if England struggled for the lack of a top-quality off-spinner, India revelled in Ashwin's world-class off-spin. The 34-year-old collected his 29th five-for in Test cricket. He teased Dan Lawrence before getting his scalp. He dismissed Ben Stokes with a beauty.

## Speed matters

On a deck with uneven bounce, bowling quicker through the air was important. TV stats showed that Axar's average speed was in the early 90s (kph).

Ashwin went along in the late 80s and early 90s. But his delivery to dismiss Stokes was a lot slower that drew the batsman forward. Only Kuldeep Yadav bowled in the late 70s and looked ineffective in a six-over spell. The chinaman bowler has returned to the Test fold after a gap of more than two years and some rustiness was expected.

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