

OPINION 6
BOOSTER DOSE
REQUIRED?

WORLD 8
INTERNET ACCESS RESTORED AS
MYANMAR COUP PROTESTS GROW

SPORT 12
WEST INDIES BEAT
B'DESH IN 1ST TEST

Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

*Late City Vol. 31 Issue 38
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

NEW DELHI, MONDAY FEBRUARY 8, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3

the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com



MANOJ STARTS
SHOOT FOR
DESPATCH
10 VIVACITY

Glacier burst wreaks havoc in Chamoli

125 missing, 7
bodies found;
Rishiganga power
project damaged

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

At least 125 people are missing with the number expected to rise further after an avalanche caused by glacier breach near Reni village in Chamoli district resulted in sudden rise in the water level in the Rishiganga and Dhauliganga rivers on Sunday morning.

The Rishiganga hydropower project and NTPC's dam on Dhauliganga were also damaged in the disaster. According to official sources, the avalanche took place at about 10 am and soon after that the Government issued alerts in all areas along the Alaknanda and Ganga rivers from Chamoli district down to Haridwar.

Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat, along with senior officials, reached the affected area in the afternoon to assess the situation. Talking to media persons after returning to Dehradun, the CM said at the time when the disaster struck about 35 persons and two policemen were at the Rishiganga project site. About five kilometres downstream at the NTPC project under con-



Locals inspect the site near damaged Dhauliganga hydropower project at Reni village after a glacier broke off in Joshimath causing a massive flood in the Dhauliganga river in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand on Sunday

struction in Tapovan more than 100 persons had gone to work. Scores of the workers were able to move away on hearing the shouts of alarm as the flood progressed.

Seven bodies had been recovered till the evening. The flood damaged one bridge at Reni and four suspension bridges. The road link to 17 villages has been severed though residents in seven out of these villages migrate seasonally. The CM said, "President

Ram Nath Kovind called me expressing concern about the disaster. Prime Minister Narendra Modi also phoned me twice, expressing concern and assuring all the assistance required by Uttarakhand. Union Home Minister Amit Shah also called twice to enquire about the situation and assured all help.

"Chief Ministers of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Gujarat also called us and assured all necessary help."

On being asked about the damage assessment and State's requirements, the CM said at present the main focus is on rescuing people and saving lives. The State has all the necessary resources for rescue and medical treatment, augmented by the Centre in response to the disaster. When asked about the possible cause of the disaster, he said the cause will be ascertained later by experts as now the focus is on saving lives.

Continued on Page 2

Unstoppable building of hydel plants in hilly region invites disaster: Experts

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The glacier burst which triggered Chamoli tragedy leading to the damage to the Rishiganga Project downstream was waiting to happen in the hydel plants dotted fragile mountainous region of Uttarakhand, environmentalists have said.

In fact, a 2019 study published in the journal Science Advances revealed that due to rising temperatures because of

global warming, Himalayan glaciers are melting twice as fast since the start of the 21st century and have lost over a vertical foot and a half of ice each year.

"This melting of glaciers has created a potential threat of water supply for hundreds of millions of people in countries including India," said the researchers in their analysis, spanning 40 years of satellite observations across India, China, Nepal and Bhutan.

While climate change

make the region vulnerable to earthquake and cloudburst, the environmentalists feel that the Government's unstoppable construction of hydel power plants and other activities like roads were adding to the environmental woes.

BJP leader Uma Bharti has also expressed concerns over the dam construction spree in the "ecologically sensitive" region around the Dhauliganga river's upstream.

Continued on Page 2

Defence forces pressed into rescue mission

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Army has deployed 600 men, including engineers and medical teams, as part of the rescue efforts in Chamoli flash flood in Uttarakhand on Sunday. Three helicopters and specialised equipment were also deployed at the disaster site.

Two transport planes of IAF to ferry NDRF troops and equipment are ready at Hindon. Also 40 marine commandos will be flown from Mumbai.

Special teams of scientists of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) were airlifted to monitor avalanches and floods.

The Indian Airforce has also kept several aircraft and helicopters on the standby, while the Navy has flown specialist divers of the Indian Navy to Uttarakhand. At least, seven teams of divers will help in locating and rescuing missing people, officials said here on Sunday. The three Army helicopters were carrying out reconnaissance missions to assist the rescue teams on ground to reach the exact spot to rescue stranded people.

Continued on Page 2

Avalanche warning for J&K, HP, Ladakh, U'khand, Sikkim

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

After a glacial break in the Uttarakhand's Chamoli district, the Defence Geoinformatic Research Establishments on Sunday issued a fresh warning of avalanche in Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim in the next two days.

The yellow warning issued for HP's Kullu, Lahaul and

Spiti on the Manali-Leh and Manali-Beas Kund axis and the Udaipur-Killar-Chamba road was sent to the Ministry of Home Affairs and National Disaster Management Authority on Sunday.

Meanwhile, in a relief for the area hit by a glacier burst in Uttarakhand, the India Meteorological Department on Sunday said no adverse weather is expected over Chamoli, Tapovan and Joshimath on February 7 and 8.

Continued on Page 2

CAPSULE

40 SHANTIES GUTTED, 6 ANIMALS DIE IN FIRE

New Delhi: Forty shanties were gutted and six domesticated animals died after a fire broke out near the Harikesh Nagar Metro Station in southeast Delhi's Okhla Phase II in the early hours of Sunday. Delhi Fire Service Director Atul Garg said it was medium category fire and information about it was received around 2.23 am.

2 WOMEN SHOT DEAD, THREE CHILDREN HURT

Ghaziabad: Two women were shot dead and three children sustained injuries in a robbery here, police said on Sunday. The incident took place at Saraswati Vihar Colony under the Masuri police station area on Saturday night, police added.

ABDUCTED JAMMU GIRL RESCUED FROM BIHAR

Jammu: A 16-year-old girl who was allegedly kidnapped about 20 days ago here was rescued in Bihar from the clutches of her abductor who was arrested, police said on Sunday.

Covid jabs won't be available in open market soon

Vaccination for above 50 to start in March

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has no immediate plan to make the vaccines available in the open market. The country has vaccinated nearly six million healthcare and frontline workers so far. "Presently, Covid-19 vaccines are being administered on an emergency basis, under full observation and in a controlled manner. If the vaccines are released in the open market, there won't be any control over them. The decision will be taken as the situation demands," Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said.

The Minister said the country is developing seven more Covid-19 vaccines and also working on further vaccine development to inoculate every citizen of India.

The Covid-19 inoculation process for people aged above 50 will start in March, he said. "We are not dependent only on the two vaccines as the country is working on seven more indigenous vaccines. Simultaneously, we are also working on the development of more vaccines because India is a huge country and we need more players and research to reach out to everyone," he said. Three of the vaccines are in the trial phase, two are in the pre-clinical stage, one is in phase 1 and another in phase 2, he said.

"As on February 7, 2021, till 8 am, total of 57.75 lakh (57,75,322) beneficiaries have received the Covid-19 vaccine under the countrywide vaccination exercise. The cumulative vaccination coverage includes 53,04,546 healthcare workers and 4,70,776 frontline workers," said the Ministry.

Continued on Page 2

No 'ghar wapsi' till farmers' demands met, says Tikait

PTI ■ CHARKHI DADRI

Asserting that the agitation against the Centre's farm laws is a people's movement that will not fail, Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait on Sunday said there will be no 'ghar wapsi' till protesting farmers' demands are met.

Tikait lauded the role of "khaps panchayats" (caste councils) and their leaders in supporting the farmers' stir. Addressing a "Kisan Mahapanchayat" near here, Tikait said the Government should roll back the contentious farm laws, frame a new legislation to assure the continuation of the minimum support price (MSP) for crops and release the farmers arrested recently.

"There will be no 'ghar wapsi' till farmers' demands are met," he said.

"Yeh jan andolan hai, yeh fail nahi hoga (this is a people's movement, this will not fail)," he added.

Continued on Page 2

Didi dashed people's hope of mamata: PM

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday kicked off his pre-poll campaign in West Bengal with a scathing attack on Mamata Banerjee Government holding it guilty of "innumerable fouls" and promising the people of the State "optimum good governance" once the BJP comes to power. "The people will bring the BJP to power replacing the TMC Government," Modi said.

He was addressing a political rally at the industrial town of Haldia in East Midnapore where he inaugurated a plethora of Central projects worth ₹ 5,000 crore, including Dhobi-Durgapur gas pipeline and fishing hub. The PM referred to lingo of Bengal's popular sports, football, and said, "Bengal is a State that loves football. That's why, using some football terminology, I would like to say that the bua bhatija (aunt-nephew) dispensation had committed a number of fouls



Prime Minister Narendra Modi receives a book from Union Minister of State for Women and Child Development Debasree Chaudhuri during the foundation stone laying ceremony of Catalytic Iso-dewaxing unit at Haldia Refinery in East Midnapore district on Sunday

like mal-governance, tolabaji (extortion), general loot, syndicate raj' criminalisation of politics and politicisation of the police administration."

He went on to add, "The people of Bengal are watching and very soon, the State will

show the 'Ram card' to the TMC," Modi said, in an oblique reference to the red card in football.

"This is why the people of Bengal have decided to bring the BJP by throwing it out of power... even the TMC sup-

porters are itching to see the back of this Government. And this is why the real parivaratan (political change) will take place unlike the one that Mamata Didi had promised 10 years ago but ended up giving a worse Government than what the Left and the Congress gave," he said.

The people had expected "Mamata (compassion)" from the TMC Government after it came to power but they got "nirmamta (cruelty)" instead, he said alleging how the Chief Minister was so intolerant to criticism that she put those behind bars all those who raised their voices against her.

"She is even intolerant towards slogans like Bharat Maata ki Jai (hail Mother India)," Modi said reminding how on account of bad governance given by the Congress, Left and the TMC, Bengal which had a glorious past ranking among the best developed States in the country had turned into a laggard of sorts.

Continued on Page 2

Sabse Pehle
Life Insurance

Because children grow up very fast!

LIC's
New **Children's**
Money Back Plan

UTN: 512N296V02 PLAN NO.: 932

Get attractive payouts at important stages of your child's growth.

SALIENT FEATURES:

- **Age Eligibility:** 0-12 years. **Maturity Age:** 25 years
- **Minimum Sum Assured:** ₹ 1 Lac. **Maximum Sum Assured:** No upper limit
- **Money Back Instalments:** 20% of Basic Sum Assured on completion of 18, 20 and 22 years of age
- **Maturity Benefit:** Balance 40% of Basic Sum Assured plus Bonus
- **Premium Waiver Benefit Rider:** Option available
- **Option to defer the Money Back Instalments:** Available during the tenure of the policy

Contact your agent / branch or visit our website www.licindia.in or SMS YOUR CITY NAME to 56767474

BEWARE OF SPURIOUS PHONE CALLS AND FICTITIOUS / FRAUDULENT OFFERS. IRDAI is not involved in activities like selling insurance policies, announcing bonus or investment of premiums. Public receiving such phone calls are requested to lodge a police complaint. For more details on risk factors, terms and conditions, please read sales brochure carefully before concluding a sale.

Follow us: [f](#) [y](#) [t](#) [i](#) [g](#) [+](#) [l](#) [i](#) [c](#) [i](#) [n](#) [d](#) [i](#) [a](#) [f](#) [o](#) [r](#) [e](#) [v](#) [e](#) [r](#) IRDAI Regn No.: 512

For more details on risk factors, terms and conditions, please read sales brochure carefully before concluding a sale.

भारतीय जीवन बीमा निगम
LIFE INSURANCE CORPORATION OF INDIA

LIC/AR/19-20/21/ENG

Zindagi ke saath bhi, Zindagi ke baad bhi.

Land worth ₹1K cr freed in MP's anti-mafia drive

PTI ■ GWALIOR

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Sunday said that under the ongoing crackdown on mafia, the Government has freed land worth ₹1,000 crore from them across the state.

He was speaking to reporters here.

"The government has freed land worth ₹1,000 crore in Madhya Pradesh from the mafia as part of the drive against them... This operation will continue to deter the malefactors to remain off the government land in the state," he said.

Chouhan said the drive was going on in an impartial

manner.

Replying to a query, he said that henceforth, permission will not be granted to open any new liquor shop in Madhya Pradesh and a campaign against alcohol consumption would be launched.

Addressing a public meeting in the city later, the chief minister said that help would be taken from the members of the society to end the menace of drinking and drug addiction.

He said that Rs 5,000 crore would be pumped in for Gwalior in the next five years.

Addressing another function, he said that the 105-year-old annual Gwalior Mela would commence from February 15, adding that those

buying vehicles there will get sops.

In his address, Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Tomar praised the Chouhan-led BJP government for "working tirelessly for the uplift of Gwalior-Chambal region, which it will continue to do".

BJP's Rajya Sabha member Jyotiraditya Scindia said, "Gwalior would turn heads in the country considering the rapid pace at which its development is taking place."

Later, Chouhan, Tomar and Scindia had a meal at the house of a sanitary worker named Ramsevak. The chief minister handed over a cheque of Rs 20,000 to Ramsevak to get his house repaired.

Mother kills 6-yr-old son in Kerala to 'please' god, held

PTI ■ PALAKKAD

In a shocking incident, a 30-year-old madrasa teacher allegedly killed her six-year-old son by slitting his throat early on Sunday at her house in Pookalakkad here, to appease god through a sacrificial offering, police said.

The woman, who is pregnant, told the police that she had sacrificed her son to 'please Allah'.

She was taken into custody, they said.

After the gruesome act, the woman herself informed the police about the crime, shocking relatives and neighbours.

The incident took place at

THE WOMAN, WHO IS PREGNANT, TOLD THE POLICE THAT SHE HAD SACRIFICED HER SON TO 'PLEASE ALLAH'

4 am. The victim, the youngest of the woman's three sons, was sleeping with her.

She woke him up and took him to the washroom and tied up his legs before killing the boy.

Her husband, a gulf returnee, was asleep in another room with their two other sons.

Cong workers stage protest against fuel, gas price hike near FM's meeting venue

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The Mumbai Congress workers on Sunday staged a noisy protest against rising prices of fuel and domestic gas and inflation in the vicinity of a venue at Dadar in north-central Mumbai where Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had come to address the representatives of corporate houses, business leaders, industrialists and industry associations.

The Congress workers staged a demonstration near the Swaminarayan Temple at Dadar where Sitharaman arrived to address influential sections of people on the issues relating to the Union Budget 2021-2022.

Mumbai Regional Congress Committee (MRCC)

THE CONGRESS WORKERS STAGED A DEMONSTRATION NEAR THE SWAMINARAYAN TEMPLE AT DADAR

President Bhai Jagtap, who led the protests that comprised party leaders, Ministers, legislators and ward heads, charged that in the 65 years of Congress' rule at the centre, the prices of petrol had never gone up beyond ₹65 per litre, but the BJP — in just seven years — had allowed the price to shoot up to ₹94 per litre now.

Jagtap said that the cooking gas prices which stood at ₹390 per cylinder in 2014, had nearly doubled to ₹719 per cylinder. "The rise in fuel

and domestic gas prices have destroyed domestic budgets. The common people have been badly affected as never before," he said.

"The BJP claims this year's budget is very good. But the fact remains that it is good only for the corporate and industrial houses. It's a disastrous budget for the common man," the MRCC president said.

Apart from Jagtap and MRCC's Working President Charan Singh Sapra, the other prominent Congress leaders who participated in the budget included State Education Minister Varsha Gaikwad, former minister Arif Naseem Khan, ex-city president Eknath Gaikwad, party leaders Bhushan Patil, (Mrs) Ajanta Yadav, Sandesh Kondwilkar and Ashok Jadhav.

9-month-old Iraqi boy gets new lease of life after liver transplant at Delhi hospital

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A nine-month-old boy from Iraq got a new lease of life after undergoing liver transplant at a hospital in Delhi.

Such a transplant is considered risky among those aged less than one year. However, doctors of Manipal Hospitals in New Delhi took up the challenge and performed the nine-hour-long surgery on Ali Hamad on January 3.

Hamad's mother donated a part of her liver to save her son's life who was born after three kids who died perhaps of a similar disease that could not be diagnosed and treated timely, the hospital said.

Hamad was discharged from the hospital on January 26, it said. According to Dr Sailendra Lalwani, the head of the liver transplant and hepato-pancreatic-biliary surgery department, no supply of blood to the liver is a big challenge to any liver transplant team as vascular complications are high in paediatric transplant patients.

The reconstruction of the portal vein with graft is always

a challenge as it increases the risk of thrombotic complications. To overcome this challenge, we planned to use an iliac vein graft procured during cadaveric liver transplant, said Dr Lalwani who performed the surgery with a multi-disciplinary team.

"On January 3, the baby underwent the transplant. There was no flow in the portal vein. We placed the interposition vein graft to give inflow to the liver. After the surgery the baby was shifted to ICU on a ventilator," he said.

Hamad was off the ventilator the next morning and gradually in the next few days, the oral feeding started. Finally, after 20 days of the surgery, he was discharged from the hospital, the doctor said.

Timely clinical intervention is very important in such cases and Hamad came to right on time. This case was no less than an actual miracle, said Dr Sufia Saxena, a consultant paediatric gastroenterologist and hepatologist at the hospital, who was part of the multi-disciplinary team.

Afghanistan thanks India for sending five lakh corona vaccine doses

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Afghanistan on Sunday thanked India for providing 5,00,000 doses of the coronavirus vaccine to the war-ravaged nation and described the assistance as a clear sign of "generosity and commitment" towards the strong partnership between the two countries.

India sent the vaccine doses to the people of Afghanistan as a gift, officials said. In a tweet, Afghan Foreign Minister Mohammed Haneef Atmar expressed his "profound gratitude" to the government and people of India as well as his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar for sending the consignment and helping Afghanistan in checking the spread of the pandemic.

Atmar described India's assistance as a "clear sign of generosity, commitment and strong partnership".

The consignment of the vaccine doses was received by Afghanistan's acting Minister of Public Health Waheed Majroh from Charge d'Affaires of the Indian embassy in Kabul

Raghuram S. The vaccines arrived in Kabul by an Air India flight. India is the first responder to deliver Covid-19 vaccines to Afghanistan, according to the Indian embassy in Kabul.

India had earlier gifted more than 20 metric tonnes of medicines to Afghanistan as part of assistance to help the country deal with the pandemic. Last week, external affairs ministry spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said India had sent 56 lakh doses of coronavirus vaccines under grants assistance to a number of countries while 100 lakh doses were sent under commercial supplies.

In a major announcement, India had on January 19 said it will send Covid-19 vaccines under grant assistance to several countries including Bhutan, Maldives, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Mauritius. India is one of the world's biggest drugmakers, and an increasing number of countries have already approached it for procuring coronavirus vaccines.

Terrorists plan to set up hideouts in Jammu to receive arms from Pakistan: DGP

PTI ■ JAMMU

Asserting that Jammu has always remained a target of Pakistan and its agencies, Director General of Police Dilbag Singh on Sunday said terrorists are planning to set up their hideouts here to receive arms and ammunition from across the border and smuggle it to Kashmir. However, the Jammu and Kashmir Police is alert to the challenge, he added.

Singh said the arrest of Lashker-e-Mustafa chief from the Kunjwani area of Jammu on Saturday reflects the determination of the force to scuttle the nefarious designs of the neighbouring country sponsoring terrorism and drugs in the union territory.

"Jammu has always remained a target of Pakistan, its sponsored terrorist outfits, ISI and the agencies running militancy in J-K. In the past, religious places were repeatedly targeted and a grenade attack had taken place on a temple in Rajouri in the recent past.

"Police have got inputs and are taking action (to foil any attempt to disturb peace and harm the communal harmo-

ny)," the police chief told reporters on the sidelines of a function here.

Singh said the recently floated Lashkar-e-Mustafa is an offshoot of the Jaish-e-Mohammad outfit and majority of its members were arrested in Kashmir or Jammu.

"The questioning of its commander (who was arrested in Jammu city on Saturday) is going on and his disclosure suggests that they wanted to spread militancy to Jammu and set up hideouts so that they can dump the arms and ammunition received from Pakistan before smuggling to Kashmir or any other place," he said.

The DGP said he was happy that the police arrested the terrorist on time and the plan was thwarted.

"The Jammu as well as Kashmir police are working in coordination and are ready to face any challenge with determination... We have a cent per cent success rate in the cases where police seized arms and ammunition and drugs which were airdropped by drones or smuggled by other means," he said.

Glacier burst wreaks havoc in Chamoli

From Page 1

While the State Government has announced ex-gratia of Rs 4 lakh each for the dependents of those killed, the PM has announced an ex gratia of Rs 2 lakh each.

The companies executing the Rishiganga and Tapovan projects are assessing the damage. The CM said that the situation is now under control and that there is no danger.

According to official sources, till the evening, 12 labourers had been rescued alive from the edit tunnel of the Rishiganga project while 30 were stuck in the main tunnel. About 250 ITBP jawans had reached the affected area for rescue work.

While a 40-member group of the Army reached Tapovan, another was at Joshimath and two Army teams had reached Joshimath for relief operations.

Defence forces pressed into...

From Page 1

The rescue missions are jointly carried out by National Disaster Relief Force (NDRF), State Disaster Relief Force, Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and the Army.

The ongoing efforts were reviewed by the National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC) headed by Rajiv Gauba. The Chief Secretary of Uttarakhand briefed the committee through video conference about the actions taken by them.

Two teams of NDRF are en route and three additional teams have been flown in from Hindon which will reach the spot later in the night.

Officials said here the military station near Rishikesh was actively involved in the coordination of rescue and relief operations with the local administration even as Army headquarters monitored the situation.

Also, three helicopters including two Mi-17s and one Dhruv advance light helicopter of the IAF were stationed in Dehradun and nearby areas for rescue operations. More aircraft will be deployed as per the requirement.

Avalanche warning for J&K, HP, Ladakh...

From Page 1

The glacier collapse at Joshimath on Sunday led to a massive flood in the Dhauli Ganga river and caused large-scale devastation in the upper reaches of the ecologically fragile Himalayas. There are around 200 glaciers in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir.

According to the Avalanche warning bulletin issued by Defence Geoinformatic Research Establishments, Pooch, Rajouri, Reasi, Ramban, Doda, Kishtwar, Udhampur, Anantnag, Bandipura, Ganderbal in Jammu & Kashmir, Kargil and Leh in Ladakh, Pithoragarh, Chamoli, Uttarkashi and Rudrapurag in Uttarakhand, Kinnaur and Shimla in Himachal Pradesh,

north Sikkim and east Sikkim have danger level 'one' warning. Chamba, Lahaul Spiti and Kullu in Himachal Pradesh have 'yellow' warning or danger level 'II' for Sunday and Monday.

The danger level 'one' is related to unlikely while danger level 'two' is low intensity avalanche warning. For danger level 'one', the Defence Geoinformatic Research Establishment said that it is partly unsafe conditions and small size triggering is possible on few extreme slopes. "In danger one level, rare avalanche activity is possible with high external loading such as tremors, explosives or movement in the formation zone," it said. Officials said that there is a snow avalanche threat at Kalath on the Chandigarh-Manali highway, Nehru Kund-

Kulung-Palchan-Kothi on the Manali-Leh highway, Tandi-Keyong Darcha in Lahaul and Spiti on the Manali-Leh highway, Darcha-Patsio-Zingzingbar on the Manali-Leh highway, and at the Atal Tunnel at Rohtang on the Manali-Leh highway in Himachal Pradesh.

