



## UNIQUE CELEBRATION

Actor Alia Bhatt has recreated a popular scene from *Highway* as the movie completed seven years of its release

LEISURE P2



## PROTESTS CONTINUE IN MYANMAR

Protests gathered steam Sunday following the killing of 19-year-old girl who had gathered to protest against the junta

INTERNATIONAL P10



## TITLE FOR DJOKOVIC

Novak Djokovic wins his record-extending ninth Australian Open crown at Melbourne

SPORTS P12

## IRREGULAR by MANJUL



These are only for car owners. Only those who can afford petrol can buy my vegetables.

# SRC alerts dists to tighten COVID rules

PNN & AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 21:** The Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) Sunday directed the district Collectors, Superintendents of Police and Municipal Commissioners to ensure strict implementation of Covid-19 safety guidelines in all public places including workplaces to avoid any chance of resurgence of the virus in the state.

"It is observed that people at many places are showing complacency in observing the basic safety protocols such as mandatory wearing of mask or other face covering while in public place, frequent hand-washing or use of hand sanitizer, maintaining minimum one meter physical distance, avoiding congregation, etc.," the SRC said in its letter to the other state officials.

It also added, "At this juncture, we need to be very careful and ensure strict enforcement of the COVID-19 safety protocols by all in public places including workplaces to avoid any chance of resurgence of the disease in our state." The department asked Collectors to take legal action against the defiant citizens and institutions if needed. "Strong penal action shall be taken against the persons violating the COVID-19 Guidelines/ safety protocols. Shops and other commercial establishments found violating such norms may be sealed and action as per law be taken

State	Update	1,43,127	1,06,78,048	1,56,21,214
Kerala	66087	260475	4483	1584
Maharashtra	4061	261328	214680	1091
Maharashtra	45956	1249	515310	2784
Karnataka	151713	1053	425653	10893
Karnataka	15901	813	265643	3042
Tamil Nadu	12287	922058	702	123059
Tamil Nadu	4147	830782	620	881369
West Bengal	17451	259973	5132	1533
West Bengal	3625	559920	498	53181
Chhattisgarh	3039	117977	1063	1063
Chhattisgarh	3793	378	57052	594
Punjab	2883	1172	38701	664
Punjab	6740	156	20667	348
Uttar Pradesh	2521	591359	91	181
Uttar Pradesh	8712	35	28772	373
Madhya Pradesh	1954	54	5938	135
Madhya Pradesh	3546	41	9414	339
Telangana	1715	40	32961	391
Telangana	1623	38	13765	148
Telangana	1715	24	4373	19
Telangana	1623	4	4948	62
Telangana	1623	4	3396	2

## 7-day lockdown in Amravati

**MUMBAI:** Seven-day total lockdown imposed in Maharashtra's Amravati, Achalpur due to COVID spike. A total lockdown of seven days has been imposed in Amravati City and Achalpur town in Maharashtra due to a large number of coronavirus patients. Mumbai: A seven-day long total lockdown has been imposed in Amravati City as well as Achalpur town in Amravati district due to a large number of coronavirus patients. The announcement was made by Guardian Minister Yashomati Thakur in a press conference on Sunday afternoon.

against such violators," the instructions from the SRC read.

In view of this, the SRC directed the district and police authorities to check and ensure strict observance of COVID-19 safety protocols such as mandatory wearing of mask, maintaining physical distancing in all public places including workplaces and educational institutions.

Concerned authorities of government and private offices/institutions including educational institutions shall be responsible for due compliance of the COVID-19 safety protocols in their respective establishments, the letter said.

Large congregations must be avoided and wherever permission has been granted, compliance of the COVID-19 safety protocols and crowd size shall be strictly monitored.

## Centre warns states against spike in cases

**NEW DELHI:** Amid a spike in daily new cases of COVID-19 in some states including Maharashtra and Kerala, the Centre has advised them to increase the proportion of RT-PCR tests and regularly monitor mutant strains besides refocusing on strict surveillance and stringent containment in selected districts. In a letter to the states, the government has also

stressed that all negative rapid antigen test results should be mandatorily followed by RT-PCR test.