There is the threat of a snow avalanche at Palchan-Solang-Dhundi-Beas Kund on the Manali-Leh highway via the Atal Tunnel, on the Udaipur-Killar and Chamba road at Tandi-Kirting-Thirot-Kumseri-Udaipur and the Triloknath area in Lahaul and Spiti, besides at Udaipur-Shaor-Chhau in Lahaul and Spiti and Chamba districts. In the Banjar area of Kullu district, there is a snow avalanche threat on the Khanag-Jalori Pass road on the national highway No. 305.

Covid jabs won't be available in open market...

From Page 1

It added that 12 States reported vaccination activity on Sunday — Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Manipur, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tripura and Uttarakhand.

A total of 1,16,478 sessions have been held so far, it said, adding that 1,295 sessions were held till 6:40 pm on Sunday.

No adverse events following immunisation (AEFIs) have been reported till 6:40 pm on Sunday.

The total 58,03,617 vaccinated beneficiaries include 3,79,042 from Bihar, 2,92,195 from Kerala, 3,88,476 from Karnataka, 3,42,016 from Madhya Pradesh, 4,73,480 from Maharashtra, 1,66,408 from Tamil Nadu, 1,09,589 from Delhi, 4,46,367 from Gujarat, 6,73,542 from Uttar Pradesh and 3,54,000 from West Bengal, according to the provisional report.

Unstoppable...

From Page 1

"I am downstream in Haridwar now. But even here, there is a flood alert. This shows how environmentally sensitive the upper reaches of the Ganga are," said former Water Resources Minister in the Modi Government in a series of tweets after Sunday's incident. At least, 170 labourers at the dam construction site were reported missing following massive landslides and tunnel blockages in the ecologically-fragile Himalayan region which is already facing climate change. Swami Shivanand Saraswati, a 76-year-old founder of Haridwar's Matri Sadan, an organisation working for the protection of environment told a news agency soon after the tragedy that they had been demanding a freeze on the construction activity around the Chamoli district since 2013.

"However, the government has not listened to our concerns and continued with the construction of hydel-power projects. Now, this is the wrath of nature". He was referring to warnings around the construction activity on the Dhauliganga River, the site of Sunday's dam breach in the wake of a glacial burst, in a government-

appointed expert committee report in 2017. Environmentalist Rajendra Singh minced no words as he said that the cloudburst was reflective of the government's "flawed policy" towards the holy river. "The environmentalists have been demanding a complete end to hydel power projects on the upper reaches of the river. This is just nature's way of responding. I only hold the government responsible for this. The warning signs were there in the 2013 tragedy," said Singh who is known as India's "Waterman" for his water conservation efforts. In 2018, Professor GD Agarwal, an environmental engineer-turned-sage, who succumbed to his 111-day hunger strike to protest the "increase in" construction activity on the Ganga River in Uttarakhand over the past few years, had accused the current government of being insensitive to "Maa Ganga" (Mother Ganges) and just cashing it for commercial gains, including selling hydel power and infrastructure development. According to various reports, till 2018, there were as many as 42 hydel power plants operational and 203 more in various stages of approval, planning and development, though lately the Centre had been scrapping a few of them following outcry from locals

and green activists. For instance, the Standing Committee of the National Board of Wildlife (NBWL) dropped NTPC's two hydro-power projects — 520 MW (4x130) Tapovan Vishnugad dam and 171 MW Lata Tapovan dam — proposed on the Ganga river, citing gazette notification issued last October that barred projects that obstruct minimum ecological flow (e-flow) in the river. In fact, Dr. D K Hari and Dr. D K Hema Hari, in their blogpost Bharath Gyan way back in 2018 rued how a string of hydel power projects were like tomb bombs ticking in the region. "As we go up along the rivers in the fragile region, to the upper reaches of the Himalaya, we see a plethora of Hydel power projects being built on the main river itself at close proximity," they said as they cited a central report in 2017 which had advised the Centre to stop all the hydel dam construction activity on the upper reaches of the river. However, it's not only the NGOs and activists who have been warning the Government about the threats from the spree of construction being undertaken in the Himalayas. Earth scientists from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Roorkee in 2019 in a research published in Current Science raised a red flag over the Modi Government's ₹12,000-crore

pet project Char Dham Mahamarg Vikas Pariyojana that aims to connect the four pilgrimage in the fragile mountainous eco-system region. Scientists T Siddique and SP Pradhan had warned that inadequately performed excavation without proper consideration of eco sensitive terrain may lead to catastrophic events as witnessed during the Kedarnath disaster in 2013. The scientists said that the 900-kilometer long all-weather road project which envisages widening of National Highway-58, is being executed in complete violation of environmental norms with several irregularities like adoption of unscientific methods, inappropriate dumping of tonnes of mud and debris, excavation at steep angles among others. The project is already drawing flak from environmentalists, NGOs like Citizen for Green Doon, and locals who too have alleged serious violation of green norms as well as rampant cutting of hills making the area prone to landslides. Earth scientist Pradeep Srivastava, from Dehradun-based Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology in the report called the project "unsustainable". "Such projects won't work in these mountains because the roads are built on "fragile rocks" and "subsidised landslides," he said.

Didi dashed people's hope of mamata: PM

From Page 1

Though the Chief Minister skipped the Prime Ministerial programme, no exact reason was given for the same. However, sources said the decision to skip the Sunday's programme was taken in view of the "insult she had been meted out on January 23 at Victoria Memorial in Kolkata" where alleged BJP supporters had hooted her with 'Jai Shri Ram' slogan in presence of the Prime Minister.

Reiterating how the Chief Minister got irritated by patriotic slogans Modi on Sunday said, "She gets angry when people chant 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' but not when conspiracies are hatched to defame India."

"Not only that the TMC Government refused to perform but it stalls the developmental schemes introduced by the Centre from reaching the people of Bengal," Modi said adding how Banerjee put spanners on the plethora of Central schemes like Kisan Sanman Nidhi, Ayushman Bharat and deprived the people of Bengal from getting benefited from them.

"Not only this, thousands of crores of rupees sent after the Amphan cyclone and the pandemic were misappropriated," he said, adding "even the courts had to intervene in favour of a thorough probe into the matter."

Regardless of the depravations the "first Cabinet meeting

of the BJP Government will take up the issue to ensure that the Central schemes reach the people and particularly farmers in general," he said promising that "even the benefits the people could not get in the past years due to the adamant attitude of the TMC Government will be compensated for."

Earlier expressing anguish at the dam burst in Uttarakhand where many villages have been swept away in a near repeat of the Himalayan Tsunami that hit the same State a few years ago, the Prime Minister said that Central Government was in continuous touch with the State and was sending all possible help to save life and property.

No 'ghar wapsi' till farmers' demands met, says Tikait

From Page 1

Tikait claimed the campaign against the agriculture laws is going strong. With many "khap" leaders present at the mahapanchayat, Tikait lauded their role in strengthening the stir.

Independent MLA from Dadri and chief of the Sangwan Khap, Sombir Sangwan, who in December withdrew his support to the BJP-JJP government in Haryana, dubbing it anti-farmer, was present at the event.

Earlier on February 3, Tikait had addressed his first Kisan Mahapanchayat in Haryana's Kandela in Jind.

The BKU leader from Uttar Pradesh

has been camping at Ghazipur on the Delhi-UP border as part of a campaign by farmer unions against the central laws enacted in September.

Tikait said that khaps go back to the days of King Harshvardhana and have been playing their role in society ever since.

The BKU leader said when the farmers' stir started, attempts were made to divide it by calling it the agitation of Punjab and Haryana.

Seeking to project unity among farmer unions, Tikait said the "manch (stage) and panch (leaders leading the stir) will not change".

The BKU leader, whose emotional appeal recently had revived the protest that was losing momentum after the January 26 violence in Delhi, said people from different section of society were leading and part of the stir.

Cautioning the protesting farmers, Tikait said "Some people will try to divide you as Sikh, non-Sikh" but they

should remain united.

Tikait again praised BKU leader from Punjab, Balbir Singh Rajewal, who was present on the occasion, for providing a sound leadership to the stir. "Rajewal is our big leader, he is very wise. We will fight this battle strongly," he said.

Tikait also made a mention of the tragedy caused by a glacier burst at Joshimath in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand, leading to a massive flood in the Dhauli Ganga river and causing large-scale devastation in the upper reaches of the ecologically fragile Himalayas.

"A big tragedy has struck Uttarakhand. I appeal to the BKU family and other farmer organisations to lend a helping hand and assist the local administration," he said.

He appealed to all to conserve water and plant trees to protect the environment.

Meanwhile, taking a lesson from the

Jind Mahapanchayat where the stage had collapsed, the organisers had bricked the stage this time.

Thousands of farmers have been protesting since late November 2020 at Delhi's borders with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, demanding a rollback of the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020; Farmers' (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020; and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.

The protesting farmers have expressed apprehension that these laws would pave the way for the dismantling of the minimum support price (MSP) system, leaving them at the "mercy" of big corporations.

However, the government has maintained that the new laws will bring better opportunities to farmers and introduce new technologies in agriculture.

TO PROMOTE E-BIKES, SCOOTERS First phase of 'Switch Delhi' begins

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Transport Minister Kailsah Gahlot on Sunday started the first phase of "Switch Delhi" campaign aiming to encourage citizen to adopt Electrical Vehicles (EVs): e-bike and e-scooters and viewing the city as EV Capital of India.

The Minister said EV Policy especially focuses on incentivising the purchase of two wheelers, which comprise 2/3rd of all vehicles in Delhi and cause maximum pollution. "Incentives upto ₹30,000 can be availed upon the purchase of two-wheelers listed under the policy along with scrapping incentives," Gahlot said.

Gahlot said, "The total cost of ownership of an electric two wheeler over a period of 10 years is approximately percent of that of a petrol scooter in Delhi and approximately 54 percent of that of a petrol bike in Delhi, as per analysis by RMI India. Electric two wheelers are upto Rs. 2.05 cheaper to drive per kilometer as compared to petrol scooters and upto INR 1.82 cheaper to drive per kilometer as compared to petrol

bike. Electric 2 wheelers would achieve cost parity with the petrol scooters and bike in a maximum of 6 months."

According to Delhi government's EV policy, 23 two-wheeler models are available and eligible for purchase and scrapping incentives across 7 manufacturers.

Illustrating masses about EV policy, Gahlot said by switching to electric two wheelers which have very low operating costs, an individual can make annual saving of approximately ₹22,000 as compared to using petrol scooter and ₹20,000 as compared to a petrol bike. "An average electric two wheeler provides a life time savings of 1.98 tonnes of carbon emissions as compared to an average petrol two wheelers, which is equivalent to planting 11 trees," he added.

Delhi government's Switch Delhi campaign is an eight-week electric vehicle mass awareness campaign to sensitize each and every Delhiite about the benefits of switching to electric vehicles.

A study by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) shows that vehicle pollution is the cause of 28 percent of

PM2.5 emissions in Delhi, and two wheelers constitute seven percent of this pollution.

Considering Delhi's context, the policy lays special focus on the two-wheeler vehicle segment.

The policy offers various financial and non-financial incentives on the purchase of two-wheelers. A purchase incentive of ₹5,000 per kWh of battery capacity shall be provided per vehicle to the registered owner and subject to a maximum of ₹30,000 per vehicle. For vehicles that are eligible for purchase incentives shall also receive a scrapping incentive of up to ₹5,000 for scrapping and de-registering old ICE two-wheelers registered in Delhi. Road tax and registration fees will also be waived for all electric two-wheelers during the period of the policy.

Under Delhi's EV policy, 23 two-wheeler models are available and eligible for purchase

and scrapping incentives across 7 manufacturers namely Hero Electric Pvt Ltd, Revolt Intellcorp Motors, Ampere Vehicles Pvt Ltd, Benling India Energy & technology Pvt Ltd, TVS, Ather, Okinawa Scooters, Jitendra New EV Tech Pvt. Ltd, and Lion Electric Pvt. Ltd.

The environmental benefits upon switching to Delhi are significant.

According to environment experts, an average electric two wheeler provides a life time savings of 1.98

tonnes of carbon emissions as compared to an average petrol two wheelers. "To put it simply, we need roughly 11 trees to sequester 1.98 tonnes of CO2. We can save our environment by making this switch and we owe this to our future generations," the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) minister said.

"The Delhi Government has been working tirelessly to lay the ground for a successful transition to electric vehicles in the national capital. I urge Delhiites to now switch to electric, make this a mass movement, take responsibility for our environment, and make our city the EV Capital of India. I assure you, we're here to help you switch to sustainable transport," he added.



60-yr-old man held for Red Fort violence on R-Day

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police on Sunday arrested a man, aged around 60, who was carrying a reward of ₹50,000 in connection with the Red Fort incident on Republic Day. Police said that the accused, Sukhdev Singh was arrested from Chandigarh by the Crime Branch team.

The Crime Branch of Delhi Police is probing the 13 cases in connection with the Republic Day tractor parade violence. A senior police officer said that the accused Sukhdev Singh was allegedly leading the mob at the Red Fort on the day of incident and his presence was very much active.

So far, a total of 127 people have been arrested in connection with the Republic Day violence across the national Capital, police said. Thousands of farmers protesting the Centre's new agri laws had clashed with the police during the tractor parade on January 26.

Many of the protesters, driving tractors, reached the Red Fort and entered the monument. Some protesters even



So far, 127 people have been arrested in connection with the Republic Day violence across the national Capital, police said

Independence Day. Earlier, the police had announced cash reward of ₹1 lakh for information that can lead to the arrest of actor Deep Sidhu, Jugraj Singh, Gurjot Singh and Gurjant Singh who hoisted flags at the Red Fort or were involved in the act. A cash reward of ₹50,000 each was also announced for Buta Singh, Sukhdev Singh, Jajbir Singh and Iqbal Singh for allegedly instigating protesters.

AAP: BJP chief, councillors travelled outside India on MCD's expense

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Sunday said that several Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) councillors including Delhi BJP chief Adesh Gupta, mayors and officials have taken several trips inside and outside India on municipal Corporation's expense.

AAP Senior leader Durgesh Pathak said that at one side employees of the BJP ruled MCD are starving and on the other side BJP leaders are using MCD funds for their trips. "The AAP demands that the BJP ruled MCD must publish a white paper declaring all

such trips taken by the BJP councillors or mayors within 48 hours.

The AAP demands a thorough probe on such misappropriation of MCD funds," he said.

However, responding to the charges, Delhi BJP Spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said that the AAP leaders are in a habit of exaggerating and dramatizing things to try and malign the political image of BJP ruled MCDs.

"Trips by Ministers of Delhi Government or Mayors of MCDs to other cities is a normal protocol affair and the

fact of the matter is Delhi Government is bearing expenses of many political tours of AAP Ministers including Manish Sisodia to several states like Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand under the garb of study tours of schools in those states," he said.

Kapoor further said that MCDs are in deep financial crunch due to Arvind Kejriwal Government's withholding funds since 2020 while the two official trips of erstwhile Mayors under dispute are of 2018 and 2019 and Durgesh Pathak has tried to portray as if it is not a matter of 2 trips but of 20 unpaid trips.



Farmers stage a protest against new agri laws at Tikri Border in New Delhi on Sunday. Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

SDMC launches plastic waste removal drive

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In order to ensure cleanliness in its area ahead of Swachhhta Survekshan-2021, the South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) launched a plastic waste removal drive in all four zones and lifted nearly 200 kilograms of waste from the green belts falling under the jurisdiction.

Deputy Commissioner of South Zone G Sudhakar said that in this special drive dif-

ferent stretches of around 57 KM were covered and nearly 200 kilograms of plastic waste were lifted from the green belts falling under the jurisdiction of South Zone.

Sudhakar said that in view of the Swachh Survekshan, the sanitation staff are working hard and SDMC is giving extra efforts to upkeep the sanitation condition and in this line night sweeping is also done in different markets from the available resources.

BJP declares candidates for bypolls to 5 municipal seats

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Delhi announced its list of candidates for the upcoming Municipal Corporation Delhi (MCD) bypolls for five municipal wards, scheduled to be held on February 28.

The name of the candidates are - Rakesh Goel from Rohini N-32, Surbhi Jaju, Shalimar Bagh N-62, Om Prakash Guggarwal, Trilokpuri, E-02, Siyaram Kanojia Kalyanpuri, E-08, Mohd. Nazir Ansari will contest from Chauhan Bangar E-41. Delhi BJP president Adesh

Gupta on Sunday launched party's campaign for bypolls in five municipal wards. He launched it by worshipping at Maharishi Valmiki temple at Trilokpuri in East Delhi.

The ruling AAP and the Congress are other main players in the bypolls on five municipal wards in the national capital which are being seen as a litmus test before the civic body elections due in 2021.

Four of the five wards fell vacant after sitting councillors contested assembly polls on AAP ticket in 2020 and became MLAs.

Two wards in North Delhi

Municipal Corporation (NDMC), Shalimarbagh and Rohini-C, and three under the East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC), Trilokpuri, Kalyanpuri and Chauhan Bangar, will go for the bypolls.

The Shalimar Bagh ward fell vacant since death of Renu Jaju who had won the seat on a BJP ticket in 2017.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which is eyeing to capture the three municipal corporations ruled by the BJP since 2012, will be a frontrunner in the bypolls trying to regain the four seats held by it earlier.

40 shanties gutted in Okhla Phase II fire

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Six domesticated animals died while forty shanties were gutted after a fire broke out near the Harikesh Nagar Metro Station in southeast Delhi's Okhla Phase II in the early hours of Sunday. Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal took to Twitter to express his concerns and assured all possible help to those affected.

"Concerned about the news of fire incident at Okhla. I am constantly in touch with the fire department and the district administration, people are being provided with all possible help," he said.

According to Atul Garg, the Director of Delhi Fire Service (DFS), it was medium category fire and information about it was received around 2.23 AM following which DFS teams were dispatched for the spot.

DO YOU WANT TO BECOME AN IAS / IPS OFFICER?

OPPORTUNITY FOR UPSC ASPIRANTS FROM DELHI SCHOOLS TO HAVE DIRECT CONVERSATION WITH YOUNG IAS / IPS OFFICERS

SECOND SESSION:

Meet two young officers in this session and have an open interaction with them

Monday, February 08, 2021 at 3 pm onwards

In conversation with

Sh. Udit Prakash (IAS - 2007)
Director Education, Delhi Govt.

Sh. Ingit Pratap Singh (IPS - 2011)
Deputy Commissioner of Police, South West District, Delhi Police

Delhi government has initiated a program for the UPSC aspirants from Delhi schools to give them better insights about UPSC exam preparation. Under this program, every month young IAS/IPS officers interact with the students and share their life experiences and strategies for exam preparation. This session is second in series of this program.

For registration, interested students may send their name, class and full name of their school over WhatsApp to

8130266666

Directorate of Education, Government of NCT of Delhi

2 booked for duping over 1,500 investors of ₹16 cr

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

Over 1,500 investors have been duped of ₹16-17 crore by a fake investment company on the pretext of giving huge returns. In connection with the matter a case of forgery was registered against two accused after a recommendation of the Economic Offence Wing (EOW) cell of the Gurugram police, the police said on Sunday.

Those booked have been identified as Manish Chaudhary and Mukender alias Mukku. They run a company, named Spark Life, based at Spaze IT Park, Sector-49 on Sohna Road in Gurugram. According to the police, the company had no permission from the RBI to run such operations. The complainant, Rajwanti, a resident of Civil Lines in Gurugram, told the police that the suspects had lured him into investing a meagre amount in their company.

"The duo culprits told the woman if she invests in their company she will get 10.8% profit in total per month. The woman fell in their trap and she asked her near and dear includ-

ing her husband to invest in the company and they invested around ₹9 lakh in the fake company via cash or account transfer," the complaint told the police.

The woman also stated in her complaint that the duo accused her of showing her fake Reserve Bank of India (RBI) letter and told her they will invest their money in 'EXPEDAI AND AGODA', an international company which deals in hotel booking.

"The accused told the woman one of their brothers Deepak who was working in a private bank in Ajmer in Rajasthan used to take care of their investments. Later we came to know that the culprits had duped ₹16-17 crores by duping over 1,500 people."

"An inquiry in the case was conducted by EOW cell of the Gurugram police after their recommendation a case of fraud and other relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) was registered against the culprits at Sector 50 police station. Further probe is on," said Inspector Amit Kumar, station house officer (SHO) of Sector-50 police station.

Man wanted for killing Delhi Police constable held after brief exchange of fire

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has arrested a 30-year-old man, wanted for allegedly killing a Delhi Police constable last year, after a brief exchange of fire in the national Capital.

The accused identified as Mohammad Hassan, a resident of Loni in Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad district, had been absconding for the last five months after robbing and killing constable Manish Yadav in September last year.

Police said that Hassan, carrying a reward of Rs 50,000, had been changing hideouts in Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, UP since the incident but he had been residing in Delhi for last one month.

According to Pramod Singh Kushwaha, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Special Cell, Hassan was arrested on Friday after a brief exchange of fire when police team received inputs that he would come from Wazirabad on a Yamaha superbike and would go towards

Usmanpur to commit a crime in the area.

"Police also recovered one semi automatic pistol of .32 bore and three live cartridges from Hassan's possession. Four empty shells and the motorcycle were also seized," said the DCP.

"On September 7 last year, Hassan along with three other associates had waylaid constable Yadav in UP's Baghpat district, while he was travelling to his village on his bike from Delhi. The accused had threatened Yadav and had asked him to hand over his belongings. When Yadav resisted, Hassan and his associates had shot him and robbed him off Rs 20,000 and other articles including his identity-card," said the DCP.

"Yadav was severely injured and was taken to a nearby hospital where he died during treatment. Hassan is involved in 15 other criminal cases, including robbery, snatching, assault, criminal intimidation among others in Delhi and UP," said the DCP.

DIP/Shabdarth/D/01/05/20-21

Crisis mgmt panel takes stock of U'khand glacier burst

PNS ■ NEW DELHI / MUMBAI

The National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC), under the chairmanship of Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba, met on Sunday afternoon to review the situation arising out of the natural disaster in Uttarakhand caused by the glacial burst. The Cabinet Secretary directed the concerned agencies to work in close coordination and extend all requisite assistance to the State administration. He emphasised the need to account for all missing persons and ensure that those trapped in the tunnel are rescued at the earliest.

Gauba also directed that surveillance should be maintained till rescue efforts are completed and the situation returns to normalcy.

The meeting was attended by Union Home Secretary, Secretary of the Ministry of Power, DG ITBP, Chief IDS, Members of NDMA, DG NDRF, Chairman CWC, DG IMD and Chairman DRDO, along with other senior officers. Chief Secretary, Uttarakhand joined the meeting with his team of officers.

Chief Secretary, Government of Uttarakhand briefed the Committee through VC, on the ground situation as well as

Prayed for wellbeing, safety of people: Prez Kovind

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

President Ram Nath Kovind on Sunday said he was deeply worried about the massive glacier burst at Joshimath in Chamoli district and prayed for the wellbeing and safety of people.

The tragedy was a flashback to the 2013 flash floods in the hill State that claimed lives running into thousands.

Reacting to the major natural tragedy in Uttarakhand, Kovind, in a tweet, also said he was confident that rescue and relief operations on ground are progressing well.

"Deeply worried about the glacier burst near Joshimath, Uttarakhand, that caused destruction in the region. Praying for wellbeing and safety of people. Am confident that rescue and relief operations on ground are progressing well," he tweeted.

the actions taken by them after the incident to evacuate people and to contain the damage caused by the flooding due to the glacial burst.



Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu prayed for the safety of those affected.

"I join the nation in praying for the safety of all those affected by the flash flood caused by a glacier burst in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand," the Vice President Secretariat tweeted quoting Naidu.

The vice president said he is sure that the state and Central Governments are trying their best to mitigate the crisis.

On his part Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted, "Am constantly monitoring the unfortunate situation in Uttarakhand. India stands with Uttarakhand and the nation prays for everyone's safety there. Have been continuously speaking to senior authorities and getting updates on NDRF deployment, rescue work and relief operations."

Union Home Minister Amit Shah spoke to Uttarakhand Chief Minister



Trivendra Singh Rawat and assured him of all possible support to deal with the situation arising from the glacier burst and the resulting floods.

Shah also said teams of the NDRF were deployed for rescue and relief operations of the affected people while additional troops of the force were being airlifted from Delhi.

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday

said she was deeply shocked over the disaster.

"Deeply shocked and very saddened at the loss of lives in the disaster that took place in Uttarakhand. My deepest condolences to the families of the deceased. Wishing a speedy and full recovery for those injured in the calamity," she said on Twitter.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said his government is ready to extend

Central Water Commission (CWC). There is also no threat to the neighbouring villages. At the same time, the concerned agencies of the

Centre and the State were asked to keep a strict vigil on the situation, and a team from DRDO, which monitors avalanches, is being flown in

for surveillance and reconnaissance. MD, NTPC has been asked to reach the affected site immediately," said Cabinet Secretariat in a state-

ment. Two teams of NDRF are enroute and three additional teams have been flown in from Hindon Air Force air-

port in Delhi which will reach the spot later in the night. More than 200 ITBP personnel are on the spot, and one column and Engineering Task Force (ETF) of Army, with all rescue equipment have been deployed. Navy divers are being flown in and aircrafts/helicopters of the Indian Air Force (IAF) are on standby.

Meanwhile, speaking to the media in Maharashtra, Home Minister Amit Shah said that rescue and relief operations by the Centre and State Government are in full swing and three teams of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) from nearby areas have reached the spot. Soon other teams will also reach there, said Shah adding that that ITBP jawans have also reached there and the state machinery is also active.

The Union Home Minister said that he has spoken with the Chief Minister of Uttarakhand and the Air Force has also been alerted. Shah said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally called up the NDRF team and guided them.

He said that the Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai is monitoring the rescue operations from the NDRF Control Room in the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Farmers' Fasal Bima claims rejected 9 times in just 2 years

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The number of farmers' crop insurance claims that were rejected by insurance companies under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) multiplied 9 times in just two years.

According to data provided by Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar in response to a question in the Rajya Sabha on Friday, in 2017-18, the number of rejected claims was 92,869. In the next year, 2018-19, the figure more than doubled to 204,742. By 2019-20, it was 928,870, a whopping 900 percent increase," the reply said.

"Insurance companies can reject some of these claims on various grounds like late intimation of claims, denial of claims to non-insured farmers or non-insured crops, non-occurrence of the risk etc," said Tomar. Meanwhile, to boost the safety of farmers' crops and ensure maximum benefit of crop insurance reaches to farmers, the Centre has allocated ₹16,000 crores for PMFBY for the fiscal year 2021-22.

This is a budgetary increase of around ₹305 crore as against the previous fiscal year 2020-21.

The scheme extends coverage for the entire cropping cycle from pre-sowing to post-harvest including coverage for losses arising out of prevented sowing and mid-season adversities.

According to the agriculture ministry, PMFBY is globally the largest crop insurance scheme in terms of

farmer participation and 3rd largest in terms of premium. Over 5.5 crore farmer applications are received on a year-on-year basis.

As of now, out of total farmers enrolled under PMFBY, 84% are small and marginal farmers.

Over the past 5 years, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has worked extensively towards revamping the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) scheme by relooking at the structural, logistical, and other challenges. The scheme was made voluntary for farmers post its revamp in 2020. The scheme has made it easier for the farmer to report crop loss within 72 hours of occurrence of any event through the Crop Insurance App, CSC Centre or the nearest agriculture officer. Claim benefit is then provided electronically into the bank accounts of eligible farmer," it said.

The scheme was launched in 2016 was conceived as a milestone initiative to provide a comprehensive risk solution at the lowest uniform premium across the country for farmers.

Integration of land records with the PMFBY portal, Crop Insurance mobile-app for easy enrollment of farmers and usage of technology such as satellite imagery, remote-sensing technology, drones, artificial intelligence and machine learning to assess crop losses are some of the key features of the scheme.

PM Modi reviews flood situation in Uttarakhand



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday reviewed the situation in Uttarakhand following floods caused by a glacier burst at Joshimath in Chamoli district, and took stock of the rescue and relief work underway.

"Am constantly monitoring the unfortunate situation in Uttarakhand. India stands with Uttarakhand and the nation prays for everyone's safety there. Have been continuously speaking to senior authorities and getting updates on NDRF deployment, rescue work and relief operations," Modi tweeted.

The PMO said in another tweet that Modi, who is in Assam to launch several development projects, reviewed the situation in Uttarakhand and spoke to the state chief minister.

"Authorities are working to provide all possible support to the affected," the PMO said.

Modi is on a tour to Assam and West Bengal on Sunday.

A glacier broke off in Joshimath in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district on Sunday, causing a massive flood in the Dhauli Ganga river and endangering the lives of people living along its banks. Massive destruction is feared.

More than 150 labourers working at the Rishi Ganga power project may have been directly affected, said State Disaster Response Force DIG Rishim Aggarwal.

Damage from pollution no less than damage from other heinous crimes: NGT

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal has rapped the Uttar Pradesh Government for not taking effective steps to control pollution in River Hindon, noting that damage from pollution is no less than the damage from other heinous crimes.

A bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice A K Goel said repeated orders will not serve any purpose unless the administration takes ownership of its Constitutional obligation to the citizens.

"It is a matter of regret that the State authorities have failed to discharge their constitutional obligation of taking remedial measures in spite of attention of the highest authorities in the administration being drawn to the problem," the bench said.

"We had expected that with the involvement of the Chief Secretary, the procedural and inter-departmental coordination issues will be resolved. But unfortunately, it has not so happened," the bench said.

"Thus, instead of keeping the proceedings pending, we consider it appropriate to require the Chief Secretary, UP to ensure remedial action on expeditious basis.

"The action should also include fixing responsibilities and making entry in the service record of incompetent or failing officers, who were earlier entrusted this responsibility, granting necessary approvals and providing necessary funds," the bench said.

The NGT also directed the River Rejuvenation Committee of UP to monitor execution of action plans for Hindon, subject to overall

oversight of the Chief Secretary.

The Chief Secretary, while reviewing the status of various issues, may focus on timely completion of the ongoing works, it said.

The green panel also noted that the Member Secretary of the state pollution control board does not have exclusive charge of the PCB but is also Special Secretary to the Government, apart from being Member Secretary, SEIAA and holding other positions.

"One wonders how one person can do justice to the job holding so many positions when even working as Member Secretary pollution control board requires full time involvement in view of serious environmental issues awaiting attention.

"Independence in working is also bound to be affected when a person has multifarious functions, including as limb of the Government, making it difficult to work as independent regulator," the bench said.

"Even the compliance report in the present case, on behalf of the State, has been filed by the said Member Secretary in his capacity as Special Secretary to the Government. Let this aspect be looked into by the Chief Secretary, UP and remedial action taken in accordance with law in the light of the Supreme Court judgement," the bench said.

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) was hearing a petition filed by NGO Doaba Paryavaran Samiti alleging pollution in Kali Nadi, Krishna and Hindon rivers, resulting in diseases and deaths of some inhabitants of the area.

SC seeks explanation from NCB for delay in filing plea against HC verdict



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has termed as "atrocious" the manner in which a "sensitive matter" of narcotics has been sought to be prosecuted, and directed the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) to give an explanation over the delay in filing a plea against the Rajasthan High Court verdict in the case.

The apex court, which observed that a petition challenging the high court's December 2018 verdict acquitting the accused persons in a narcotics case has been filed before it after a delay of 652 days, noted the "glaring gaps" and said the NCB headquarters had sat on the file for one year.

"We find that in a sensitive matter relating to narcotics the manner in which the pre-

sent proceedings are sought to be prosecuted is atrocious.

The special leave petitions have been filed after a delay of 652 days," a bench comprising Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Hrishikesh Roy said in its February 1 order.

The case pertains to alleged recovery of over 5 Kg contraband heroin from a car in 2013.

While referring to the explanation given by the NCB, the bench noted that the "glaring gaps which are apparent" are — the opinion of the special public prosecutor was given after six months to the department on May 16, 2019 and the draft special leave petition (SLP) is stated to have been received by NCB headquarters on August 22, 2019 and was forwarded to department con-

cerned for corrections on August 22, 2020 after one year.

"Thus, the NCB headquarters sat on the file for one year," the bench said, adding, "We call for an explanation from the NCB headquarters as to how the aforesaid has transpired and what responsibility has been fixed on which officer for such negligence."

"We would also like to know what steps are being taken to streamline the process. The affidavit will be filed under the signatures of the Director General, NCB. The affidavit be filed within four weeks," the top court said and posted the matter for hearing after four weeks.

The apex court was hearing a plea filed by the Centre, through the NCB, against the high court's December 6, 2018 verdict.

India readies blueprint for protecting endangered turtles

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Home to four turtle species — olive ridley turtle, green turtle, hawksbill turtle, and leatherback sea turtle, India has finally outlined a blueprint for the protection and conservation of endangered marine turtles found on its coastal zones.

Even though all the species found on the coastal zones stretching 7,500 km are listed under Schedule I of the Indian Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, their populations in the Indian sea waters are under threat.

In fact approximately 61% of worldwide turtle species are either threatened or already extinct, and the sea turtle is no exception as they struggle with pollution and degradation of nesting habitats, which can interfere with their egg-laying. And turtles in the Indian oceans are no exception.

Speaking at the virtual launch event recently, Union



Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar said that both floral and faunal diversity including the marine biodiversity is the beauty of India and we need to conserve it with best possible action and interventions.

The documents 'Marine Mega Fauna Stranding Guidelines' and 'National Marine Turtle Action Plan' contain ways and means to not only promote inter-sectoral action for conservation

but also guide improved coordination amongst the government, civil society and all relevant stakeholders on the response to cases of stranding, entanglement, injury or mortality of marine mammals and also conservation of marine turtles.

Javadekar said, India has rich marine biodiversity along a vast coastline of over 7,500 km. From colorful fish, sharks, including Whale Sharks, turtles and big mammals like

whales, dolphins and dugongs to bright corals, marine habitats not only harbor diverse species but also provide resources essential for human wellbeing.

Despite the immense economic, ecological and cultural values of marine habitats in India, marine megafauna species and marine turtles face a wide variety of challenges including stranding and entanglement.

Managing such challeng-



situations requires coordination, action and people's participation which would help in the long-term conservation of marine species and their habitats, he added.

The action plans high-

light actions to be taken for handling stranded animals on shore, stranded or entangled animals in the sea or on a boat, management actions for improved coordination, reducing threats to marine species and their habitats.

Also, the plan outlines steps to be taken for rehabilitation of degraded habitats, enhancing people's participation, advance scientific research and exchange of information on marine mammals and marine

turtles and their habitats. Conserve Species, their habitat and reduce negative impacts on survival of marine turtles.

Concerns about nest predation, plastic pollution, light pollution, habitat degradation, and bycatch (marine creatures that are inadvertently trapped in fishing nets) have been addressed in the policy.

Scientists estimate that to restore wildlife in the ocean, at least 30% of the world's oceans should be put completely off limits to harmful human activities by 2030, according to a latest report by Greenpeace International.

India is a signatory to the Indian Ocean Sea Turtle Agreement (IOSEA) of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), a United Nations backed initiative.

The latest policy rollout represents India's step in its conservation push, said a scientist from the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).

Some people abroad conspiring against India, but won't succeed: PM

Guwahati: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said that some forces sitting abroad are conspiring against India, but the people of the country would not allow them to succeed.

Addressing a massive public gathering at Dhekiajuli in northern Assam's Sonitpur district, the Prime Minister without naming any person and organisation said that the conspirators sitting abroad not only conspiring against India but also maligning the world famous Indian and the Assam tea.

He said: "Some documents have revealed such conspiracies plotted abroad. Despite the conspiracy, Assam and India would go forward. Let them do their conspiracy, but the peo-

ple of India would not make them succeed."

"I want to tell you about the conspiracy hatched to defame the country. They are saying the image of Indian tea has to be defamed worldwide, systematically."

Modi said that in this year's Budget major thrusts were given in infrastructure development in India and the north-east region.

"With the development of the connectivities, trade and business would further flourish. New India would be Atmanirbhar Bharat. The new India would take Assam to a new height of development."

The Prime Minister said that the Northeastern region has left behind communal tension, terrorism, crisis, hatred,

and conflicts and is now surging ahead after waiting for long years.

The Central government is taking forward the region with all sincerity. The region was backward as the people earlier stayed far away from the region.

The recent Bodoland accord and subsequent elections to the Bodoland Territorial Council are the example of "bikash and viskwas" (growth and trust) to work together, he added.

"Today is a special day for me. Today I got the opportunity to pay respect to this historic land of Dhekiajuli. In this land, people defeated the aggressors. In 1942, people here martyred to protect the nation and to respect the tri-



colour. "Every drop of martyrs' blood makes our resolve stronger, thus this rich history makes me take pride on Assam."

Referring to the song of great singer and composer Bhupen Hazarika, Modi said

that the sun rises first in Northeast, but the morning of development had to wait long for Assam and Northeast.

In his 31-minute speech in Hindi, the Prime Minister said that since independence for seven decades Assam has six medical colleges, but in last five years building of six more medical colleges had started resulting 1,600 MBBS doctors would come out every year in Assam.

The Prime Minister announced that one medical college and one technical institution in each state to be taught in the mother tongue of the local people.

He said that the under construction AIIMS in Guwahati would be ready within one-and-a-half years making Guwahati a hub of the modern medical treatment not only for Assam it would cater all the eight Northeastern states.

Modi said that the Ayushman Bharat Yojana has been incorporated in Assam 350 hospitals benefiting 1.50 crore people in getting free

treatment while huge numbers of people also benefited under the Atal Amrit Abhiyan scheme.

"Entire world is now praising the way India undertook its Covid vaccination drives. In this year's Budget unprecedented allocation has been made for the health sector as this sector is now our priority sector. In 600 districts we would set up integrated labs so that the people can not go far away for various testing."

Modi said that nobody knows better than him about the flavour of Sonitpur's red tea.

"Assam is also developing its world famous tea. Only yesterday (Saturday), crores of rupees were given directly to the bank account of 7.50 lakh tea garden workers. Rs 1,000

crore special package has been earmarked for the welfare of the tea garden workers in Assam and West Bengal," he said.

Under the Assam government flagship scheme "Cha Bagichhar Dhan Puraskar Mela" (cash award fair for tea workers) the state government transferred Rs 3,000 each to the bank accounts of 7,46,667 lakh tea plantation workers. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman was the chief guest in the Saturday's function.

From the Dhekiajuli public meeting, Modi laid the foundation stone for two medical colleges in Biswanath Charali and Charaideo and launched the 'Assam Mala' project to upgrade the state highways. IANS

We never promised Shiv Sena Maha CM's post: Shah

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Dismissing the oft-repeated claim made to the contrary by the Shiv Sena, Union Home Minister and senior BJP leader Amit Shah said on Sunday that his party had never promised the Chief Minister's post on a rotational basis as part of the 50:50 power-sharing agreement reached between his party and the Sena in the run-up to 2019 Maharashtra Assembly polls.

Breaking his silence for the first time over his party's long-time ally Shiv Sena's accusation that the BJP had reneged on its party to give the chief minister's post for two-and-a-half years out of the full five years, Shah said: "They (Shiv Sena) say that at a closed door meeting, I had made them a promise to them about sharing the chief minister's post with them. I had not made any such promise to Uddhavji as claimed by him and the Shiv Sena."

"I do not do anything in private nor have I indulged in backroom politics. Whatever I do, I do in the midst of people. I am not scared of anyone. Whatever I want to say, I say it in public. I did not make any such promise to Uddhavji. In fact, the Shiv Sena used the photographs of Modiiji that two and a half times bigger than their president. The Shiv Sena sought votes from the

people in the name of Modiiji," Shah said.

Speaking at a function after inaugurating a 300-bed private hospital-cum medical college set up by former chief minister and senior BJP leader Narayan Rane at Sidhurdurg in coastal Konkan region, Shah said: "I was the BJP President when my party and Shiv Sena contested the 2019 State Assembly elections as an alliance. We contested the elections under the leadership of Devendra Fadnavis. Both the parties sought votes in the name of Modiiji. I addressed rallies with Shiv Sena leaders. Modiiji also addressed rallies with the Sena leaders. At each public meeting, I asked the people to elect the NDA to power. I repeatedly said that Devendra Fadnavis would become the chief minister. Why did not say anything about the sharing of the chief minister's post? I repeat we had not given any assurance to the Shiv Sena on the chief minister's post."

It may be recalled that on February 18, 2019, the Shiv Sena and BJP had - at a closed door meeting held at Thackeray's "Matoshri" residence formalised the seat-sharing pact for the following Lok Sabha polls in the State. At that meeting, the BJP and Shiv Sena had also decided on a 50:50 ratio for sharing seats for the State Assembly polls.

Subsequently, the Shiv Sena had claimed that the BJP had also agreed to share the chief minister's post on a rotational basis, a claim that the then Amit Shah-led party dismissed saying that no such agreement had reached between the two saffron alliance partners at that meeting. The disagreement between the two parties on the sharing of the chief minister's post led to a break-up between the two saffron alliance partners and the subsequent post-poll power sharing arrangement among the Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress.

Slamming the Shiv Sena for severing the ties with the BJP and joining hands with the NCP and Congress to form a government in Maharashtra after the 2019 Assembly polls, Shah said: "We (BJP and Shiv Sena) and won the elections together under the leadership of Devendra Fadnavis. But, after the Shiv Sena gave up the ideological mornings of late Balasaheb Thackeray, joined hands with the Congress and NCP to form a 3-party aorickshaw government. When we annulled Article 370, they (Shiv Sena) hesitantly welcomed the move. Same thing happened when our government decided... We were never scared of any one at any point of time."

Drawing parallel with what happened in Bihar where the

BJP had contested the elections in alliance with the JD(U), Shah said: "We had all along said that Nitish Kumar would be the next chief minister of Bihar. After the election, we - despite the fact our party had larger number than the JD(U) - Nitish Kumar the chief minister as we had promised."

"The BJP was founded on ideological grounds. We had formalised our ideology for the sake of politics. I would like to tell my Shiv Sena friends that you have not come to politics to promote and practise your ideology. After the death of Balasaheb Thackeray, the Shiv Sena has been deviating from its ideology. The people of Maharashtra know all about you now. But, I would like to say that we will not follow your footsteps. If we had followed your footsteps when Devendra Fadnavis, the Shiv Sena would not have survived till now," Shah said.

Shah Heaped praise on former chief minister Narayan Rane - whose political outfit Maharashtra Swabhimani Party merged with the BJP in the run-up to the 2019 State Assembly polls - for continued efforts to develop the latter's home district of Sindhurdurg. He assured Rane that his party would dump or ditch the latter under any circumstances, but would treat him with full dignity.

Tamil Nadu CM inaugurates Naruvi hospitals in Vellore



VELLORE: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami inaugurated 'Naruvi Hospitals', a state-of-the-art multi-specialty hospital of global standards in Vellore on Friday evening, raising the fort city's people-centric healthcare to a new level in the State.

Palaniswami unveiled the plaque of the new Rs.600 crore hospital in the heart of Vellore through video-conferencing from the Secretariat in Chennai, in the presence of the State Health Minister Dr. C. Vijayabaskar, Commercial Taxes Minister K.C. Veeramani, MGR University Chancellor and former MP, Dr. A.C. Shanmugam, and Chairman of 'Naruvi Hospitals', Dr. G.V. Sampath.

The 500-bed Hospital is a first of its kind in "innovative partnership", with technical collaboration with 'Henry Ford Health System', a leading healthcare provider in the U.S.

Even as the auspicious inauguration was watched live at the Hospital premises here, to the accompaniment of 'Nagaswaram' music, by its doctors and staffed by Naruvi Hospitals' managerial team, Dr. G. V. Sampath at the Secretariat in Chennai earlier

greeted the Chief Minister with a bouquet.

Welcoming the gathering, Dr GV Sampath had a special word of thanks to Palaniswami, who despite his pressing duties and engagements, took time to launch the project today.

Explaining the reasons for choosing Vellore in Tamil Nadu to house such a top-class medical facility, with 19 Specialties and ten Super-Specialties to start with, Dr Sampath said many boxes were instantly ticked in preferring Tamil Nadu.

They included the State having one of the best infrastructures in the country, good governance and peaceful ambience with law and order well maintained.

Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami's leadership has actualized this eco-system, he added.

Dr Sampath, in his opening remarks, also thanked K.C. Veeramani, for his continuous support and encouragement for this Hospital project from the beginning, besides complementing the Health Minister, Dr. C. Vijayabaskar for making Tamil Nadu the leading state in healthcare in the country.

'Cow factories' way forward for promoting dairy farming: Giriraj

IANS ■ PANAJI

Union Minister for Animal Husbandry, Dairy and Fisheries Giriraj Singh on Sunday said that starting "cow factories" was the way ahead for promoting the dairy industry across India, even as he chided Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for not being able to distinguish between a male and female calf.

Speaking at a meeting of the Bharatiya Janata Party State executive committee members in Panaji, Singh also said that the Central Government was aggressively promoting vaccination for animal and poultry borne diseases like bird flu and foot and mouth disease.

"There is a technology which has come up, with which one can start a cow factory. When I say this people are surprised. Like you have test tube babies in humans... everyone knows it. We will make test tube babies (calves) with embryos in laboratory," Singh said at the state executive committee meeting.

Rooting for 100 per cent artificial insemination to promote the dairy industry, Singh also said that the efficiency and milk generation capacities in cows could be increased with the help of lab technology.

"If there is a cow which yields five litres, we will add embryos (of cows) which generate 20 to 30 litres," Singh said, adding that facilitating sorted sex semen would also provide the dairy industry.

Chiding Rahul Gandhi for being out of touch with rural India, Singh said that he would quit politics if the Gandhiscion was able to distinguish between a male and a female calf.

"He who does not know the difference between a female and male calf. If he can spot the difference in gender between a two-month-old male and female calf from a distance, I will quit politics," Singh said.

Earlier addressing a press conference in Panaji, Singh said that the Central government had identified 39 diseases which are transmitted from animals to humans and was pushing for vaccination to keep them at bay.

"It is being discussed because there are 39 diseases which are transmitted from animals to humans. You must have heard about discussions in the media about bird flu. Maharashtra was also affected by bird flu," he said.

He also said that a free vaccination programme was also being undertaken to prevent the harmful transmission of brucellosis, a cattle disease which can trigger infertility in humans.

ABDUCTION AND MURDER

Deceased Navy man a stock market player, had huge debts: Palghar police

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The investigations into the abduction and murder of the Indian Navy sailor, who was found in a half-burnt in the jungles of Palghar district in Maharashtra, have thrown up a shocking finding that as an avid stock market player, he had piled up debts amounting to Rs 23 lakh.

The Palghar police investigating the case on Sunday came up with the revelation about the deceased Navy sailor Surajkumar Mitilesh Dubey being in huge debts, came to light two days after victim Navy sailor Surajkumar Mitilesh Dubey was found in half-burnt, semi-nude condition in a forested area of Palghar district. Surajkumar succumbed at Sion Hospital in north-central Mumbai, where he had been rushed for treatment.

The Palghar district police have formed 10 teams, comprising ten police personnel each, to investigate all the angles in the case, including the motive behind his murder.