India has been witnessing a rise in the COVID-19 active caseload over the past few days which is pegged at 1,45,634 as on date and now consists of 1.32 per cent of India's total infections. "More than 74 per cent of the active cases of the country are in

Kerala and Maharashtra. Of late it is seen that there has been a spike in the daily cases in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh also. Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir too are witnessing a surge in daily new cases," the ministry said. In the last four weeks in Kerala, the average weekly cases have fluctuated between a high of 42,000 and a low of 34,800.

1800 266 266 1 (tollfree)

## Economic Survey talks about hiked tax deficit scenario

Double whammy on the GST front may kill the tax net of the govt & affect the overall collections



of the fiscal were unlikely to compensate the losses in GST and other taxes.

"Only 49.06 per cent of the estimated receipts could be achieved indicating a shortfall of 50.94 per cent and the state has fallen 42.91 per cent short in GST collection as of December 2020 end. It may be very difficult to make up the shortfall within three months," the report said.

The report added, "The shortfall in GST revenue could have been neutralised by the GST compensation by the Central government. But here again, the requirement is 14 per cent growth in state GST revenue, which is next to impossible this fiscal and the Union government may not have enough funds to compensate the states."

## SHORT TAKES

### Two more ruling MLAs quit in Pondy

**Pondicherry:** Two more MLAs of the Congress-DMK alliance in Pondicherry resigned Sunday, delivering yet another jolt to Chief Minister V Narayanasamy, a day before he is scheduled to face a floor test in the assembly to prove his majority. The resignation by Congress MLA K Lakshminarayana and DMK legislator Venkatesan further reduced the strength of the ruling alliance to 11, while the Opposition has 14 MLAs in the 33-member Assembly, which has seven vacancies.

### BSF jawan injured in landmine blast

**Malkangiri:** A BSF jawan was critically wounded Sunday after a landmine planted by Maoists exploded on the roadside near Kartanpalli under Mathili police limits in Malkangiri. The wounded jawan has been admitted to the district headquarters hospital and is currently undergoing treatment. According to reports, jawans of 160th Battalion stationed at Kartanpalli were returning to their camp after carrying out anti-Maoist operations in various parts of the district.

### Another jumbo found dead in Karlapat

**Bhawanipatna:** An elephant calf was found dead near a nullah at Ghusrigudi in Karlapat wildlife sanctuary taking the toll to seven within a gap of 20 days. The death was due to suspected haemorrhagic septicaemia, sources said. Earlier, six elephants-all pregnant, died of the bacteria infection.

## Jaleshpatta Ashram chief gets threat calls



POST NEWS NETWORK

Ashram chief had lodged a complaint after getting a death threat over on mobile phone Saturday.

The accused will be taken for questioning to help the police elicit more information from him about the case, police said.

The ashram chief got a threat call at around 5 pm Saturday and 9 am Sunday on his phone when the caller on the other side impersonating as Maoists threatened to blow up the ashram with bombs. Scared, Swami Jivannuktananda lodged a complaint at the Tumudibandha police station demanding adequate security for his life.

"A phone call was received and they threatened to blow up our Jaleshpatta Ashram within four days as well as kill me. The callers were speaking in Hindi," Puri said.

"How dare they resort to such a call issuing death threats? In 2008, five of our ashram mates were shot dead. We are into social welfare activities. I demand security," he added.

Police tightened security at the ashram after the complaint was filed. Kandhamal SP also visited Tumudibandha and reviewed the progress on the probe.

Notably, Swami Laxmananda Saraswati, the then chief of the Jaleshpatta Ashram and four of his aides were killed August 23, 2008 evening. The incident sparked communal violence in the state wherein at least 38 people were killed.