In his dying declaration, Surajkumar - hailing from Daltonganj in Jharkhand - had told the police that he was posted on INS Agrani. He was abducted from Chennai on January 30 and held captive there by three unknown persons, while he was returning to his work station after his vacation.

Upon his arrival from Ranchi to Chennai to join duty on January 30, Surajkumar was accosted at gunpoint outside the Chennai airport and whisked away to an unknown location where he was captive for 3 days.

The abductors allegedly demanded a ransom of Rs. 10 lakh from him. When he refused to pay up the ransom, he was abducted and brought to the jungles of Vevji within the limits of Gholdwad of Talasari in Palghar district, where the abductors allegedly poured petrol on him and set him on fire. The local people alerted the police subsequently.

Talking to media persons on Sunday, Palghar's District Superintendent of Police Dattatray Shinde said: "The deceased had three mobiles -- ones of which one was exclusively for dealing in stocks and shares of which even his family was unaware.

The deceased (Surajkumar) had

taken a personal loan of Rs.8 lakh, a private loan of Rs.5.75 lakhs from a colleague. After his engagement on Jan. 15, 2021, he had taken another loan of Rs.9 lakh from his future in-laws," Shinde said.

The investigators are looking into the mystery behind 13 calls he got from a particular number repeatedly demanding the details of his Raipur-Hyderabad-Chennai flight on January 30 and January. 31."

Shinde said that the deceased had assured his colleague that he would return the loan soon either by cheque or online transactions. "But we still do not know as to why they brought Surajkumar all the way from Chennai to Palghar forests".

According to Shinde, Surajkumar's father Mithilesh Dube contacted the INS Agrani Commander Ashok Rai after his son failed to resume his duty at INS Agrani on January 30, to enquire. "The family did not ransom calls after Surajkumar's disappearance from the Chennai airport," Shinde said.

Shinde said that the deceased had switched off two personal phones on January 31 night with the last location indicating Chennai Airport vicinity. "that was the reason for his family to file a missing complaint with Chainpur Police Station in Jharkhand.

"On February 1, Surajkumar's cousin Chandan Dube learnt of the third number which was active but he did not answer after which the police contacted the two share-trading firms. Surajkumar's father has told us that he had no knowledge of his son's stock-market investments, the huge loans on his head and related aspects, Shinde said.

Shinde said that the real motive behind the murder was not clear yet. "Our team has gone to Chennai to investigate the case. We hope to solve the case as soon as possible," he said.

The investigations have revealed that despite the huge loans he had taken, his two accounts in different branches with State Bank of India showed that he had as low a balance as Rs. 392. "We have learnt that he had transferred rest of the amounts to two share trading firms through which he conducted his deals," Shinde said.

Halal eateries issue threatens religious polarisation in Kerala

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Kerala, plagued by controversies like gold smuggling, hawala transactions and allegations of corruptions is facing a major social issue which has all the potential to emerge as a cause for communal tension, according to social scientists.

The Halal certified business establishments in the State have caused heart burning and anxiety among Hindus and Christians who have started questioning the legality of such practice in a secular society. R V Babu, leader of Hindu Aikya Veda was arrested under non-bailable charges by the Kerala Police on Friday for questioning the practice of Halal certification of commercial establishments.

"I was arrested for asking people to shun establishments spotting Halal certification because in a secular society like ours, there is no space for this kind of discrimination," Babu told *The Pioneer* over his arrest.

K V Rajasekharan, social scientist who is a prolific writer on social issues said the insistence on Halal certification by one community would lead to polarisation. "It is not advisable to allow Halal certification. This is like imposing the practice of one community over others," said Rajasekharan.

Bhargava Ram, of HAV, said Halal is a term used to denote meat of animals which were slaughtered by Muslims reciting Islamic verses. "Persons belonging to Islamic community consume only Halal chicken or meat. Restaurants and eateries serving such food display the Halal certified emblem. Though it was not in vogue in Kerala, of late most Islamic establishments have started spotting Halal emblem," said Bhargava Ram, a spiritual guru.

He also said that devote Muslims are particular about Halal certification. "Though it was confined to eateries, now it has become mandatory for products like coconut oil and talcum powder to spot the Halal emblem to tell the world that the products are not Haraam (impure, according to Arab language)," said Ram.

Kevin Peter, president, Christian Action for Social Action (CASA) an umbrella organisation unifying all Christian sects, said the trade name Halal has created a lot of apprehension among the people. "We had opposed restaurants and eateries spotting the boards 'Only for Brahmmins'. The Halal system is like going back to the days of untouchability and discrimination," said Kevin.

Kerala has seen mushrooming of restaurants and eateries in the post-Covid-19 phase. "Traditional eateries have been shut down but the new ones are all that sell non-vegetarian stuff. This is certain to destroy the food culture and eating habits of the Keralaites," said a leading restaurant owner.

According to Ram, the spreading of Halal certified establishments mark the beginning of Business Jihad or Economic Jihad. "Business and trade sectors would become Islamic domains. Kerala already has Halal residential accommodations," said Ram who said this would further lead to loss of employment by Non-Muslims."The Islamic verses has to be recited only by Muslims and it will become mandatory to employ Islamists for the job.

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority
 Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida, G.B. Nagar (U.P.)
 Website: www.noidaauthorityonline.com

E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tenders are invited from firms/contractors registered with UPLC Lucknow for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on Noida Authority's official website: www.noidaauthorityonline.com & http://etender.up.nic.in Please ensure to see these website for any changes/amendments & corrigendum etc.

A) (1) 54/DGM(JAL)/AO/SM(JAL)/I-20-21 Strengthening of Sewerage (P/L Sewer and Water Line in Sector-112) Noida. Rs. 41.88 Lacs
The above tenders can be uploaded by date 22.02.2021 upto 5.00 PM.
Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date 23.02.2021 at 11:00 AM.

B) (1) 51/DGM(JAL)/AO/SM(JAL)/I-20-21 Strengthening of W/s (Shifting of Water and Sewer line Alignment Elevated Flyover Aghapur to Sector-106) Noida. Rs. 40.28 Lacs
The above tenders can be uploaded by date 15.02.2021 upto 5.00 PM.
Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date 16.02.2021 at 11:00 AM.

Office SENIOR MANAGER (JAL)-I
 Sector-5 NOIDA

CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA

छत्तीसगढ़ शासन, जल संसाधन विभाग
 कार्यालय मुख्य अभियंता
 महानदी गोदावरी कछार, रायपुर (छ.ग.)
 ई-प्रोक्यूरमेंट निविदा सूचना
 eProcurement Portal: <https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in>
 (द्वितीय आमंत्रण)
 शुद्धि पत्र क्रमांक 01

सिस्टम निविदा क्रमांक 71090/निविदा सूचना क्रमांक 10/वलेलि/2020-21, महासमुद्र, दिनांक 29.01.2021

महासमुद्र जिले के विकासखण्ड महासमुद्र की कछारडीह जलाशय के बांयी एवं दांयी तट मुख्य नहर एवं 01 नग लघु नहर (रायतुम माईनर) का रिवाजलिग एवं सी.सी. लाईनिंग कार्य, 05 नग पक्के कार्यों का निर्माण तथा 15 नग पुराने पक्के कार्यों का मरम्मत एवं 31 नग कोलाबा लगाने का कार्य की ऑनलाईन निविदा में प्रमुख अभियंता, जल संसाधन विभाग के पत्र क्रमांक 4261533/निविदा प्रकोष्ठ/2019/3312 (टी.सी.) दिनांक 29.01.2021 के तारतम्य में संशोधन किया गया है जिसे ई-प्रोक्यूरमेंट की वेबसाईट <https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in> पर देखा जा सकता है।

टीप:- निविदा की अन्य शर्तें यथावत रहेंगी।
 विज्ञापन क्रमांक 86764/दिनांक 30.01.2021

कार्यपालन अभियंता
 जल संसाधन संग्राम, महासमुद्र
 R.O.NO:-86918/7 कृते, मुख्य अभियंता, महानदी गोदावरी कछार,
 R.O.Date:-06/02/2021 जल संसाधन विभाग, रायपुर, (छ.ग.)

IN THE HIGH COURT OF DELHI AT NEW DELHI (TESTAMENTARY INTESATE JURISDICTION) CITATION U/s 283, INDIAN SUCCESSION ACT, 1925
 In the matter of TEST CASE No. 03/2021 SH. VIKRAM MEHRA vs PETITIONER VS GOVT. OF NCT OF DELHI & ORS. ...RESPONDENTS

To, All Concerned.
 In the matter of estate of Late Smt. Pushpa Mehra W/o Late Sh. Satya Pal Mehra, R/o B-26, West End Colony, New Delhi - 110 021. Whereas Sh. Vikram Mehra S/o Late Sh. Satya Pal Mehra, R/o B-26, West End Colony, New Delhi - 110 021 has filed a petition under Section 276 of the Indian Succession Act, 1925 for grant of Probate in respect of Will dated 23.05.2011 of Smt. Pushpa Mehra, deceased. And whereas the aforesaid case is fixed for hearing on 18.03.2021 at 11:00 A.M. before Joint Registrar (Judicial) of this Court. This citation is issued, in terms of Section 283 of the said Act to all persons claiming to have any interest in the properties of the said deceased to come to this Court, file objections, if any and take part in the proceedings on the date specified above for the grant of Probate. Given under my hand and the seal of this Court, in terms of the order dated 01st day of February, 2021.

Assistant Registrar for REGISTRAR GENERAL

NOTICE
 ALANKIT LIMITED

Regd. Off: 205-208, Anarkali Complex, Jhandewalan Extension, New Delhi-110055
 CIN: L74900DL1989PLC036860

We wish to inform you that a meeting of the Board of Directors of Alankit Limited is scheduled to be held on Saturday, 13th day of February, 2021 at 4E/2, Jhandewalan Extension, New Delhi-110055 at 02:30 p.m. Interim to consider and take on record the following:

- To consider and adopt unaudited Standalone and consolidated financial results of the company for the 3rd Quarter and 9 months period ended 31st December, 2020.
- To consider the Limited Review Report (under Ind-AS) of the company for the 3rd Quarter and 9 months period ended 31st December, 2020.

Place: New Delhi
Date: 06.02.2021

For Alankit Limited
Khushboo Arora
 Company Secretary



www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

Reconnected

The restoration of 4G internet services in J&K is an opportunity for its people to link up with the Govt

“Gar firdaus bar-rue zamin ast, hami asto, hamin asto, hamin ast (If there is a heaven on earth, it's here, it's here, it's here).” The famous words of Mughal emperor Jehangir come closest to the feeling of euphoria most Kashmiris must be experiencing after the restoration of 4G internet services in the Union Territory. In today's world when internet, through social media, plays a critical role in shaping public perception and helping people across the globe to reach out to one another, snapping the high-speed server for long is neither workable nor sustainable. It would only exacerbate the alienation and create an undercurrent of unrest likely to erupt sooner than later. That said, it cannot be denied that such curbs are vitally important to maintain law and order, especially when volatility in the region and a rogue neighbour are involved. The services were resumed 18 months after being suspended on August 4, 2019, a day before the Centre stripped the erstwhile State of its special status and bifurcated it into the Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) and Ladakh. The Government curtailed the services on grounds of anticipated law and order problems and on the basis of intelligence inputs about possible terrorist infiltrations from across the border. Though the action drew widespread criticism from several countries, human rights organisations and the Opposition parties, the Centre showed no signs of yielding to pressure in a hurry and restarted the services only after their

resumption on a trial basis in two districts — Udhampur (Jammu) and Ganderbal (Kashmir) — achieved the desired outcome. Moreover, the announcement came only after the peaceful conclusion of the grassroots-level *panchayati raj* elections late last year.

The resumption of 4G services is certainly a big leap towards restoring people's confidence in the governance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha. Most of the big-ticket reforms announced by Sinha for the State's people are likely to reap rich dividends only for the BJP. The announcement of the resumption in high-speed internet services was welcomed by National Conference leader and former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah who tweeted: “4G Mubarak! For the first time since Aug 2019, all of J&K will have 4G mobile data. Better late than never.” The return of 4G services will help businesses, students, the administration as well as public and private sectors in gaining the much-needed momentum for the development of the region. However, the Intelligence agencies and the Government would closely scout for any “anti-national” activities on social media that might disturb peace, incite violence and throw the politically sensitive J&K spiralling back into violence and terrorism. The people there no longer want to live in the eerie silence that prevails following the imposition of curfews and restrictions. The Centre must prove its point that the “UT of Jammu & Kashmir has been fully integrated into the mainstream” by doing whatever it takes to maintain calm and tranquillity in the region.

PICTALK



Marine One, with President Joe Biden aboard, lifts off from the South Lawn of the White House on Friday. AP

Booster dose required?

The travel, tourism and aviation sectors might feel a bit hard done by, with few sops in the Budget. But it is still too early to intervene

Around this time last year, your columnist wrote a piece saying that the global aviation sector was about to get hit hard by an emerging pandemic. At the time, nobody — not this columnist or, frankly, any of you — could have predicted that a year later we would be sitting at such a place. Entire industries have been ripped asunder, millions across the world have seen their livelihoods disappear, both blue collar and white, and countless others are trying to just survive by the day. Few industries, however, have been as badly impacted as the travel, tourism and allied sectors, particularly aviation.

Decimation in its essence is too mild a term to describe what has happened to these industries; after all the term was born during the Roman Republic when commanders executed a tenth of a legion for cowardice. The industry, in retrospect, would have been happy to have fallen by just a tenth. India's largest airline operator, Interglobe Aviation that owns and operates IndiGo, recently announced its third quarter results where it said they had lost a stunning ₹7 crore per day. And they are India's best-run airline in business. Hotels are barely surviving. While some large chains have managed to ride out the storm, many smaller properties across the country have shut shop. With no social security, thousands of employees find themselves in a financially precarious position.

But those in the formal sector might have had some sort of saving. At many major tourist destinations across the country, it is actually the guy way down in the tourism value chain who has been hit the hardest. Think of the masseurs in Kerala's ayurvedic spas? Think of the tourist guides at any World Heritage Site and think of the poor people who sold everything from cheap trinkets to fancy shawls; also, the artisans behind the scenes. The collapse of the international travel business has hit hundreds of thousands of Indians, not just at the beach



resorts of Kerala or the palaces in Rajasthan but also major pilgrimage sites such as Bodhi Gaya and Sarnath.

There is a school of thought that argues that domestic tourism will pick up some of the slack. And indeed the rush of tourists to places like Goa is heartening even though — with COVID-19 protocols being blithely ignored and the potential of another wave of infections still looming — some of the pictures and videos emerging from Goa are concerning, to say the least. That said, the influx of tourists into Goa has helped many thousands keep their jobs and, as yet, another outbreak has largely been prevented although there are some stories emerging of people who travelled to Goa and contracted the virus.

But, just casual observation makes it obvious that there is no raging pandemic in India. Airports are crowded and most flights are packed; while the railway services are still limited, some amount of travel has returned and, to use the words of Deep Kalra, Chief Executive Officer of India's largest online travel agency, *MakeMyTrip.com*, there has been a return of “revenge travel” where families sick and tired of being cooped up inside



A SCHOOL OF THOUGHT ARGUES THAT DOMESTIC TOURISM WILL PICK UP SOME OF THE SLACK. INDEED, THE RUSH OF TOURISTS TO PLACES LIKE GOA IS HEARTENING EVEN THOUGH SOME OF THE PICTURES AND VIDEOS EMERGING FROM THERE ARE CONCERNING, TO SAY THE LEAST

all year are flying and driving around India.

But, to be honest, that is just a small slice, the highest end of the consuming class in India, which is just a minuscule proportion of our population. While many of these tourists earlier spent their rupees abroad — they are the class of people who have had destination weddings or were the chief executives of companies that did expensive off-sites — with the wedding and conference business being hit, although there are some green shoots now, the fact is that “revenge travel” while helping the industry is not quite enough. This is evident in MakeMyTrip's results for the last quarter (October-December) of 2020: Air ticketing was down 62 per cent, hotel bookings 66 per cent and bus bookings 43 per cent.

The industry is looking for help but that begs the question, what can the Government do? Sure, some sops on taxation and depreciation for hotels and airlines could be given. Taxation benefits on aircraft lease, as announced in the Budget, would help bring down rentals but with the global airline industry in the doldrums as well, with the sole exception of the country that started this



KUSHAN MITRA

mess — China, lease costs have come down anyway. So, that loops back to the original question, what can the Government do? The Government cannot buy up stocks of the stone inlay workers who used to sell to foreign tourists at the Taj Mahal. It can't provide work to the thousands of guides at India's several World Heritage Sites, or even much of a dole for that matter, nor can it help the people who used to arrange high-end luxury trips and who had invested their savings in the business.

What it can do, and this was proved by the Budget, is that it can encourage inbound tourism. It can promote India in a way that other countries cannot. India has some of the best heritage and natural beauty. It can reduce taxes on aviation fuel to spur flying and local tourism as well. It can cut consumption taxes in hotels and India should join the list of nations that offer tax refunds to foreign shoppers. But, for that to happen, we will still have to wait until this accursed pandemic is past us and, for that to happen, we should all line up and wait for our turn to get the jab.

(The author is Managing Editor, *The Pioneer*. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NOTHING SPECIAL FOR RAILWAYS

Sir— Though the Indian Railways is known to refurbish its services at frequent intervals, its failure to keep the cost-effective factor in mind is its bane. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has given a huge outlay—1.10 lakh crore— to the Railways. The question is, will the lofty plans of the Government take off and reach their logical conclusion? As expected, the Minister has gone gaga on infrastructural development towards safety and comfort of travellers. There is nothing special in Sitharaman's declaration that the Railways will go all the way in developing more aesthetic Vistadome Linke Hofmann Busch (LHB) coaches because a lot many mainline trains already possess these coaches.

The LHB coaches are already in use in India since 2000. The automatic train protection system, an anti-collision mechanism, is long overdue. But when will it be put to use is a pertinent question. The National Rail Plan for 2030 means nothing unless properly planned. The dedicated freight corridors cannot wait more. A 100 per cent track electrification by 2023 is good news. Expansion of gauge conversion and enhanced signalling systems, greatly emphasised by the Minister, should be hastened. More private sector involvement, via public-private partnership (PPP), in upgrading railway stations and running of trains on specific routes should be ensured.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

GOOD MOVE TO RESTORE 4G INTERNET

Sir — Restoration of 4G internet services in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir after 18 months is a laudable step by the Government. It symbolises that normalcy is returning to the region. After the abrogation of Article 370, the special status of the erstwhile State was taken away and it was bifurcated into two Union Territories—Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. It is good on the part of the Government to restrict the internet in J&K as the separatists and terrorist organisations

We must support real farmers



We don't need to bother about the likes of Rihanna, Greta Thunberg, Mia Khalifa and Meena Harris who want to maintain their status as celebrities by interfering in India's internal affairs. Their interference is unwarranted and uncalled for. They don't have any idea about the Indian ethos and values and come from a very different background. Mia Khalifa is an adult movie star. They don't care a bit about our farm-

ers and are giving unsolicited advice. Even the farmers who are protesting have no interest in what these celebrities are saying and are largely indifferent. However, the statements by these celebrities and movie stars seem to be orchestrated and appear to be a part of international conspiracy by divisive forces that are hell-bent on creating unrest in India.

On the other hand, some farmers who are part of a strong middlemen lobby that governs the agricultural *mandis* in Punjab and are pro-Khalistani, are happy about what is happening. For such people, vested interest comes first and national interest is nowhere in their priority. Our Government cares for the real farmers and not about these middlemen who survive on commission and interest money. Let us support the Government which wants to improve the lives of farmers. The entire Opposition and many organisations are opposing the farm laws simply for the sake of vote bank politics.

J Kannan | Hyderabad

supported by Pakistan were looking for opportunities to create unrest in the region.

The internet services were partially restored last year, but only 2G internet services were available for mobile users. But now as the situation in the Union Territory is getting better, removing the restrictions on 4G internet is a very good decision to ensure that the life of normal people gets back on track at a faster pace. It will promote business in the UT and many local businesses will be able to increase their sales by online means. It is also good news for students and professionals who till now were not able to get the benefit of internet for academic and professional purposes.

Krishnansh somani | Ujjain

FRAME A COMPREHENSIVE TRAFFIC POLICY

Sir — Cities across the globe are witnessing traffic congestion owing to the growing number of private vehicles jostling for space on roads. Lack of adequate public

transport infrastructure is now emboldening people to switch to private modes of transport, leading to congestion on roads. Pedestrians and cyclists are left with no choice with such encroachment of road space by other vehicles. Public transport options like buses and Metros are also not utilised to the fullest extent owing to inadequate planning and lack of foresight.

The urban policymakers should emphasise that the organisations employing workforce that uses private transport should switch to flexible working options and thus reduce congestion on roads. As most of the workforce has computer-related jobs, a unified policy should be framed to allow flexible working opportunities apart from encouraging work from home in busy cities and big metropolitans.

Varun Dambal | Bangalore

SOUND BITE

To make our judicial system future-ready, the use of AI is being explored. It will not only improve the efficiency of the judiciary but will also speed up the entire system.



Prime Minister — Narendra Modi



Germany's attitude towards the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project is, for the present, “unaffected” by Russia's treatment of its Opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

German Chancellor — Angela Merkel



I went to Marilyn Manson's house when I was a teenager with some friends. I was a big fan. He referred to a room in his house as the “r’pe room”. I stopped being a fan.

Singer — Phoebe Bridgers



Joe Root makes us all feel pretty rubbish, how he makes batting look. I was quite surprised when he ran down the wicket and smashed a six for the double.

Cricketer — Ben Stokes



When the vaccines are going to come? That's why there's a lot of anxiety and there's a lot of noise going on right now. I want to reassure: we are on track.

Canadian Prime Minister — Justin Trudeau

Quarantines again

With several countries reimposing strict quarantine rules, global travel is lurching towards another crisis

Canada and the United Kingdom (UK) are among the countries that are bringing in compulsory quarantine rules from the middle of the month. This means that visitors from most countries will have to quarantine themselves at their own cost. And those found breaking the rules will have to pay massive fines, which should act as a deterrent. The United States has also imposed a condition that all incoming visitors will be required to have a negative RT-PCR test result before they arrive, but individual States have wildly different rules. All this is despite nations like the UK rolling out one of the most comprehensive vaccination systems, and are on track to have their entire populations vaccinated by summer. On the face of it, the new quarantine and testing rules might seem like overkill and only meant for the Governments and the pharmaceutical industry to get a feel of the virus.

However, some particularly virulent new strains emerging from Brazil and South Africa, where existing vaccines appear to be less effective, are worrying administrators, doctors and scientists across the world. Travel to and from these countries has been severely curtailed by many nations and pharmaceutical majors have been working to adapt their vaccines to these new strains. In many parts of the West, the virus is wreaking havoc with both the number of infected and the number of deaths still climbing, although

in countries like India it appears that the Government has got the hang of the virus, much to the consternation of many western journalists. In many non-metropolitan parts of India, life as usual seems to have resumed with mask compliance levels dropping and social distancing becoming a thing of the past. Even the Government has now allowed movie halls to be opened at full capacity, which is nothing short of an acceptance that things are back to somewhat normal. However, nations, including India, would do well to remain cautious. The tale of the virus in the Amazonian city of Manaus is a cautionary one. In that northern Brazilian city, too, authorities were convinced that they had the virus in check and that, thanks to a high microbial load, the city had achieved herd immunity. Today, Manaus does not have enough hospital beds or even oxygen to cope. The worst is still not past us, although we are in a much better state than we were a few months ago. India, like other nations, should continue to quarantine foreign arrivals and should not speed up opening the economy too fast, lest we regret it in the future.

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

A BOLD BUDGET BUT BALANCE NEEDED

Chanakya's principles of collecting taxes like a honeybee should have been followed by the FM



SHSHANK SAURAV

Budgetary allocations in Finance Minister (FM) Nirmala Sitharaman's third Union Budget are directed towards reviving growth as the Centre preferred growth over fiscal prudence. Capital expenditure (Capex) has been increased by 34 per cent to ₹5.54-lakh crore which will give the much-needed push to infrastructure. Expenditure on healthcare that was hiked from ₹94,452 crore to ₹2,23,846 crore should be used towards building the health infrastructure. Though estimated non-tax revenue is lower as compared to last year but the sanctity of the fiscal deficit target will be largely dependent on realisation of disinvestment proceeds. Our PSUs are like the family silver but it doesn't make sense to sell profitable PSUs while keeping loss-making ones running with public money. This kind of privatisation is "unjust enrichment in disguise" where corporates will benefit at the cost of public money. Institutions like the LIC have been created over decades and selling stakes in the name of reform is unwise. Nevertheless, valuation of PSUs is always a contentious issue despite increased transparency in the price discovery mechanism.

The Centre had a tough year and there was no option but to resort to market borrowings. The *Economic Survey* argued that as long as our nominal growth rate is higher than the cost of borrowings, policy-makers should not be worried about debt. This theory is good only in those circumstances where debt is being utilised for asset creation which remains invested and generates consistent surplus. In our case, this is not so because market borrowings are targeted at ₹12.05-lakh crore while Capex is planned for ₹5.54-lakh crore. If we add targeted disinvestment proceeds then overall asset creation will fall short of liabilities assumed by the Government. If we add interest payment of ₹8.4-lakh crore and Capex creation, then apparently it looks like borrowings are used to meet the interest obligation which of course is a legacy issue for this Government.



A higher fiscal deficit for the current Budget is a fact but obsession with debt is bad. Mature economies are formal and thereby their ability to quickly raise resources is better as compared to India and therefore we should not be comparing our debt-GDP ratio with the West. Higher borrowing is going to increase bond yield also which will raise the cost of borrowings for the Centre and India Inc. Higher debt-GDP ratio is not going to improve our ratings. Sovereign ratings are not just a linear factor of willingness and ability to pay because that is determined by variables with varying weightage. There are not too many tax proposals this year and some of the amendments are in the interest of taxpayers. Reducing the time limit to three years for opening income escaping assessments, setting up a dispute resolution mechanism and faceless appeal with the Income-Tax Appellate Tribunal are welcome steps. However, a monetary limit of ₹10 lakh for eligibility under the dispute resolution mechanism should be enhanced because provisions related to the settlement commission are proposed to be omitted now. The obsession with taxing Provident Fund should also end because this is the only safe investment for salaried people. Increasing the monetary threshold for an I-T audit and doing away with certification of annual returns under the Goods and Services Tax could be counterproductive towards tax compliance and should be reconsidered. The success of initiatives towards transparent taxation and dispute resolution is dependent on proper execution else these will go the 'Vivad se Vishwas' scheme way, where assesses are still awaiting response from tax officials.

Overall, the budgetary allocation is good in view of the pandemic-hit economy which has just started picking up and the fiscal constraints which the Government is facing. Perhaps this is the best budgetary allocation which we have seen in the recent past. GST collection, PMI data and credit growth are indicating that the economy is back on track. However, the Government should have considered giving some relief to the middle class and Chanakya's principles of collecting taxes like a honeybee should have been followed.

(The writer is a chartered accountant and public policy analyst. The views expressed are personal.)

Time to end India's skill famine

The sad part is that only 10 per cent of the total workforce in the country receives some kind of skill training



MOIN QAZI

The amount of change the world economy has witnessed in the last two decades and the rate at which it has occurred is staggering. It is inevitable that everyone will have to deal with a significant degree of professional change. This shift could be seismic, to the extent that the very nature of a trade or profession is transformed forever. Skill development holds the key to India's ability to tap the vast potential of its youth for achieving inclusive growth and for evolving as the hub of the global financial system. However, much thought needs to be invested for designing the right training methodologies. It should focus on learning by doing rather than rote classroom learning.

A range of entrepreneurs in the fields of construction, textiles, leather, gems and jewellery and so on will have to be engaged and candidates will have to work as apprentices. Our skill programme is churning out unemployable skills and not employable skills, for which there is a huge shortage. The private sector has no incentive to impart skills to its workers. On the other hand, in countries like Germany, the system of apprenticeship makes it mandatory for the private sector to impart skills to the workers.

India's education system leans heavily on theoretical learning while practical training aspects involving "working with hands" and "learning by doing" take a backseat. Bookish knowledge is rarely supplemented with industrial training in the country. We have inadequate infrastructure for imparting industrial skills to the students who are dropouts of the educational system, particularly in rural India or those who cannot continue their studies due to financial constraints. This is one of the main reasons for India's demand-supply mismatch where the industry lacks a skilled talent pool and youngsters cannot find jobs.

The skill gap analysis reveals that by 2022, the 24 key sectors of the economy will generate a demand for 109 million skilled workers. In sales and in unorganised sectors such as the leather industry, textiles, fabrication, servicing of automobiles and so on, automation can never completely replace the human workforce. Clearly, what is needed is a skill-based ecosystem that includes the right blend of infrastructure, faculty and industry participation so as to ensure sustainability and long-term income generation.

Numerous challenges are required to be addressed for skill development in India. The huge number of informally trained workers, who form a part of the workforce, have still no formal training opportunities. Their skill training is generally through individual learning and observations, or by transfer of skills from a master craftsman to an apprentice. These craftsmen can set up small cottage units but cannot be absorbed in factories where basic technical skills are an essential prerequisite.

With the influx of cheap, machine-made products, traditional handicrafts are being driven out from market competition even though the handcrafted products are aesthetically superior. Traditional craftsmanship is losing value and the market offers poor compensation to the artisans for their skills and artistry. The gap between skill training and employment has widened, leading to a situation where youth are unable to find the employment that they are aspiring for and employers are unable to find workers who are appropriately trained for the job.

New rules, new openness, and new connectivity require different sets of skills just to keep



INDIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM LEANS HEAVILY ON THEORETICAL LEARNING WHILE PRACTICAL TRAINING ASPECTS INVOLVING 'WORKING WITH HANDS' AND 'LEARNING BY DOING' TAKES A BACKSEAT. BOOKISH KNOWLEDGE IS RARELY SUPPLEMENTED WITH INDUSTRIAL TRAINING

The writer is a well-known development professional of international repute. The views expressed are personal.



up, let alone thrive. Technical skills such as coding can be taught and assessed more easily while soft skills take time to develop and are more complex in nature, the latter are more beneficial in the long-term. When taught well, soft skills enable students to understand people and the world around them better, adapt to changes more easily, have a thorough understanding of social dynamics and ultimately progress further in their chosen careers.

Technical skills are arguably more practical and easily quantifiable and are considered important for securing a job. The importance of imparting skill training to the youth is well-recognised and has been flagged as a national priority for almost a decade, with significant initiatives being launched by the Government.

The sad part is that only 10 per cent of the total workforce in the country receives some kind of skill training. The feedback from corporate India and research institutes shows a grim reality that about 65-75 per cent of the 15 million Indian youth who enter the workforce each year are not job-ready or suitably employable. There is a huge gap between what is being taught to students and what they need to pursue as a successful career. To narrow this gap, we need to create a curriculum that focuses on imparting the skills that are relevant to the times. Thus, teaching and curriculum design needs to be given a greater priority.

Technology is advancing faster than we can adapt, upending the job market and delivering unimaginable shocks to both our values and pattern of thinking. Most children entering school today will do

jobs that don't exist yet. Many of these children who are still being educated in the old system will find the new norms, institutions and patterns of working alien to their ways.

Technology empowers but will render millions of jobs obsolete, as smart machines take over repetitive tasks. Many of the schools and universities are structured on the old, hierarchical elitism of colonial times and consider students as empty vessels that simply need to be filled with bookish knowledge. As a consequence, such educational institutions are disempowering students through their outdated teaching methods.

The need of the hour is not only giving adequate skills but also developing it in such a manner that it fosters inclusive growth. We should focus on the "one lifecycle" approach which encompasses all aspects related to skill training, including employability. Adopting this approach will ensure that the kind of skills imparted to trainees are marketable and linked with jobs.

It is also important to ensure that specific skills are not scaled across multiple areas in the same region as this saturates the market with limited opportunities for those who are trained. If everyone is trained in becoming a blacksmith, there will be too many blacksmiths and not enough jobs. Imparting locally-relevant skill sets like repairing bicycles, two-wheelers, solar lamps or mobiles, running a poultry unit, and the like, make families self-sustaining.

To this end, Governments should boost investment in lifelong learning to retrain, re-tool and re-skill. For example, Governments could provide training grants

throughout the life of a worker. Governments should also reinforce the supply of skills by strengthening incentives for educational institutions to harness the power of digital technology and new business models.

While we continue our efforts to provide training in more advanced skills, it is also necessary to strengthen the ecosystems for basic subsistence skills in smaller communities. We can design new-generation skills for para-veterinarians, health workers, solar engineers, water drillers and testers, hand pump mechanics, artisans, designers, masons, accountants, technicians and computer programmers who support their fellow villagers in building and sustaining collective livelihood projects and increasing their economic and social resilience.

There is an important role for organisations supporting small producers to hone their skills, understand the marketplace dynamic and to adapt their products for urban markets. They can encourage and promote environment-friendly products and processes, help in branding, packaging solution and also support primary producers in transitioning their subsistence livelihoods to reach sustainable levels.

We require a more coordinated approach from various stakeholders if we want to enlarge the network of training programmes and ensure that training is closely aligned with specific demands of the industry. It requires intervention at four levels: Quality trainers, market-aligned curriculum, assessment of learning outcomes and effective matchmaking between the youth and jobs.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

REDDY SHOULD BE CONFINED TO HIS RESIDENCE TILL THE COMPLETION OF ELECTIONS TO THE GRAM PANCHAYATS ON FEBRUARY 21.
—ANDHRA STATE ELECTION COMMISSIONER
NIMMAGADDA RAMESH KUMAR



IT IS EVIDENT THAT THE SEC IS ACTING UNDER THE DIRECTIONS OF TELUGU DESAM PARTY PRESIDENT CHANDRABABU NAIDU.
—ANDHRA PRADESH PANCHAYATI RAJ MINISTER
PEDDIREDDY RAMACHANDRA REDDY

Reforms in the UN must for the good of mankind

After remodelling, there has to be a paradigm shift in giving the UN a new mandate on the way to turning it into a democratic world government

Events and developments of the last few years have made the world fractured and disunited. This has accentuated threats to security in some countries and regions. In the normal course, civilisations have risen and fallen with few surviving exceptions like India and China. But now in the age of climate change and nuclear (N) weapons, mankind is faced with myriad challenges which threaten its existence. The immediate threat the world has been facing is that of the pandemic. The United Nations (UN) was supposed to play an important role in mitigating this but there has been hardly any joint effort or effective response by it to fight the pandemic. The world has already been facing some abhorrent chal-



JL KOUL JALALI

The writer is a journalist, former IIS officer and producer. The views expressed are personal.

lenges for decades now which include the pernicious effects of climate change, accidental or intended holocausts that could be caused by enormous stockpiles of N-weapons and geopolitical struggles now mostly in the context of terrorism or aggressive and wrongful assertion of power by China.

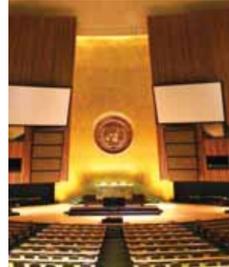
Regarding climate change, it is a happy augury that the Joe Biden Government in the US has decided to undo the action of the previous regime and return to the Paris Agreement. But N-weapons in the absence of any worldwide disarmament agreement now pose a far more devastating threat to mankind.

Regarding the danger posed by terror, the US has announced that it will determine whether the Taliban has

reduced attacks in Afghanistan in keeping with peace deals by it with the previous US Administration. However, there is no surety that the peace deals will work.

The danger posed by China emanates from the manner in which it wants to assert itself aggressively without any regard for international laws. This has already endangered security in the Indo-Pacific region. Immediate to India, the impasse between Indian and Chinese troops on the Line of Actual Control has strained ties between the two powers.

All these and other dangers facing mankind, again focus attention on the mandate of the UN to maintain global peace after its establishment in 1945 at the end of World War-II. The



UN has helped the world in many ways, but its efforts have not been adequate to prevent wars, terror attacks and bloodshed. Its structure and lack of reforms has been the main cause responsible for this.

Addressing a virtual high-level meeting of the UN General Assembly (UNGA)

last September, Prime Minister Narendra Modi pointed out that the UN has been facing a crisis of confidence and reiterated India's call for its reform to reflect present realities. He asked, how long would India, the world's largest democracy with more than 18 per cent of the global population, be kept out of the UN's decision-making structure? Citing historical and contemporary reasons for a bigger role for India, Modi pointed out its growing economic and strategic clout, its role in peace keeping missions, its philosophy of working for the interests of mankind, its history as a non-colonising nation, its green initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance, its actions for security and development in regions like the

Indo-Pacific and its role in helping other countries during the current pandemic. Also its partnerships are not directed against someone else and its development programmes are not bound by any malafide intent.

Obviously, permanent membership for India at the UNSC is an important element of reform of the world body. Consequently, during its current two-year non-permanent membership of the UNSC, reformation of the world body should be the first priority of India's diplomatic efforts. After the world body is completely reformed, there has to be a paradigm shift in giving it a new shape on the way to ultimately turning it into a democratic world government.

Among other issues, the first step should be to turn the "larger mandate of the reformed world body to prevent wars and security threats" to "Authority to prevent wars and security threats." But for this nation States as members of the reformed world body would have to share shades of their sovereignty with the new world body. This is a necessity and may no longer be an utopia given the fact that the first-ever treaty on the prohibition of N-weapons has come into force. The result of a sustained campaign for decades, the treaty is not supported by all countries but it is a step forward. A long, sustained campaign could also turn the utopia of a world democratic government into a possibility.

Internet access restored as Myanmar coup protests grow

AP ■ YANGON

As enthusiastic crowds of tens of thousands marched through the streets of Myanmar's biggest city on Sunday to protest last week's coup, their spirits were lifted by the return of internet services that had been blocked a day earlier.

Separate protests that began in various parts of Yangon converged at Sule Pagoda, situated in the center of a roundabout in the city's downtown area. Protesters chanted "Long live Mother Suu" and "Down with military dictatorship."

Authorities had cut access to the internet as the protests grew.

Saturday, fanning fears of a complete information blackout. On Sunday afternoon, however, internet users in Yangon reported that data access on their mobile phones had suddenly been restored.

The demonstrators are seeking to roll back last Monday's seizure of power by the military and demanding the release from detention of the country's ousted leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, and other top figures from her National League for Democracy party.

The military has accused

Suu Kyi and her party of failing to act on its complaints that last November's election was marred by fraud, though the election commission said it had found no evidence to support the claims.

The growing protests are a sharp reminder of the long and bloody struggle for democracy in a country that the military ruled directly for more than five decades before loosening of its grip in 2012.

Suu Kyi's government, which won a landslide election in 2015, was the first led by civilians in decades, though it faced a number of curbs to its power under a military-drafted constitution.

During Myanmar's years of isolation under military rule, the golden-domed Sule Pagoda served as a rallying point for political protests calling for democracy, most notably in during a massive 1988 uprising and again during a 2007 revolt led by Buddhist monks.

The military used to deadly force to end both of those uprisings, with estimates of hundreds if not thousands killed in 1988. While riot police have been sent to watch the protests this past week, soldiers have been absent and there have been no reports of clashes.

Showing little fear, protest crowds have grown bigger and bolder since Monday's coup, while remaining nonviolent in support of a call by Suu Kyi's party and its allies for civil disobedience.

In one of Sunday's gatherings, at least 2,000 labor union and student activists and members of the public gathered at a major intersection near Yangon University. They marched along a main road, snarling traffic. Drivers honked their horns in support.

Police in riot gear blocked the main entrance to the university. Two water cannon trucks were parked nearby.

The protesters held placards calling for freedom for Suu Kyi and President Win Myint, who were put under house arrest and charged with minor offenses, seen by many as providing a legal veneer for their detention.

Reports on social media and by some Myanmar news services said demonstrations were taking place in other parts of the country as well, with a particularly large crowd in the central city of Mandalay.

Saturday had seen the size of street protests grow from the hundreds to the thousands, but it also saw the authorities cut most access

Prachanda's supporters rally against Nepal PM Oli's decision to dissolve Parliament

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Hundreds of students belonging to the Nepal Communist Party's rival faction led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' on Sunday held a rally here against Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli's decision to dissolve Parliament, as the rivalry between the two top leaders escalated.

The rally by Prachanda's supporters came two days after pro-government students chanting slogans like "We love KP Oli," "Oli is our hero," "Oli for the prime minister" staged a massive show of strength in Kathmandu in favour of Oli.

Supporters of Prachanda on Sunday shouted slogans like "We hate you K P Oli" and "We hate KP Oli for taking the country towards the path of regression by dissolving the House of Representatives."

The ruling NCP has split over Oli's call for a new Parliament to be elected more than a year ahead of schedule.

Both Oli and the rival group claim to control the Nepal Communist Party and the issue is being disputed at the Election Commission. The rival faction even announced that it had ousted Oli from the party at a meeting last month.

The ruling NCP has been witnessing months-long tussle between two factions, one led

Defending his move to dissolve Parliament, Oli said some leaders tried to obstruct the functioning of his Govt and he had no other alternative other than seeking a fresh mandate

by 68-year-old Oli and Party's chairman and another led by 66-year-old "Prachanda", also the executive chair of the party and former premier.

Defending his move to dissolve Parliament, Oli said some leaders tried to obstruct the functioning of his government and he had no other alternative other than seeking a fresh mandate.

The ruling NCP has split over Oli's call for a new Parliament to be elected more than a year ahead of schedule.

Both Oli and the rival group claim to control the Nepal Communist Party and the issue is being disputed at the Election Commission. The rival faction even announced that it had ousted Oli from the party at a meeting last month.

Big challenge: Biden is pressed to end federal death penalty

AP ■ CHICAGO

Joe Biden, the first sitting US president to openly oppose the death penalty, has discussed the possibility of instructing the Department of Justice to stop scheduling new executions, officials have told The Associated Press.

If he does, that would end an extraordinary run of executions by the federal government, all during a pandemic that raged inside prison walls and infected journalists, federal employees and even those put to death.

The officials had knowledge of the private discussions with Biden but were not authorized to speak publicly about them.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki, when asked Friday about Biden's plans on the death penalty, said she had nothing to preview on the issue.

Action to stop scheduling new executions could take immediate pressure off Biden from opponents of the death penalty.

But they want him to go much further, from bulldozing the federal death chamber in Terre Haute, Indiana, to striking the death penalty from U.S. Statutes entirely.

A look at the steps Biden

could take and the challenges he would face:

Q: WHY THE PUSH FOR ACTION NOW?

A: While the coronavirus pandemic and election coverage dominated the news last year, many Americans who paid close attention to the resumption of federal executions under President Donald Trump were dismayed by their scale and the apparent haste to carry them out.

The executions, beginning July 14 and ending four days before Biden's inauguration on Jan. 20, were the first federal executions in 17 years. More were held in the last six months under Trump than in the previous 56 years combined.

Executions went ahead for inmates whose lawyers claimed were too mentally ill or intellectually disabled to fully grasp why they were being put to death.

Lawyers for Lisa Montgomery, convicted of killing a pregnant Missouri woman and cutting out her baby, said her mental illness was partly triggered by years of horrific sexual abuse as a child. On Jan. 13, she became the first woman executed federally in

nearly 70 years.

Q: WOULD A DECISION TO STOP SCHEDULING EXECUTIONS END THE PRACTICE?

A: Biden can guarantee no federal executions during his presidency by simply telling the Justice Department never to schedule any. But that would not prevent a future president who supports capital punishment from restarting them.

Barack Obama, for whom Biden served as vice president, did place an informal moratorium on carrying federal executions out when he was president, ordering a review of execution methods in 2014 after a botched state execution in Oklahoma.

But Obama never took any steps toward ending federal executions for good. That left the door open for Trump to resume them. Death penalty critics want Biden to slam shut that door.

Q: WHAT ARE BIDEN'S RANGE OF OPTIONS?

A: The surest way to prevent a future president from again restarting executions is to sign a bill abolishing the federal death penalty. That would require Congress to pass such a bill.

UK records another 18,262 Covid cases; 828 deaths

IANS ■ LONDON

Another 18,262 people in Britain have tested positive for Covid-19, bringing the total number of coronavirus cases in the country to 3,929,835, according to official figures released on Saturday.

The country also reported another 828 coronavirus-related deaths. The total number of coronavirus-related deaths in Britain now stands at 112,092. These figures only include the deaths of people who died within 28 days of their first positive test, Xinhua news agency reported.

Earlier on Saturday, Clive Dix, chairman of Britain's vaccines taskforce, said he is "very optimistic" that Britain can meet the target of vaccinating all over-50s by May.

Britain would be "ahead of

the game" in terms of anticipating variants of coronavirus and was making "libraries of future vaccines", he told the BBC. Downing Street has confirmed that all British adults aged 50 and older are expected to be offered a first dose of the coronavirus vaccine by early May. More than 11 million people in Britain have been given the first jab of the coronavirus vaccine, according to the latest official figures. Meanwhile, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said that it is still too early to talk about ending coronavirus restrictions as the infection levels are still "very high".

It was "still early days" and people should continue to stay at home and follow the lockdown rules, Johnson said in a video posted on Twitter on Friday night.

Global Covid-19 cases top 105.7mn: Johns Hopkins

IANS ■ WASHINGTON

The total number of global coronavirus cases has topped 105.7 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 2.30 million, according to the Johns Hopkins University.

In its latest update on Sunday morning, the University's Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) revealed that the current global caseload and death toll stood at 105,724,227 and 2,307,219, respectively.

The US is the worst-hit country with the world's highest number of cases and deaths at 26,908,962 and 461,910, respectively, according to the CSSE.

India comes in second place in terms of cases at 10,814,304.

The other countries with more than a million confirmed

coronavirus cases are Brazil (9,447,165), the UK (3,941,273), Russia (3,907,653), France (3,376,266), Spain (2,941,990), Italy (2,625,098), Turkey (2,524,786), Germany (2,285,003), Colombia (2,151,207), Argentina (1,976,689), Mexico (1,912,871), Poland (1,545,530), South Africa (1,473,700), Iran (1,459,370), Ukraine (1,285,059), Peru (1,173,045), Indonesia (1,147,010), Czech Republic (1,030,112) and the Netherlands (1,015,757), the CSSE figures showed.

Brazil currently accounts for the second highest number of Covid-19 fatalities at 230,034, followed by Mexico (164,290) on the third place and India (154,918) on the fourth. Meanwhile, the nations with a death toll above 20,000 are the UK (112,305).

Nationwide Covid-19 vaccination begins in Bangladesh

IANS ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh's Covid-19 vaccination programme began on Sunday across the country with a target to inoculate 3.5 million people in the first phase.

Bangladesh had received the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine from the Serum Institute of India (SII) under grants assistance on January 21. Health Minister Zahid Maleque has received his first shot of the coronavirus vaccine after the inauguration of the vaccination drive through video conferencing from the health directorate of Bangladesh. Maleque was administered the jab at a Sheikh Russel Gastroenterology Institute and Hospital in the capital's Mohakhali area around 11.30 a.m.