Snow covers the town of Jezzine in southern Lebanon

REUTERS PHOTO

## CBI sends notice to quiz TMC MP Abhishek's wife, in-law

AGENCIES

**New Delhi/Kolkata, Feb 21:** A CBI team Sunday went to the Kolkata residence of Abhishek Banerjee, TMC MP and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew, serving a notice to his wife and sister-in-law to join the probe in the coal pilferage case, a development that has further raised the political temperature in poll-bound West Bengal. The team handed over the notice issued by Investigation Officer Umesh Kumar, Additional Superintendent of Police in the

### BATTLE FOR BENGAL



CBI, in connection with the case of theft of coal from the mines of Eastern Coalfields Ltd in West Bengal in which Anup Manjhi is the

alleged mastermind, sources said.

The notice issued Sunday asked Abhishek Banerjee's wife Rujira Banerjee to remain present at her address on Harish Mukherjee Road on the same day "for the purpose of answering certain questions relating to the case", they said.

The CBI has also asked the TMC MP's sister-in-law Menaka Gambhir to join the probe on Monday when she will be quizzed by the investigation team, the sources said.

The Trinamool Congress and the BJP targeted each other over the CBI action.

## Parties expect 'growth-oriented' Budget today

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 21:** In their interaction with the media, different political parties Sunday said that the state Budget, to be tabled Monday, should be aligned such that it paves way for recovery from the damages caused by the pandemic.

Leader of Opposition Pradipta Naik said that criticism of the government on the state of economy would not be apt for the political parties as the economy was in the doldrums across the globe.

"It is not good for the Opposition to criticise the government as the pandemic has hit the different sectors of economy," he said. However, he said that the government needs to do better in funding the health sector.

Naik said, "The government has ample money and it needs to take special care of health, drinking water and education. It will be a challenge for the government to provide jobs to the unemployed. Now things have started to be normal, the government needs to take care of the development of the state."

The Congress party, on the other hand, criticised the government for its poor economic records. Congress leader Taraprasad Bahinipati said, "The per capita income in the state has decreased and is a matter of concern. The government has also lost revenue from most of the sectors of the economy."

According to Bahinipati, only the liquor sector had seen some stabilisation. The state government has only been beating its own trumpet about development, but is hollow from inside. The government has been creating new records in borrowing."

# Chinese social media debates who is in control of Ladakh

BEFORE THE FOCUS SHIFTED TO 'NATIONAL MOURNING', AN INTERESTING DEBATE WAS SEEN ON THE CHINESE SOCIAL MEDIA CIRCLES ON THE EFFICACY OF THE DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT BETWEEN CHINA AND INDIA

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, Feb 21:** The February 11 agreement for disengagement on the north and south banks of Pangong Tso and the PLA Daily, for the first time, publicly claiming four Chinese casualties from the Galwan clash February 19 have once again made China-India border standoff a major talking point in China.

Before the focus shifted to 'national mourning' and the emotional outpour over the fallen soldiers, an interesting debate was seen on the Chinese Internet and social media circles on the efficacy of the disengagement agreement between China and India, particularly which side has compromised and by how much.

While there was some satisfaction that a major crisis could be averted

for the time being, there was much more disappointment in China over perceptions like "China has given away too much - a piece for peace", that "the concession was inexplicable" and "the agreement unfair and unfavourable to China".

Many commentators in the Chinese Internet argued that the retreat was far from "equidistant" - China retreated far more than India, demolished more structures than India and surrendered its key advantages at the Northern Bank of Pangong Lake.

That China can no longer station troops/patrol between the 4th and 8th finger as per the agreement, is seen by many as the real disadvantage for the Chinese side.

"On the northern bank of the Pangong Lake, China was able to pa-



trol till F2 in the 1990s. India built a stronghold at F3 as late as 2014 and according to its own admission, it can patrol till F4/F5 once every two months due to poor condition of infrastructure in the Indian side. India did occupy some heights in the F4 in September last year but was still not able to cross F4. In contrast, the China had a "water base"

in F8, a base in F5, and a decent road connecting F4-F8. It had actual control of the region, was in a much stronger position and had much greater mobility as compared to India. But according to the new agreement China must dismantle all the fortifications, buildings, cannon, positions, tents etc., built between F8-F4 and stop patrolling of

the area as well. This is undoubtedly, India's victory on the Northern Bank", argues an anonymous account in a long thread on LAC disengagement at the online military forum, chaojidabenyong.net.