Deputy Minister Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury Nowfel became the first person in the Chittagong Division to be vaccinated after the inauguration of the inoculation campaign at the Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH).

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzaque, Science and Technology Minister Yeafesh Osman and Public Administration Minister Farhad Hossain have also received their shots.

Hospital sources said some 162 people, including ministers, lawmakers and physicians, will be vaccinated in five booths at the hospital. CMCH Director Brigadier General S M Humayun Kabir, Chattogram City Corporation chief medical officer Doctor Selim Akhter.

Biden ending deals with Central America restricting asylum

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The Biden administration is withdrawing the US from agreements with three Central American countries that restricted the ability of people to seek asylum at the southwest border, part of a broad effort to undo the the immigration policies of President Donald Trump.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Saturday the administration had notified El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras that it had started the formal process of terminating agreements that had been part of Trump's effort to restrict asylum.

The agreements, which had been on hold since early in the coronavirus pandemic, required many people seeking asylum at the US-Mexico border to go instead to one of the three Central American countries and pursue their claims there.

"The Biden administration believes there are more suitable ways to work with our partner governments to manage migration across the region," Blinken said in a statement announcing the immediate suspension of the agreements and their eventual termination.

The secretary of state said the administration intends to work with the Central American nations to reduce some of the insecurity and poverty that cause people to flee in the first place while maintaining the security of the U.S. Border.

"To be clear, these actions do not mean that the U.S. Border is open," he said. "While we are committed to expanding legal pathways for protection and opportunity here and in the region, the United States is a country with borders and laws that must be enforced."

NY Assembly passes Kashmir resolution

India calls out attempts to misrepresent J-K's rich mosaic

PTI ■ NEW YORK

The New York State Assembly has passed a resolution calling on Governor Andrew Cuomo to declare February 5 as Kashmir American Day, drawing a sharp reaction from India which noted with "concern" attempts by "vested interests" to misrepresent Jammu and Kashmir's rich cultural and social mosaic to divide the people.

The resolution, sponsored by Assembly member Nader Sayegh and 12 other lawmakers, states that the "Kashmiri community has overcome adversity, shown perseverance and established themselves as one of the pillars of the New York immigrant communities."

It adds that "the State of New York endeavours to cham-

pion human rights including the freedom of religion, movement and expression for all Kashmiri people, which are embedded within the US Constitution, through the recognition of diverse cultural, ethnic and religious identities."

Commenting on the resolution, a spokesperson of India's Embassy in Washington said: "We have seen the New York Assembly Resolution regarding Kashmir American Day. Like the US, India is a vibrant democracy and the pluralistic ethos of 1.35 billion people are a matter of pride."

"India celebrates its diversity and rich cultural mosaic, including in Jammu and Kashmir, which is an integral and inalienable part of India. We note with concern the attempt by vested interests to

misrepresent the rich cultural and social mosaic of Jammu and Kashmir to divide the people.

"We will engage with the elected representatives in the New York State on all matters concerning India-US partnership and the diverse Indian diaspora," the spokesperson said on Saturday in response to queries on the resolution.

The legislative resolution, adopted in the New York State Assembly on February 3, calls on Cuomo to proclaim February 5, 2021 as Kashmir American Day in the State of New York.

In a tweet, Pakistan's Consulate General in New York acknowledged the role of Sayegh and The American Pakistani Advocacy Group towards the adoption of the resolution.

China rights activist missing after being stopped at airport

AP ■ BEIJING

Authorities have given no word on the status of Chinese legal rights activist Guo Feixiong after he was blocked from leaving the country last week to join his family in the United States, his sister said Tuesday.

Yang Maoping said they had no word from Guo or information from police since he was reportedly detained at Shanghai's Pudong airport Thursday while attempting to board a flight to the US.

Guo had messaged friends that he would go on hunger strike unless allowed to leave the country to be with his wife who is undergoing treatment

for cancer.

"I have been informed that I cannot leave the country because I am under suspicion of endangering state security and other such charges. I will now go on indefinite hunger strike and call on the people of China and governments and people around the world to offer assistance," Guo said in a text sent to friends and passed on to journalists. Guo helped govt critics and had been imprisoned for more than 10 years under China's loosely defined state security laws.

The ruling Communist Party frequently uses travel bans to punish those who challenge it, often as a prelude to prosecution and lengthy prison terms.

Iran's leader: US must lift sanctions before return to deal

AP ■ TEHRAN

Iran's supreme leader says the US must lift all sanctions if it wants Iran to return to the nuclear deal with Western powers, state TV reported Sunday.

The televised comments mark Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's first since the inauguration of President Joe Biden, who has said he wants to rejoin the accord.

"If they want Iran to return to its commitments, the US must lift all sanctions in practice, then we will do verification and see if the sanctions were lifted correctly, then we will return to our commitments," Khamenei said.

Inmates at St Louis jail set fires, break out windows

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Inmates at a St. Louis jail set fires, caused flooding, broke out fourth-floor windows and tossed a stationary bike, chairs and mattresses outside Saturday in the latest disturbance over concerns about the coronavirus pandemic and restrictions that have limited visits and stalled court proceedings, officials said.

Dozens of law enforcement officers worked for hours before bringing the riot at the St. Louis City Justice Center under control shortly before 10 a.m., a spokesman for Mayor Lyda Krewson, Jacob Long, said. About 115 inmates were involved, said Long, who described the group as "extremely violent and non-compliant" in an interview with The Associated Press.

One corrections officer was attacked and treated at a hospital for his injuries before being released, Long said. No detainees were hurt, he said.

Video posted on social media by passersby showed inmates standing near three windows on the fourth floor that had been smashed out. Some carried signs or tossed items, some ablaze, to the sidewalk below. Firefighters used a hose to put out the fires.

Long didn't have a cost estimate for the damage but described it as "fairly extensive."

"There are some burn marks on the front of the building. They destroyed the inside of their floor and threw all sorts of stuff outside. ... They flooded the floors, clogged the toilets, clogged the drains, so there is water damage," Long said.

6.3-magnitude earthquake jolts Philippines

IANS ■ Manila

An earthquake measuring 6.3 on the Richter scale jolted the Davao del Sur province in the Philippines on Sunday, authorities said, adding that damages were expected.

The Philippine Institute of Seismology and Volcanology (Phivolcs) said the quake, which struck at 12.22 p.m. (local time), hit at a depth of 15 m, about 6 km southeast of Magsaysay town, reports Xinhua news agency.

The institute said the quake, which was tectonic in origin, will trigger aftershocks and cause damage.

The tremors was also felt in Kadapawan City, Koronadal City in South Cotabato and other areas in the Mindanao region.

It was not immediately known if there were any casualties or injuries.

The Philippines has frequent seismic activity due to its location along the Pacific "Ring of Fire".

Indian-origin expert uses lockdown to capture world's unconscious bias stories

London: A London-based Indian-origin consultant and broadcaster's new podcast series exploring the subject of unconscious bias with prominent personalities around the world has emerged as one of Spotify's popular offerings, heard across 38 countries.

Smita Tharoor, founder of Tharoor Associates and co-founder of Culturelytics, has covered in-depth conversations with the likes of actor Vidya Balan on society's unconscious bias about marriages to journalists, authors and war zone photographers and politicians like her brother, senior Congress MP Shashi

Tharoor. Now in her third season, Smita Tharoor explains her motivation behind 'Stories of Unconscious Bias' and the urge to highlight life lessons on challenging our deeply held notions.

"In April 2020, at the peak of being locked down in Delhi, I read an interview with Vidya Balan. She was talking about lockdown and the lessons learned and, in the interview, she said she hated cooking because she always felt that cooking was demeaning and not part of being a successful woman," said Tharoor. "I don't know Vidya Balan, have never met her but it got me thinking

about why it is she had felt that way; what was in her upbringing that had influenced her. She had unconsciously believed this and had fought going into the kitchen all her life. Now during lockdown, she realised that she could cook if she wanted and in actual fact, it did not demean her," she recalls.

That led to the critically-acclaimed actor of films such as 'Kahaani' becoming the launch episode of Season 1 of the new podcast series and since then there has been no looking back for Tharoor, with 28 interviews spread across sectors and regions.

PTI

Egypt's president says he supports interim Libya Government

AP ■ CAIRO

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi has given his support to a transitional government that would lead neighbouring Libya through elections late this year.

In rare televised comments late Saturday, el-Sissi said the appointment of the interim government Thursday, which includes a three-member Presidential Council and a prime minister, was "a step in the right direction."

The Libyan Political Dialogue Forum, which includes 75 U.N.-picked dele-

gates from across the country, appointed Mohammad Younes Menfi, a Libyan diplomat from the country's east, as chairman of the Presidential Council. The forum also chose Abdul Hamid Mohammed Dbeibah, a powerful businessman from the western city of Misrata, as prime minister.

The three council members each represent a region of old Libya: Tripolitania in the west, Cyrenaica in the east, and Fezzan in the southwest.

The appointment caps months of UN-brokered talks that resulted in an agreement to hold elections Dec 24.

"We are supportive of them. ... We are ready to cooperate with them for Libya's recovery and to prepare for the elections in Libya," el-Sissi said. The Egyptian leader said his threat last year to send troops to Libya helped "start a genuine period for peace" in the oil-rich country.

"We are keen that each move ... Aims to build peace, prosperity and maintain stability in a region that has been suffered in the past 20 years a very great shock," he said.

Egypt views the instability in neighbouring Libya as a national security threat.

BANK PRIVATISATION PLAN

Govt to work with RBI: Nirmala Sitharaman

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday said the government will work with the Reserve Bank for execution of the bank privatisation plan announced in the budget.

Speaking to reporters in the financial capital, Sitharaman also said that the government has no plan to form any bank investment company to house the government stakes in banks.

In the union budget presented last week, Sitharaman had announced the privatisation of two banks as part of its disinvestment plan. Bank unions have opposed the move.

"The details are being worked out. I have made the announcement but we are working together with the RBI," she said, when asked about the proposal.

She, however, declined to comment on any specific details about which will be the candidate chosen for privatisation.

"We will let you know when the government is ready to announce," she answered when asked about the details.

On the bad bank, Sitharaman said the government may have to give some guarantee for the National Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC), but stressed that this is a solution which has come from the banks itself and will also be led by them.

Sitharaman alleged that the banks' non-performing assets, which are to be transferred into the National ARC, are a legacy of the mismanagement in the past.

There is no "phone banking" happening now, with favours being sought for anyone from New Delhi.

On the Bank Investment Company (BIC), she said no such proposal is on the table and wondered what resulted in the discussion.

"There is no such discussion. I don't know where it is coming from. At least it is not before me. I am not discussing

that," she said.

She said that there is a need for professionalisation of banks and the government is trying to ensure the same.

The minister also said that the banks are gradually getting out of the risk aversion, which had set in during the early days of the pandemic.

When asked about the ambitious divestment targets and the government's ability to push through necessary reforms to earn the projected revenues, Sitharaman exuded confidence of hitting budgetary estimates of Rs 1.75 lakh crore divestment.

Sitharaman said the government stands to get up to Rs 30,000 crore from the newly introduced agricultural infrastructure cess.

On the issue of fuel prices, and inflation there in because of the duties, Sitharaman said if the Centre lowers excise, states will increase their taxes to keep the prices at the same level and also earn some revenues.

Petrol, diesel prices unchanged for 2nd consecutive day

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

Retail fuel prices remained unchanged on Sunday, with petrol selling at Rs 86.95 per litre in the national capital. In Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai, petrol was sold at Rs 93.49, Rs 89.39 and Rs 88.30 per litre respectively.

Diesel prices also remained unchanged on Sunday. Prices of the fuel in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai were Rs 77.13, Rs 83.99, Rs 82.33 and Rs 80.71 respectively.

Petrol and diesel prices have largely been elevated amid reviving crude oil prices. The benchmark Brent crude oil is currently around \$59 per barrel.

Though firm global crude and product price is the reason for the increase in retail price of petrol and diesel in past days, it is interesting to note that even though crude has been hovering just over \$55 a barrel for a long time, OMCs had gone in for a pause in price of auto fuels on consecutive days.

Crude price have remained firm for last few weeks in wake of unilateral production cuts announced by Saudi Arabia



Petrol and diesel prices have largely been elevated amid reviving crude oil prices

and a pick-up in consumption in all major economies globally.

The last few increases in pump prices in petrol and diesel has taken its price to record levels across the country in all major metro cities and other towns. The last time the retail price of auto fuels were closer to current levels was on October 4, 2018 when crude prices had shot up at \$80 a barrel.

The current price rise is largely on account of steep increase in central taxes on petrol and diesel and firm crude prices. The Budget has

India's coal import rises by 15% in December

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country's coal import rose by 15.1 per cent to 23.63 million tonnes (MT) in December 2020 compared to 20.52 MT in the year-ago month.

Non-coking coal imports were at 15.63 MT in December this fiscal against 14.21 MT in the same month last fiscal. Coking coal imports were at 5.36 MT against 4.47 MT in December 2019-20, according to provisional data compiled by mjunction services.

However, the country's coal import dropped by 13.5 per cent to 160.79 MT in the April-December period of the ongoing fiscal compared to 185.88 MT in the same period last fiscal.

"India's coal and coke imports during April-December 2020 through major and non-major ports are estimated to have decreased by 13.5 per cent over the same period last year," mjunction services said.

During the April-December period of FY2020-

The country's coal import dropped by 13.5 per cent to 160.79 MT in the April-December period of the ongoing fiscal compared to 185.88 MT in the same period last fiscal

21, non-coking coal import was at 107.07 MT against 128.26 MT during the year-ago period. Coking coal imports were recorded at 33.54 MT during the period against 37.20 MT during the same period a year ago. Commenting on the coal import trend, Vinaya Varma, the MD and CEO of mjunction services, said, "Coal demand from utilities moved up due to higher generation in December. This coupled with a gradual recovery in industrial activities and expectations of further firming up of international prices led to increased volumes." mjunction, a joint venture between Tata Steel and SAIL, is a B2B e-commerce company and also publishes research reports on coal and steel verticals.

LED lighting product makers to approach Govt over custom duty hike on parts; prices to rise 5-10%

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prices of LED lighting products, including bulbs, may go up by 5-10 per cent as the Government is going to raise customs duty on the imported components used for their manufacturing, and the domestic makers are approaching the Government to address the issue urgently.

Electric Lamp and Component Manufacturers' Association (ELCOMA) President Sumit Joshi, "The government's decision to increase tariff on inputs and parts used for manufacturing of LED lighting products will result in a price increase for locally manufactured lighting products in the short term."

It is because currently, almost all electronic components are imported from abroad due to lack of a local component ecosystem in India, said ELCOMA said that after

a hike in the customs duty from 5 to 10 per cent on the import of the components, including driver and MCPCBs used while manufacturing LED lights, prices of the locally manufactured goods will go up.

The tariffs on finished good have remained unchanged, it added. Hike in custom duty might support the domestic industry in the long term, once the component manufacturing ecosystem in India becomes more established. "As ELCOMA, we will go back to the government to address this urgently by correspondingly increasing the tariff on finished goods as well for this category, in order to support local manufacturers in the true spirit of India becoming Aatmanirbhar Bharat," said Joshi, who is also the vice-chairman and managing director of Signify Innovations India (earlier known as Philips Lighting India).

Lithuania can be gateway for Indian companies to expand presence in Europe: Envoy

New Delhi: Led by one of the youngest Governments in the world, Lithuania is looking to broad-base ties with India in emerging high-growth areas like fintech, life sciences, digital technology and pharmaceuticals while offering a dynamic business environment to Indian investors, its ambassador Julius Pranevicius said on Sunday.

The Lithuanian envoy said his country has emerged as a burgeoning fintech hub globally and Indian companies wanting to expand their presence in Europe can use the Baltic nation as a "gateway" to the larger markets in the region.

Initiation led by Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte, which assumed office in December, is being hailed as one of the world's most gender-balanced and young governments. Out of 15 members in the cabinet, seven are women

and nine ministers are under the age of 40 years.

Pranevicius said the "young" government of Prime Minister Simonyte is leading Lithuania with "new energy and dynamism" with a focus on high-growth areas for economic growth, and the relations with India stand high on its priority. Lithuania, a prominent Baltic nation, is a member of the powerful NATO as well as the European Union.

In a historic first for the country that regained its independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990, the new government was formed by three conservative parties which are all led by women. The main agenda of the government is to deal with the challenges of the coronavirus crisis as well as to focus on growth in futuristic areas for strengthening Lithuania's economy and make it a hub of new innovation and technologies.

FPIs remain net buyers at ₹12,266 cr in first 5 trading sessions of Feb

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) remained net buyers to the tune of Rs 12,266 crore in the Indian market in the first five trading sessions of February, as positive sentiment post-Union Budget 2021 sparked a rally in investment.

As per FPI statistics available with depositories, overseas investors pumped in a net Rs 10,793 crore into equities and Rs 1,473 crore in the debt segment between February 1-5.

During the period under review, the total net investment stood at Rs 12,266 crore.

In the previous month, FPIs invested a net sum of Rs 14,649 crore in Indian markets.

Kotak Securities Executive Vice-President and Head (Fundamental Research) Ruskim Oza said, "The outcome of the Union Budget has sparked a rally and led to FPI inflows.

The sharp jump in capital expenditure and glide path of keeping fiscal deficit at elevated levels till 2025-26 will lead to a strong economic revival and higher earnings growth in future."

Besides, Groww co-founder and Chief Operating Officer Harsh Jain added that India's projected growth rate for the financial year 2022 is encouraging.

India is also slated to become one of the few nations that recovered from the economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic much faster than most other major economies of the world, Jain said.

"The continued good performance of the Indian markets is being partly fuelled by this investment from FPIs," Jain further said.

Regarding the debt segment, Morningstar India Associate Director (Manager Research) Himanshu Srivastava

said the RBI announced few measures in its monetary policy announced on Friday to promote investments by FPIs in corporate bonds.

"The central bank announced that FPI investment in defaulted corporate bonds will be exempted from the short-term limit and the minimum residual maturity requirement under the medium-term framework," Srivastava said.

This measure will help investors build greater confidence in the Indian debt markets going ahead, he added.

For future of FPI flows, he said there is a strong possibility of profit-booking by FPIs at regular intervals given the way markets are headed.

The continuation of accommodative stance by central banks globally may ensure flow of foreign investments into emerging markets, including India, said Srivastava.

ITC sets up 'Young Digital Natives' Innovators Lab'

IANS ■ MUMBAI

ITC Chairman Sanjiv Puri has announced the setting up of a 'Young Digital Innovators Lab' comprising of digital natives drawn from across ITC's businesses to crowd source transformative digital strategies.

With the objective of strengthening its competitive vitality, ITC is scaling up its digital interventions across businesses and value-chains.

"Led by the Chairman Sanjiv Puri's Vision to shape a new digital paradigm for ITC, the company embarked on a digitalisation journey in recent years by building digital capacity at scale, by adopting cutting-edge digital technologies to drive growth and by effectively leveraging digital platforms to support wide-spread social transformation," the company said in a statement.

Ministries of defence, railways, CPSEs among largest buyers from GeM platform

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ministries of defence and railways and central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) are among the largest buyer organisations on the public procurement portal, GeM, a senior official said.

Government e-Marketplace (GeM) portal was launched in August 2016 for online purchases of goods and services by all central government ministries, states and departments.

GeM CEO Talleen Kumar said that they are introducing a range of software functionalities to address the unique and diverse procurement needs of these large buyers.

"These steps will enable these organizations to conduct their procurement with transparency, ease and efficiency to the fullest possible extent on

the GeM platform. The volume of procurement conducted by the ministries of railways and defence and CPSEs has seen a steady upward trend since it was rolled out in 2016," he told PTI. The cumulative procurement by CPSEs as of January 15, 2021, stood at Rs 4,737 crore.

"The cumulative order value of procurement by the defence ministry is Rs 8,232.6 crore (as of January 15, 2021) and is the highest among all ministries and state governments," he added. Kumar said that the continuous engagement with the defence ministry and the development of new functionalities on the platform has yielded good results in this financial year.

Similarly, the cumulative order value of procurement on GeM by the Ministry of Railways as of January 15

stood at Rs 2,165.9 crore.

GeM is focussed on integrating with the procurement process of the Ministry of Railways to bring its procurement on the portal up to the full potential," he said.

The integration of GeM with Integrated Material Management System (iMMS)/ Indian Railway Electronic Procurement System (iRePS) is underway and it is expected that Railways will be able to create bids on GeM around the middle of February, Kumar added.

The cumulative transaction value on GeM as of January 26 was Rs 80,564 crore, up from 33,008 crore on August 1, 2019. Besides defence and railways, ministries of home, petroleum, finance, health, electronics and power are major buyers from the platform.

PNB expects ₹3,800 cr recovery from Bhushan Power resolution

SEES GOOD AMOUNT FROM DHFL ALSO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Punjab National Bank (PNB) is expecting to recover a substantial Rs 3,800 crore from Bhushan Power and Steel under debt resolution in NCLT, which will help it achieve the target of Rs 8,000 crore cash recoveries during this fiscal, its managing director and CEO S S Mallikarjuna Rao said.

Besides, the city-based lender also hopes to make good recovery of its exposure in crisis-hit DHFL, which is undergoing a resolution process currently.

Sticking to the bank's previous guidance on restricting the gross NPAs below 14 per

cent and net NPAs lower than 5 per cent by the end of the current fiscal, Rao said there has been an improvement in collection efficiency as well in January after a dampened December.

Across the banking industry, the collections were much better in October and November, before dampening again in December because of lack of clarity on NPA recognition from the Supreme Court, he added.

In response to a public interest litigation during Covid times, the Supreme Court had passed an interim order in September, directing banks not to declare accounts as NPA, which otherwise would have turned dud, during March-August till further orders.

"So there was an impulse on identification on NPA.

However, the collections have again improved in the month of January across the banking industry, including our bank. Considering, these factors, we are very confident that there won't be any further increase (of bad loans). About proforma NPA, we have already marked them, we have identified and have done the complete provisioning, so there won't be any impact in Q4 (FY21)," Rao said in a conference post bank's December quarter results. "On the contrary, I am expecting reduction of the proforma NPA what we have declared as on December 31, 2020." The bank has posted a net profit of Rs 506 crore on a standalone basis in the quarter ended December 2020 of this fiscal. It had posted a net loss of Rs 492.28 crore in the year-ago period.

Octro expands business overseas, says ban on game helping foreign firms

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Online gaming company Octro has started expanding its business overseas after traction in its casino and card games, namely PlayRummy and Teen Patti, according to a senior company official.

The firm's Chief Marketing Officer Manav Sethi said the move of some state government to ban online gaming is helping gaming companies that are registered outside India.

"By March of 2021, we would start the user acquisition for international markets," Sethi told PTI.

He claimed that the company has seen 100 per cent growth year-on-year, and its revenue is in three digits of crore on Indian currency.

Octro owns online games including PlayRummy, Teen Patti, Indian Rummy, Tambola and Soccer Battles. The company's card games involve real monetary transactions that it calls a game of skills.

"We have gotten growth on these sides, basically the card and casino side. We have also seen some success on the real money gaming side. So, why don't we take these IPs (internet protocol) international."

"That is where our next round of investment in terms of capital, people and time is going into."

We have two very clear tracks -- build an IP that can go global, and the second track is to take our existing IP globally," Sethi said.

NTPC says Tapovan project partly damaged, monitoring situation

New Delhi: Part of an under-construction hydropower project of state-run power major NTPC has been damaged by the avalanche in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district on Sunday.

The company has said that it is monitoring the situation continuously along with the district administration and police. Part of the under-construction Tapovan Vishnugad hydro power project (520 MW) has faced damages while another privately-owned Rishi Ganga hydro project (130 MW) was completely devastated. "An avalanche near Tapovan in Uttarakhand has damaged a part of our under-construction

hydropower project in the region. While rescue operation is on, situation is being monitored continuously with the help of district administration and police," NTPC said in a tweet. Uttarakhand Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat said that 125 people are missing following the massive flood. The incident occurred after the water level in Dhauliganga river, suddenly surged on Sunday morning following an avalanche near the Rishi Ganga power project. The 85 km river meets the Alaknanda river at Vishnuprayag at the base of Joshimath mountain in Uttarakhand.

China's 5G phone shipments reach 167M in 2020: Report

IANS ■ BEIJING

Shipments of 5G smartphones in China reached 167.5 million units in 2020, accounting for more than half of the total smartphone shipment throughout the year, according to global market intelligence firm International Data Corporation (IDC).

In the fourth quarter last year, China shipped 60.1 million 5G handsets, data from IDC showed.

Last year, the country had shipped a total of 325.7 million units of smartphones, down 11.2 percent year on year.

The shipment of smart-

phones in Q4 edged up 0.3 percent year on year to 86.4 million units, with major vendors in the Chinese market registering a favorable growth, the firm said.

Huawei continues to dominate the domestic mobile phone market with a 38.3-percent market share last year. Its total shipment reached 124.9 million units, according to the IDC.

Vivo and OPPO, another two Chinese smartphone makers, took up 17.7 percent and 17.4 percent of the market.

Respectively, followed by Xiaomi with a 12-percent share, reports Xinhua news

agency.

Apple was the only vendor among the top five that achieved a full-year growth in the Chinese market bolstered by its new release of the iPhone 12 series and continued demand for the iPhone 11 series, the IDC said.

"China will see a more stable consumer demand in 2021 as the local COVID-19 cases are expected to be less impactful," said Wang Xi, a research manager with IDC China. The market is expected to see a gradual recovery, along with the changes in the smartphone and upstream competition, Wang added.

34 aerospace, defence firms plan to invest in Karnataka

IANS ■ BENGALURU

As many as 34 aerospace and defence firms have shown interest in investing in Karnataka to spur aviation business in the southern state, an official said on Sunday.

"In all, 34 aerospace and defence firms have signed an agreement with the state government to invest a total of Rs 2,464 crore in setting up their facilities, which have the potential to create 6,462 direct jobs," an official of the Industry Department's Udyog Mitra told IANS here.

The agreements were signed at the 13th edition of Aero India 2021 expo at the Yelahanka air base on the city's

outskirts on February 3-5.

Among the firms are Abhyuday Bharat defence cluster with an investment proposal of Rs 1,000 crore, Gopalan Aerospace Ltd (Rs 438 crore), Alpha Design Technology and Tesbl Aerospace Corporation (Rs 250 crore each).

"We have a vibrant aerospace and defence sector ecosystem, which enabled the state to contribute 65 per cent of exports from the country. The proposed investing firms will attract others to invest in the aerospace sector," said state's Industries Minister Jagadish Shettar in a statement on the occasion.

As the country's aerospace hub, Bengaluru is home to

several state-run and private firms such as the defence behemoth Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL), BEL, BEMIL, NAL, DRDO, ADA, ADE and ISRO.

"With an investor-centric approach, our new industrial policy (2020-25) offers incentives for investing in the state, with regulatory reforms for access to land and labour," asserted Shettar.

The recent Innovation Index of the policy think tank NITI Aayog has ranked Karnataka on top, indicating the state's strengths in human resources, higher education, trust on research and development, with a conducive investment climate and a proactive administration.



Are you considering hiring an interior designer? If so, you must plan ahead to get maximum returns. From your budget and timeline, to your inspiration and must-haves, you must be prepared to have an in-depth conversation with your interior designer that helps them understand your needs and serve your desire.

KNOW YOUR BUDGET
 One of the first things that you should consider before hiring an interior designer is your budget. Simply put, how much do you want to spend on this interior design project? When you speak to an interior designer, one of the first things that they will inquire about is your budget. Your budget may also determine whether you can afford full-service interior design services or if you would instead do some of the work yourself and use a virtual design service that provides you with direction and advice. Everyone has a different budget for same project. It is important to understand yours before you get started so your designer can help you stay within it. If you are unsure of setting a realistic budget, your designer can also help you develop a budget for your project.

KNOW YOUR TIMELINE
 Your timeline is another crucial aspect that you should consider before hiring an interior designer. Do you have a few weeks, a couple of months, or a year? Is your timeline set in stone or flexible as long as you get the results you want? Do you want retail products or custom trade-only products (that often come with better price when working with a designer, but custom work takes more time to build)? Your timeline may influence some of your interior designer's choices, and hence it is crucial that you know your timeline and ensure that your interior designer understands it as well.



ALIGN RIGHT

While hiring an interior designer, here are a few things to consider

Collect inspiration
 Before you contact an interior designer, find what inspires you. Create an inspiration folder or inspiration board. While interior designers are talented and can work miracles, they must understand what your idea of perfect space entails. You should also explain to your designer anything that you like or dislike about your current space. This will help the designer create a space that is beautiful and to your tastes and sensibilities.

UNDERSTAND YOUR SERVICES
 Interior designers usually offer several services. You can



choose from full-service design, virtual design, bathroom design, single room design, and many other services. Before you contact your interior designer, you should know what services are relevant for your project. Are you searching for an interior designer who will take care of

everything for you? Or do you want to be the one making decisions based on recommendations from a professional interior designer? Ask yourself these questions, so you are prepared to explain your project goals to your designer clearly. If you are not 100 per cent sure which services you are interested in, don't stress too much as your interior designer will help you decide.

Determine your must-haves
 What really matters to you in your design project? We all want everything but when it really matters, what can you not live without? It is essential for you to identify must-have versus good-to-have. Do you love to read and want a comfy, cozy reading nook, and will pay anything for it and wait for it with custom design? Do you want the look you lived and liked on your travels, or visit with family and friends, or in a film or media, and have to have it? If there is anything non-negotiable, you must communicate that to your interior designer.

rior designer.

CREDENTIALS AND REFERENCES

Designer and decorator are not the same. Anyone can call themselves a designer in today's time. But do they understand the art and science of architecture and design, as well as consumer behaviour? Make an effort to get information on who is a credible designer. Are the name sake designers involved in meeting you and working with you vs just a name and work done by anyone they have hired? Do the designers have the industry affiliation, history, and testimonials that can be verified? Did you get a referral to the designer from a friend or family who has worked with the designer? Ask the designer these questions on their credential and if they will be involved on your project directly. Ask for referrals from a few past clients with a similar scale project as yours.

PERSONALITY FIT

A designer will be working on your most personal spaces that you and your family inhabit. Are you comfortable and in a trusting relationship with your designer? It would help if you have a good personality fit with your designer. Some projects last a long time, can be one to two years, and you must embark on the journey working with the designer a life-stage partner. You should be comfortable in communicating and collaborating with someone who takes time to understand your personality and your project goals. Your designer will have to learn about every aspect of your life to personalise your space to fit your lifestyle. Make sure you hire a person you can trust. Once you have found the right person for the job, you have to trust them to make the best recommendations for you and let them lead you to your dream home.

(The writer Swati Goorha is the founder & CEO and Principal Interior Designer of Swati Goorha Designs.)

WEBBED



NADIYA BAKES

Delightful cakes and heavenly breads pop from the oven as Nadiya Hussain returns to baking, her happy place, and spotlights creative kindred spirits. Season 1 releases on February 12 on Netflix.



THE MAP OF TINY PERFECT THINGS

Quick-witted teen Mark (Kyle Allen) is contentedly living the same day in an endless loop when his world is turned upside-down by the mysterious Margaret (Kathryn Newton), also stuck in the same loop. What follows is a love story with a fantastical twist, as the two struggle to figure out how – and whether – to escape their never-ending day. It releases on February 12 on Amazon Prime Video.



LIFE IN A YEAR

After Daryn learns that his girlfriend Isabelle is sick, he plans to gift her a life's worth of experiences in the last year she has left. It releases on February 14 on Amazon Prime Video.

Vipul Shah on managing two contrasting projects together

After announcing two projects recently – a medical thriller titled *Human* (web show) and a film, *Sanak*, director-producer Vipul Amrutlal Shah has already started working on the same, simultaneously. While the latter is an emotional drama about the underbelly of the human drug testing and the world of medical scam, the former is an intense, emotional, action film.

The filmmaker is working round-the-clock to ensure both the projects are shot and completed on time. "It's quite a challenging task to handle these two completely contrasting projects. I am producing both the projects and directing *Human* with Mozez Singh," admits Vipul.

Talking about the shoot schedule, Vipul informs, "During day time, we are shooting the web show and in the night, we are shooting the film. My day starts approximately at five in the morning and ends at two at night. After directing the web show from early morning to evening, I report to the sets of the film which starts from evening to next morning. Even though it's challenging, it's interesting and fun too."

After sitting at home for nine months because of the pandemic, the filmmaker is enjoying the high-energy period working on these two projects. "The two projects were not supposed to be shot together but this is something beyond my control, the timelines dictated it but I am now enjoying the process. As a creative indi-



vidual, I have a habit of taking up the challenge as fun. That's the challenge we all have accepted and we are going ahead with it," Vipul concludes. *Human* features Shefali Shah and Kirti Kulhari as lead characters and it went on floors in January this year. The web series will be co-directed by Vipul Shah and Mozez. *Sanak* will see Vidyut along with Chandan Roy Sanyal, Neha Dhupia and Rukmini Maitra (who is making her Bollywood debut).

Everybody wants transport that is reliable, safe, cost-effective, convenient, and respectful of the environment. This is where the Intelligent Traffic Management System (ITMS) can save time, money, and lives by protecting public health as well as landscapes. It achieves this through the application of information and communication processing technologies to road transport infrastructure.

ITMS solutions provide a wide range of applications that process and share information to ease congestion, improve traffic management, minimise environmental impact, and increase the benefits of transportation to the public in general. An ITMS solution consists of the following systems:

- ECB: Emergency call button system
- PA: Public addressable system
- RLVD: Red light violation detection system
- VIDS: Video incident detection system
- ANPR: Automatic number plate recognition system
- Overview cameras
- Command and control system with e-challan software/ hardware/ storage systems

There's no doubt that all of these solutions benefit the general public greatly. However, let's delve deeper into the most popular ITMS solution:

OVERVIEW CAMERAS

While all other ITMS camera systems focus on detail and are meant for specific purposes, overview camera systems are meant to provide general surveillance over the entire junction. Generally, 360-degree panoramic cameras are preferred for this application for the following reasons:

No blind spot

Panoramic cameras provide an overview of the entire junction all the time. Normally if an operator is

Master the new technology

Intelligent Traffic Management System aims to ease congestion, improve traffic management, minimise environmental impact, and increase the benefits of transportation to the public in general, says ABHISHEK KUMAR



zoomed into one part of the scene, the camera has no visibility for the rest of the area and the only video of the viewable area is stored. However, in panoramic cameras, even when the operator focusses on any area or zooms in a particular direction, the network recorder continues to record the complete oval/ picture. Thus, there is no blind spot at any point in time and constant general surveillance of the entire area is achieved.

Retrospective tracking

The activity is visible all the time, both via live and playback, an operator is not needed to ensure the camera is pointing in the right direction to capture any areas of interest while the image is being recorded. This is especially powerful for retrospective analysis of an incident wherein different

Total situational awareness

The complete coverage of activity translates to enhanced situational awareness for organisations when it comes to ensuring the security of their facilities. Operators know exactly what is taking place within their environment as it happens, with the added ability to view the recorded version of a specific situation. What's more, the stored video includes a full 360-degree view, making it easy to

access later for further investigation, and to better understand people's behavioural patterns.

To better understand how it works, we can inspect the technical aspects of these 360-degree camera systems.

Thanks to its ability to monitor large areas and provide unparalleled views, the use of 360-degree camera technology is growing rapidly. The addition of different camera form factors and specialist certifications have further added to the influx of adoption, taking the technology use far beyond that of just a conventional security camera. But no matter the application, there's one key element that can make or break an entire surveillance system: The quality of the technology. Inadequate surveillance technology can cost organisations time, money, and other resources that can thwart their security and business goals. That's why it's extremely important to take advantage of surveillance systems that leverage the highest quality features to create a usable image or video.

When it comes to 360-degree cameras, there are certain features that they should include:

- A high-speed frame rate that enables users to view live and recorded footage in high resolution without motion judder or blur, and a guaranteed frame rate, which makes it easier to comply with applicable minimum legal fps specification standards.

□ The latest generation of HDR technology that reveals the finest details in both light and dark areas of every scene for realistic image quality with smooth motion and playback.

□ Advanced compression technology that can work seamlessly alongside standard compression techniques to increase the compression ratio. This then saves storage costs by significantly reducing the space used by any video recording and saves network infrastructure costs by minimising the bandwidth of video data being transmitted over the network.

□ Optimising imagery with low-light technology, which produces clearer and brighter images with less noise, even in low light conditions.

□ Strengthening the cybersecurity of the device, increasing the security level of access to the camera, and encrypting video and other data transmission. Operators expect surveillance cameras to be their eyes for what they can't see at all times. And in real life, if someone's eyesight isn't perfect, they use contact lenses or glasses to improve their vision. The same concept should apply to video technology: Businesses should look toward features that enhance image quality through the aforementioned factors to ensure that they're gleaming the highest level of situational awareness and intelligence from their systems.

There's no doubt that ITMS solutions are an extremely useful innovation. They add to the existing framework of inadequate traffic management systems in countries like ours, and can greatly improve that related improper structures like toll deduction, *challan* due to over speeding, red light violation, driving in the wrong lane, vehicle theft and so on.

(The writer is the Regional Director of Oncam.)

TRENDBLAZER



MANOJ STARTS SHOOT FOR DESPATCH

Actor **MANOJ BAJPAYEE** shared the news that he has commenced the shoot of his forthcoming film *Dispatch*. The thriller tells the story of what goes in the underbelly of crime journalism.

Manoj posted a picture on Instagram from the set and captioned it: "Back to where it feels like home. *Dispatch* commences shoot."

The film is directed by *Titli*-fame director Kanu Behl, and will be released directly on a digital platform.

fairtalk



'I dived into theatre when I was in college and I was immediately captivated by the world of artistes. I had often watched plays in Prithvi, so the first time that I went backstage it hit me that the roles had reversed. I felt like I belonged there and acting became a constant since then. I am glad that theatres have now been resuscitated'

dailytalk



'The only talent I had is that I fell in love with my art. I fell in love with acting as a kid. I was never chasing fame or money. I thought to myself that this is something I want to do for the rest of my life. With that dream, I started doing theatre in Delhi and later joined the film institute in Pune because I didn't want to come to Mumbai unprepared'

STYLE IS PERSONAL: RITA

Singer **RITA ORA** says she doesn't care what anyone has to say about her clothes.

"I really think style is a totally personal thing. If someone doesn't like something I wear, they don't have to, that's totally fine," Rita says.

"What's important is I just need to feel confident about me. I don't care what anyone else thinks," she adds.



AN ARDUOUS JOURNEY

Dr BR Ambedkar had made every effort to fight the evil of caste system in his lifetime. However, almost 65 years after his death, it is time to reflect if anything has changed. By ALKA GADGIL

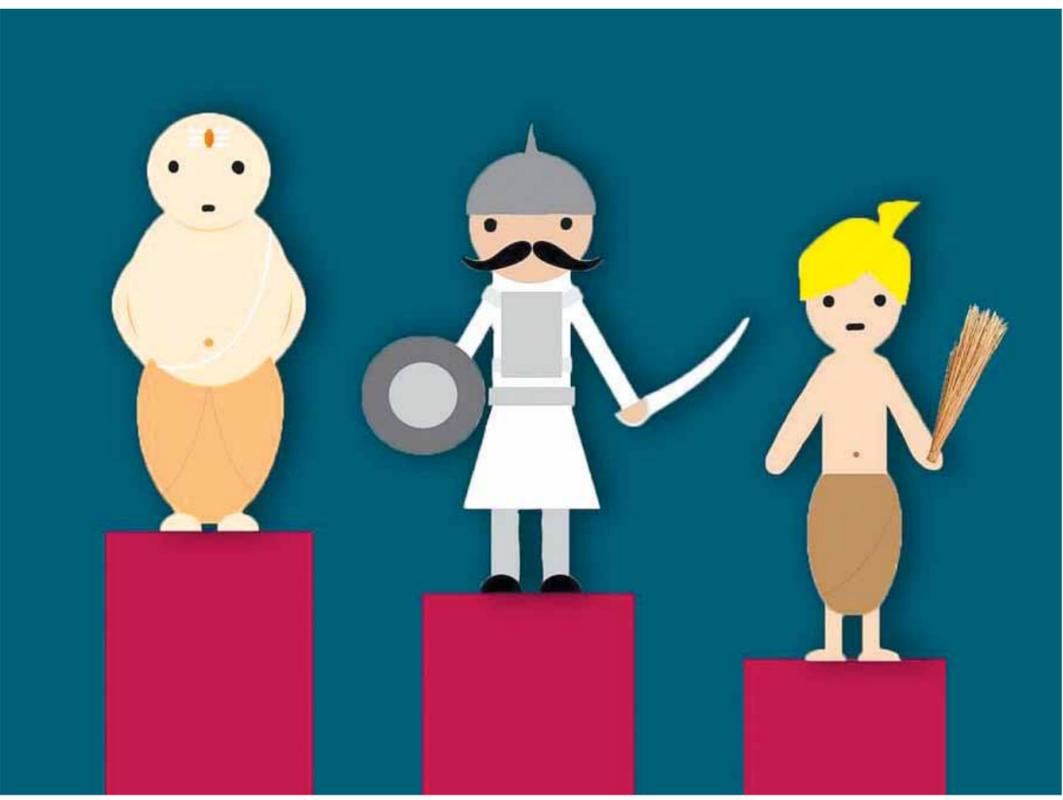
Pooja Mudhane, a nineteen-year-old girl from Virar — a town in Palghar district of Maharashtra — was exposed to the ugly reality of caste system when she was in Class-III. The school had announced the final exam results in which Pooja had secured top position. She was eager to show the report card to her friends but her father stopped her from doing so. He said, "Our caste, Mahar, is mentioned in your report card. You don't have to show it to others." Pooja asked, "Why should I hide my caste?" She didn't understand the concept of caste system, however, she did sense the shame associated with it.

"At that point, I was made to imbibe that it's not ok to display my 'lower caste', it was to be concealed. But now I am trying to unlearn that belief because I am not ashamed of it. And those who believe in it should be ashamed of their mindset," said Pooja.

This incident has had a long-lasting impact on her. So she decided to take up the cause of annihilation of caste, the idea which was proposed by Dr BR Ambedkar almost 85 years ago.

When Pooja was in Class-IV, her father abandoned the family and married someone else. While Pooja's mother, Jaya Mudhane belongs to Koli caste (the fishing community), her father, Panjabrao Mudhane is Dalit. As their inter-caste marriage was rejected by Jaya's family, no help came from her parental home after Panjabrao left the family to fend for themselves.

"My mother's leg was damaged in an accident and she had to single handedly raise three children (of which I am the youngest). She would sell fish for living but could hardly make the ends meet. We were in such a bad shape that at one point I was about to leave the school for good," shared Pooja. One day, her mother found out about the *Baag Shala*, a group engaged in coaching students from deprived fam-



ilies. It is run by Maitrakul, a home for children who find it difficult to pursue education due to poverty.

"I joined the classes at *Baag Shala*, which used to be conducted in the slums and villages of Thane, Palghar and Raigad districts of Maharashtra," said Pooja.

Baag Shala transformed Pooja into a confident person. With this newly gained confidence, she now started participating in competitions and her scholastic performance improved drastically.

She would help her mother in household chores before and after

the school hours. That's how Pooja's mother managed the house and raised her three children. Eventually, owing to the poor financial circumstances, her elder sister had to drop out of the school to look after the household. Luckily, *Baag Shala* saved Pooja from the hassle.

While her mother and sister had assumed the responsibilities of earning and looking after the house, Pooja helped her mother by transporting the supply of fish. Her brother, however, did nothing.

When Pooja decided to join

Maitrakul boarding, she was in a dilemma. "Do I continue with the house or should I join Maitrakul for my betterment?" she would ask herself. However, her mother recognised her urge.

After relocating to Maitrakul's Kalyan boarding, Pooja sought admission in Agarwal College, Kalyan in 2018. She was able to participate fully in all academics as well as extra-curricular activities.

Pooja said, "Maitrakul teaches us to follow our dreams. The facility gives us not merely bookish knowledge but also exposes us

to experiential learning. Our surroundings are our university. The culture teaches us to fall in line. 'Girls have to learn to cook while boys just have to play and study — the societal norms tell us. However, in our facility, we all have to take turns for cooking, serving and cleaning.'

After joining the facility, Pooja's urge to fight the caste divide got an impetus. "The case of Manisha Valmiki, who was gang raped and murdered in Uttar Pradesh, unnerved me. In Kolhapur, Maharashtra, Arvind Jagtap was killed for being in love

with an upper caste girl. The two had decided to tie the knot but the girl's brothers slit the throat of Arvind who succumbed to injuries. In both the cases, police took cognizance only after public outcry. We discussed this matter in Maitrakul. These cases made me angry and restless," said Pooja, earnestly.

She shared a few ideas on how she's planning to take this narrative to the youth. "The youth should break the barriers of caste. Inter-caste marriages would go a long way in annihilating the problem. Mahatma Gandhi in his later years had vowed to attend only inter-caste weddings. And I have decided to do the same. Our friend circle, too, should be diverse. It's futile to waste money on wedding ceremonies. Reading of a piece from the constitution should be part of the wedding ritual," said she.

"The older generation is not willing to listen or adapt new ways. It's easier to convince a young person. So I have decided to launch a drive against caste-based systems. We shall visit one district at a time, get connected with college students and NGOs, and initiate discussions with them. We'll make an effort to understand the views of the youth on this topic. A lot of activists like me are working on the same issue. We would try and connect with them and their movements," added Pooja.

"In our college, whenever we start a discussion on caste, the most common argument that we come across is that the Dalits have reservation, what do the upper caste people have?" she shared. Pooja feels that there's a need to address such issues and the ideology from which they stem.

Dr BR Ambedkar had made every effort to fight the evil of caste in his lifetime. Almost 65 years after his death, activists like Pooja are still fighting the malaise of casteism. Has anything really changed?

—Charkha Features



HEAL THE WORLD

Love can make us understand and experience the creation of god, says RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

It is rightly said that 'love makes the world go round.' Isn't it true that without love, our lives would seem dry and empty? Without it, we would neither see the beauty in creation, nor can we find our inner beauty. After all love is what we are all about. That is why Mahatma Gandhi has rightly said, 'Where there is love, there is life.' Although we live in this material world which is filled with natural beauty and we have created the wonders of science, we must not forget that without love, we cannot experience the benefits of those creations.

When a child is born, the mother loves the child as s/he is innocent & pure. The newborn becomes the focus of the family and a bond is formed on the basis of love. This bonding further plays a crucial role for the child to develop his/her own personality, to relate to the world around, to feel secure and confident and to be able to express in the society. Remember! A child who is loved will have no fear in his/her life and would be able to easily venture outside the family.



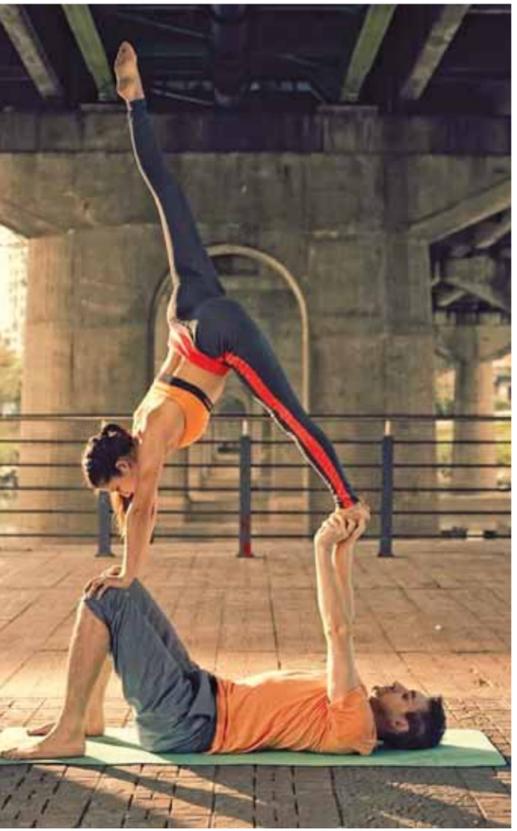
We wouldn't be able to integrate our experiences properly without a loving family because ultimately it is the love from them that gives us a sense of safety and provides us with courage to face the challenges that life brings on. We must understand that nothing in this world appears beautiful in total isolation, it is only when it is seen in the context of its surroundings that it becomes beautiful. Hence, our friends and family are the nucleus of our existence.

When we are alone, we might feel lonely but not if the soul has developed the consciousness of unlimited love. When we learn to connect with our inner nature of love, it becomes an imperishable treasure that remains with us wherever we go. This unconditional love means that I have a connection with every living being and I also spread the rays of love to the five elements of nature. With this love, I begin to understand the interdependence of all things and realise that I am not alone but I'm a part of the world drama and it is love that makes this beautiful world drama work.

By developing the understanding that all beings are his children and he is the one who purifies nature, we also become a part of his family and the custodians of nature. With this attitude, we will see everyone with a feeling of love, acceptance and belongingness. Remember! Almighty's pure love makes no judgement, it does not discriminate or rejects but is an all-embracing, all-accepting, powerful love that transforms and purifies everyone and everything by removing the traces of fear, loneliness, sorrow and grief. So let us all spread the light of love and heal the world from the wounds of hatred and negativity.

Stronger together

Practicing these yoga poses with someone you love can calm and balance your body and mind. By TEAM VIVA



The beauty of yoga is that it can be done by absolutely anyone and it can be moulded to your body, mind and soul. Practicing yoga with a significant other or someone you love can add a sense of calm and balance to your body and mind. There are certain poses that become better when practiced as a couple. Jahnvi Patwardhan, master trainer, SARVA and Diva Yoga suggests five poses that can be practiced as a couple.

THE LOTUS
 This grounding and meditative posture can be done by everyone. *Padmasana* or lotus pose is a slightly advanced posture but *sukhasana* or a simple cross legged pose can work as well. When practicing as a couple, sit with the backs touching. From the sacrum to the shoulder blades, there is complete contact. This is an extremely calming posture and practicing it as a couple makes sure that the back is aligned and brings awareness of the body, especially the back.

THE TWIST
 Taking it from the first posture,



you simply twist and grab your partners knee to get deeper into the twist. This can be more effective than a regular seated twist, again because of the awareness and alignment but also because your back is aligned, the twist is deeper and amazing.

THE BOAT
 Another fun pose is the boat

or *navasana*. Since its a balancing pose, doing it with someone brings in a counterbalance to stabilise it. You simply start by holding hands and the soles of the feet touching. And slowly straighten the legs into a boat. This pose helps bring balance to the body and mind, strengthens the core and even opens up the hamstrings when done as a couple.

THE TREE
 This is one of the best standing balance poses there is. It helps you feel rooted, steady and strong and again, when done with a partner, it works as a counter balance. Standing next to each other, ground down with one foot and place the other foot on the inner thigh (mirror each other). Hold each other around the waist and the other palm can join in *namaste*.

THE SQUAT
 The final one is the chair squat. This is a challenging one, you need to find the right equilibrium so as not to imbalance each other. You simply stand with your backs together (backs are touching throughout) and just walk the feet ahead as you squat. Go down as low as you can with the backs still touching. This is a strengthening pose for the quadriceps, hip flexors and glutes.

Practicing yoga as a couple has numerous benefits like cultivating awareness, mindfulness, gratitude, balance and compassion, and of course, its a lot of fun too.

The greatest religion is to be true to your own nature. Have faith in yourselves. —Swami Vivekananda

AIR POLLUTION MAY UP CVD RISK
 Researchers have identified that fine particulate matter has a detrimental impact on cardiovascular health by activating the production of inflammatory cells in the bone marrow, ultimately leading to inflammation of the arteries.

The study indicates that tiny particles of air pollution — called fine particulate matter — can have a range of effects on health, and exposure to high levels is a known risk factor for cardiovascular disease.

"The pathway linking air pollution exposure to cardiovascular events through higher bone marrow activity and arterial inflammation accounted for 29 per cent of the relationship between air pollution and cardiovascular disease events," said researcher Shady Abohashem from the Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) in the US.

"These findings implicate air pollution exposure as an underrecognized risk factor and suggest therapeutic targets beyond pollution mitigation to lessen the cardiovascular impact of air pollution exposure," Abohashem added.

ZINC MAY HELP WITH FERTILITY DURING CORONA
 Researchers have reported that zinc supplements for both men and women attempting to conceive either naturally or through assisted reproduction during the pandemic may prevent mitochondrial damage in young egg and sperm cells.

According to the researchers, including Husam Abu-Soud from the Wayne State University in the US, zinc supplementation of up to a maximum of 50 mg per day for all adults could also be beneficial in enhancing immunity and fighting the viral disease process of COVID-19.

For the study, published in the journal *Reproductive Sciences*, the researchers reviewed the pathophysiology of COVID-19. They found that zinc depletion in connection with the cytokine storm — the overreaction of the immune system that causes inflammation, tissue damage and possible organ failure in fighting COVID — can cause mitochondrial damage and an accumulation of reactive oxygen species in the immature egg and sperm.

NIGHT-TIME CARDIAC ARREST HIGHER IN WOMEN
 Women are more likely than men to suffer sudden death due to cardiac arrest during night-time hours, a new study suggests.

The study, published in the journal *Heart Rhythm*, says 25.4 per cent of females studied suffered cardiac arrest at night as compared to 20.6 per cent of their male counterparts. "Dying suddenly during night-time hours is a perplexing and devastating phenomenon. We were surprised to discover that being female is an independent predictor of these events," said researcher Sumeet Chugh from the Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in the US.

Medical experts are mystified, the researcher said, because during these late hours, most patients are in a resting state, with reduced metabolism, heart rate and blood pressure.

Sudden cardiac arrest — also called sudden cardiac death — is an electrical disturbance of the heart rhythm that causes the heart to stop beating, the researcher said.

ALZHEIMER'S GENE LINKED TO VIRUS RISK
 The gene that increases the risk of Alzheimer's disease can increase a person's susceptibility to and severity of COVID-19, researchers say.

The study, published in journal *Cell Stem Cell*, suggests that the gene — ApoE4 — showed a higher susceptibility to SARS-CoV-2 infection.

"Our study provides a causal link between the Alzheimer's disease risk factor ApoE4 and COVID-19 and explains why some (e.g., ApoE4 carriers) but not all COVID-19 patients exhibit neurological manifestations," researcher Yanhong Shi from the US City of Hope said.

"Understanding how risk factors for neurodegenerative diseases impact COVID-19 susceptibility and severity will help us to better cope with the virus and its potential long-term effects in different patient populations," Shi added.

DIALYSIS PATIENTS AT HIGHER COVID RISK
 People undergoing long-term dialysis are almost four times more likely to die from COVID-19 and should be prioritized for vaccination, a new study suggests.

"As the pandemic proceeds, focussed efforts should be made to protect this population from infection including prioritising patients on long-term dialysis and the staff treating them for SARS-CoV-2 vaccination," said researcher Peter Blake, Professor at the Western University in Canada.

For the study, published in *CMAJ* (Canadian Medical Association Journal), the researchers looked at data on 12,501 patients undergoing long-term dialysis, of whom 187 (1.5 per cent) were diagnosed with SARS-CoV-2 infection. Of these, 53 people (28.3 per cent) died and 117 (62.6 per cent) were admitted to hospital, the researchers said.

BESS LEAVES INDIA IN MESS

Dom's four-fer helps England take control after sizzling Pant, calm Pujara's counter-attacking stand

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Rishabh Pant's beautiful edge-of-the-seat hitting ended with his now customary indiscretion, putting India under the pump against a supremely confident England gunning for victory at the end of third day's play in the opening Test here on Sunday.

At stumps, India were 257 for 6 in reply to England's massive first innings score of 578 with 122 runs still needed to avoid the follow-on after Pant (91 off 88 balls) and Cheteshwar Pujara (73 off 143 balls) added 119 runs for the fifth wicket.

Washington Sundar (33 batting, 68 balls), primarily a batsman converted into a specialist off-spinner, was trying to make amends for his poor show with the ball in company of Ravichandran Ashwin (8 batting, 54 balls), who is never tired of a good on-field scrap, at stumps.

With a couple of days' play still left, it will be interesting to see if England team management decides to give its bowlers some respite if it gets a chance to enforce the follow-on.

"We have had some soft dismissals. The way I got out and how Jinks (Ajinkya Rahane) got out. Ash and Washington are batting well. There is a bit of spin but still a good pitch to bat on. Tomorrow will be crucial," Pujara said in the post-play press conference.

The day belonged to the current toast of the Indian team, Pant, who smashed five towering sixes — all in the arc between long-on and deep mid-wicket off left-arm spinner Jack Leach (17-2-94-0). Leach didn't exactly know what had hit him.

Sourav Ganguly treated left-arm spinners with disdain but what Pant showed on Sunday was more of pure, unadulterated contempt.

Leach wanted to target the rough outside Pant's off-stump but every time he tossed it up, the stocky man from Roorkee came out like a raging bull who had been shown the red rag and hit the spinner with the turn into



1st Test, Day 4
Live from 9:30am IST
STAR SPORTS 1 NETWORK

of the Chepauk stands.

He dazzled with his brilliance and then in an annoying manner, forgot that discretion is always the better part of valour while trying to hit off-spinner Dom Bess (23-5-55-4) over extra cover against the spin.

This was after dispatching England's most successful bowler to the square leg boundary.

And he found the only man stationed at the deep extra cover — none other than Leach, who latched onto it as if his life depended on it.

It was an innings that can evoke different emotions depending on one's own perception of Pant.

A Pant fan who loves his craft will

feel an overriding sense of joy and exhilaration just seeing him hit Leach for four sixes few minutes after India were down and out at 73 for 4. Or just smack James Anderson through the cover region.

If one is talking about a Test cricket fan then exasperation can take over just thinking about the possibilities had he decided to exercise some caution. Pant has quite literally thrown away Test hundreds four times in his short career.

But then that's Pant. There won't be any middle path and perhaps the Indian team management will now try to mould itself rather than trying to change him which obviously didn't

WE'RE IN GREAT SEAT: BESS

PTI ■ CHENNAI

England off-spinner Dom Bess rated the wicket of India skipper Virat Kohli as one of the best of his burgeoning career and said his team is in a "great seat" after day three of the first Test with the pitch expected to spin more.

"It (Kohli's wicket) is certainly up there. He is a phenomenal and a high-calibre player. He is world-class and one of the best. It is more about the process. What I am learning and doing is getting me to where I want to be," Bess told reporters after close of play.

"I am 23 and maybe going to keep going. The journey is going to be up and down. The wicket



has given me a lot of confidence. I don't want to think about it too much in the middle of the game. We have so much to work on. We have got him out and will try to

get him out next innings as well. It is a long series."

Bess ended the day with 4 for 55 including the key scalps of Kohli, Ajinkya Rahane, Rishabh Pant and Cheteshwar Pujara.

The England offie, who is playing his 13th Test and took 12 wickets in the recent tour of Sri Lanka, said he was bowling really well at the moment.

"To be honest, I am bowling really well at the moment. We haven't bowled that much in a match situation. But, I was actually really confident going out there. The most important thing is the collective effort. We have taken six wickets today."

"It has step up the game nicely and it is starting to spin. It is

only going to get more. The new ball is around the corner and we are in a great seat at the moment," Bess added.

Asked how confident he was about winning the game, the England cricketer said he didn't want to get too far ahead.

"The most important thing is to finish off the first innings. We will then see where India are at that point. India has got Ashwin and Sundar who can certainly bat..."

"We will come back on Monday and reassess. Hopefully, we take four wickets. We know that the games over here speed up very quickly. We will stick to our processes and Monday is just a new day," he added.

n't work for both parties.

Just like they don't want to change Cheteshwar Pujara, whose 73 off 143 balls over nearly four hours, was in complete contrast to Pant's pyrotechnics.

The Indian team's 'PPP' model — the 'Pant-Pujara Partnership' worked and even more so because the senior player was dispatching those boundary balls during their 119 runs stand in just over 24 overs.

But then Virat Kohli, who looked a touch dejected in the end, wouldn't mind if Pant's shot had sailed into the stands. Pujara's pull had bounced off Ollie Pope stationed at forward short leg off Bess only to lob into the waiting hands of Rory Burns.

Bess easily impressed as he got the ball to dip and drift, something that worked for him while outfoxing Virat Kohli (11), who was caught at forward short leg.

Ajinkya Rahane (1) was brilliantly caught by Joe Root when a full toss dipped on him at the final moment. This was after Rohit Sharma (6) and Shubman Gill (29 off 28 balls) were dismissed by Jofra Archer (16-3-52-2).

Pant can be sensible in putting team first: Pujara

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Cheteshwar Pujara doesn't want Rishabh Pant to curb his natural attacking instincts but would like the swash-buckler to be more "sensible" with his shot selection while putting the team's requirements above everything else.

Pant scored a breathtaking 91 off 88 balls but then threw it away with a poor shot off Dom Bess.

"It is his (Pant) natural game so we cannot restrict him much. He can't be too defensive because by doing so he can get out quickly. It is good for his game that he keeps on playing his shots but, at times, he has to be very selective," said Pujara at the end of the day's play.



He needs to understand which shots to play, which not. He needs to understand in which situation it is important that he stays in the crease. Balancing things out is the most important for him," said one of the calmest influences in the Indian dressing room.

whoever is there in the crease. He is capable of putting the team first because whenever he bats longer, then we will always end up posting a big total. So, I am sure he will realise that."

The senior batsman feels that if Pant is "sensible" and listens to the communication from the coaching staff, he can avoid those ugly dismissals.

"... And then there are times when he also has to understand and the coaching staff always communicates with him that. He has to put the team first and be little sensible at times. He has done that most of the times. There are times when gets out and looks ugly."

Mayers headlines record chase

Debutant's epic 210* in 4th innings helps WI beat B'desh in 1st Test

AFP ■ CHATTOGRAM

Kyle Mayers scored a sensational century in his debut match as the West Indies registered an unlikely three wicket win over Bangladesh in first Test.

Mayers made 210* while fellow debutant Nkrumah Bonner scored 86 as the Windies overhauled the target with three wickets remaining at the very end of the Test.

Mayers fittingly hit the winning run with just 1.3 overs left on the final day to complete the stunning run chase. Mehidy Hasan picked up 4/113 for Bangladesh.

The second Test of the two-match series starts in Dhaka on February 11.

The result meant West Indies achieved the fifth highest total of all time in the fourth innings of a Test match win. It was also the highest successful Test run-chase in Asia.

Resuming on 110/3, the



pair on debut frustrated the Bangladesh bowlers and took their partnership to 216.

Bonner pulled off-spinner Mehidy Hasan over square leg for a boundary with the first ball of the day and Mayers brought

HIGHEST SUCCESSFUL RUN-CHASES IN TESTS				
Team	Score	Opposition	Venue	Date
West Indies	418/7	Australia	St John's	9 May 2003
South Africa	414/4	Australia	Perth	17 Dec 2008
India	406/4	West Indies	Port of Spain	7 Apr 1976
Australia	404/3	England	Leeds	22 Jul 1948
West Indies	395/7	Bangladesh	Chattogram	3 Feb 2021

Faisal Features

up the century stand by hitting Mustafizur Rahman for a four and six off successive deliveries.

Mayer became the 15th West Indies batsman to get a debut century when he edged a Mustafizur ball to the boundary between slip and gully.

After two disappointing sessions, Taijul Islam finally gave Bangladesh some hope, dismissing Bonner in the first over after tea.

Bangladesh then appeared to tighten its grip on the match as off-spinner Nayeem Hasan dismissed Jermaine Blackwood for 9, leaving the West Indies at 292/5.

But Mayers continued his spectacular attack with wicket-keeper Joshua Da Silva giving him the necessary support to seal the victory.

Silva scored just 20 in their 100-run partnership and was out just three runs away from victory.

Mayers, meanwhile, brought up his double hundred off 303 balls with a gentle punch to deep backward point for a single. He then hit his seventh six to put the tourists on the verge of the victory before pushing one off Nayeem Hasan to mid-on for a single to confirm the victory.

Ankita finds place in Aus Open main draw

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Ankita Raina on Sunday became only the fifth Indian woman tennis player in Open era to secure a place in the main draw of a Grand Slam as she made the cut for the women's doubles event of the Australian Open.

The year's first Grand Slam starts here on Monday.

After missing out on the women's singles main draw, she still had a chance to qualify as a 'lucky loser' till the completion of the first round, but the 28-year-old realised her long-time dream when she signed up with Romania's Mihaela Buzarnescu and earned a direct entry.

Nirupama Mankad (1971), Nirupama Vaidyanathan (1998), Sania Mirza and Indian-American Shikha Uberoi (2004) have competed in the Grand Slam main draws for the country.

Ankita is only the second Indian after Sania, a six-time Grand Slam champion, to com-



pete in the women's doubles of a tennis major.

Nirupama was the first to crack a singles Grand Slam main draw, back in 1998 at Australian Open, while Nirupama Mankad played the 1971 Wimbledon mixed doubles with Anand Amritraj.

Shikha had competed in the 2004 US Open and reached the

singles second round.

The braveheart, who played a key role in Indian Fed Cup team's tremendous progress, said although singles hold a different significance, making the doubles too is special.

"It's first main draw of a Grand Slam, so singles or doubles, I will take it. It's special. Russia crush Italy for ATP Cup

triumph Years of hard work, toil and now I am there. Not only my hard work but blessings and support of countless people have brought me here, I can't forget that," Ankita said after her entry.

"I know it's doubles but India's name will be there. These are the moments that spark something among people. Maybe a few will start dreaming that it's possible," she added.

"People start believing. We touch many small milestones but this one is at a pinnacle. Anyone who starts playing professional tennis, dreams of playing in a Grand Slam."

"Regardless of the fact that it is doubles, I will take it. I kept at it. I stayed in the process. Maybe next time, I will play singles too. After years of hard work, it is starting with doubles but singles will happen. It's first, so special," she added.

Ankita and Mihaela will open their campaign against Australian wild card pair of Olivia Gadecki and Belinda Woolcock.

Markram, Van Dussen keep Proteas in game

AP ■ RAWALPINDI

Aggressive batting by Aiden Markram and Rassie van der Dussen gave hope to South Africa's bid to level the series after Pakistan set the tourists a challenging target of 370 runs on the fourth day of the second and final Test on Sunday.

Markram (59) and Dussen (48) both stayed unbeaten and carried the Proteas to 127-1 at stumps on day 4 as both batsmen added 94 runs and dominated the last session of the day.

South Africa, which lost the first Test by seven wickets but has not lost a Test series against Pakistan in 18 years, needs a further 243 runs on the last day on a seemingly batsman-friendly pitch.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Mohammad Rizwan (115) earlier hit an unbeaten maiden test century and shared a record-breaking ninth-wicket stand with Nauman Ali before Pakistan was bowled out for 298 for an overall lead of 369 runs.

But Markram and van der Dussen launched a counterat-



tack against spinner Nauman Ali and Pakistan's pacers Hasan Ali and Faheem Ashraf by striking 17 boundaries between them.

Pakistan had made an early inroad when Dean Elgar (17) threw away his wicket before tea as the left-hander chased a wide delivery from Shaheen Afridi (1-22) and was caught behind. Markram and van der Dussen then added a brisk 94 runs to bring South Africa back into contention.

Harry Kane's team win

AFP ■ LONDON

Harry Kane returned from injury to ease the pressure on Jose Mourinho as the Tottenham striker inspired a 2-0 win against West Bromwich Albion on Sunday.

Mourinho's side had lost their previous three Premier League games to put their top-four hopes in peril.

Revitalised by Kane's earlier than expected return from an ankle problem suffered against Liverpool, Tottenham got back to winning ways just when the under-fire Mourinho needed it most.

Kane had missed the last two games, but he made up for lost time by opening the scoring in the second half at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

Kane's 20th goal in all competitions this season took him to 208 goals in 317 Tottenham appearances — level in joint second place alongside Bobby Smith in the club's all-time scoring list.



The England captain's milestone goal was followed by a Son Heung-min strike moments later that killed off West Brom.

LEIPZIG VS LIVERPOOL IN BUDAPEST

AFP ■ LEIPZIG

Liverpool's Champions League last-16 away tie against RB Leipzig will be staged in Budapest as coronavirus restrictions bar the English champions travelling to Germany, Uefa announced on Sunday.

The February 16 first leg "will now take place at Puskas Arena in Budapest," European

football's governing body confirmed. Budapest was chosen as a neutral venue after Bundesliga side Leipzig's request for a travel exemption for their English rivals was turned down by the German Government.

Though there are some exceptions for medical workers and others in key professions the new protocol contains no special provision for professional sportspeople.

They kick off their

Russia crush Italy for ATP Cup triumph

AFP ■ MELBOURNE

Relentless Russia crushed Italy 2-0 to win their maiden ATP Cup on Sunday with Daniil Medvedev and Andrey Rublev in ruthless, red-hot form leading into the Australian Open.

Russia were the only nation in the 12-team event to boast two top 10 players and they had swept past Japan, Argentina and Germany en route to the decider.

Italy were flattened by the same Russian juggernaut on Rod Laver Arena, with Rublev destroying Fabio Fognini 6-1, 6-2 in just 61 minutes before Medvedev overpowered Matteo Berrettini 6-4, 6-2 in 79 minutes.

"It's unbelievable," said Russia captain Evgeny Donskoy. "If the level is going to be the same, these guys are going to see each other in the (Australian Open) quarter-finals because I saw the draw."

World number four Medvedev and eighth-ranked Rublev have been the two hottest players on tour since last year's US Open.

They kick off their



Australian Open campaigns on Tuesday and are scheduled to meet in the last eight.

Medvedev is now on a career-long win streak of 14 matches, including his third ATP Masters title in Paris and victory at the season-ending ATP Tour Finals, with 10 of those victories over top 10 opponents.

"It's a really big achievement ... it's a big boost in confidence," said Medvedev of his run of wins against top-ranked players.

"Even when you lose, you

know that you're capable of playing this level, and it helps you for the next time to stand up."

Rublev has been equally impressive, winning five ATP titles in a breakthrough 2020, more than anyone else, as he raced up the rankings.

He ended his season by beating world number three Dominic Thiem at the ATP Finals and has started 2021 with four straight wins at the ATP Cup, dropping just one set, to make him a contender at the Australian Open.