Others at the forum, however, tried to counter the gloom by arguing that this was not really a total concession from China, at most a 'tie' between China and India. They argue that in the middle of last year, during the Sino-Indian military negotiations, China had already proposed that the two sides disengage from the F4 standoff site equidistantly.

That is, China retreats from F4 to F8, and India retreats from F4 to F2-F3. But at that time, it was rejected by the Indian military on grounds that F4-F8 was previously an area where both sides patrolled, that it was

newly occupied by China in April 2020, while F2-F3 was a territory occupied by India for a long time.

"Equidistant", according to the Indian side, meant that China retreats to F8 and India does not move, so that 'status quo ante' or the state of the border before April 2020 can be restored. But in the ninth round of talk, India actually gave up its earlier demands and agreed to the same "equidistant" disengagement proposal, which is equivalent to accepting China's proposal last year.

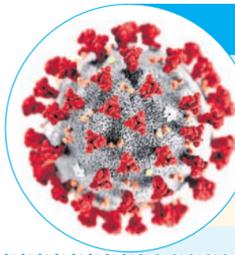
In a way, agreeing to China's proposal also means India's recognition of China's actual control status of F4-F8, just like India's actual control over F2-F3, which can also be interpreted as India's disguised recognition of China's sovereignty over F4-F8.





## NOBLE DEED

Volunteers undertake a cleanliness drive at Akhandala Mani temple in Puri, Sunday



## COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	11,17,29,153	8,68,99,828	24,73,747
India	1,09,63,272	1,06,65,813	1,56,147
Odisha	3,36,636	3,34,107	1,914

# Rehabilitate oustees within 3 months: NHRC

AGENCIES

**Kendrapara, Feb 21:** The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has asked the state Chief Secretary to complete the rehabilitation and resettlement of five revenue villages displaced due to tiger and wildlife conservation projects in Angul district's Satkosia within three months.

The apex rights panel has passed the order recently while adjudicating a petition filed by human rights activist Radhakanta Tripathy January 30, 2014. The commission, in its earlier orders, had sought a report from the Odisha Forest and Environment Special Secretary, the Principal Secretary, and Director, National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), New Delhi on the issue.

The commission directed the state to submit an additional/ requisite report in the matter. The response is awaited and the matter is pending for want of some additional information.

Being a seven-year-old case, the matter has been placed before the

## SATKOSIA TIGER PROJECT



commission for reconsideration of its earlier proceedings.

The present case relates to the rehabilitation of forest dwellers, whose villages came under the tiger conservation project and the villagers were forced to evict, but the state government has not taken any resettlement and rehabilitation measures.

The report further stated that

Earlier, the Commission asked the Director, NTCA, to expedite the relocation and submit a report, but the authority failed to respond

The DFO, Mahanadi (WL) Division has also been asked to accelerate the process after a discussion with concerned persons so as to ensure achievement within the shortest time

as regards the relocation of village Marada in Mahanadi (WL) Division is concerned, due to Left-Wing Extremist problems, the progress has been delayed.

Earlier, the commission asked the Director, NTCA, to expedite the relocation and submit a report, but the authority failed to respond. The DFO, Mahanadi (WL) Division has also been asked to accelerate the process by a discussion with concerned persons so as to ensure achievement within the shortest time.

"The admission of the state authorities regarding the delay in ensuring the basic amenities of life to one villager for the Left-wing Extremists is an abominable phenomenon in a democracy," the state said. Earlier, NHRC was informed that due to lack of funds from the NTCA and the existence of Left-Wing Extremism, the inhabitants of affected villages Satkosia Wildlife Division are facing problems due to man-animal conflict.

# We are headed for a mix of online and offline learning: Poly Patnaik

'COVID-19 WILL SHAPE THE EDUCATION LANDSCAPE OVER NEXT FEW DECADES'



That Covid-19 has changed the way we live is not news anymore. The lethal virus has led to tectonic shifts in almost every aspect of our lives and we're still grappling with the repercussions of these radical changes. What we're also debating is what the new normal is in the educational sector. Soon after it became clear that this was no passing virus, educational institutions started online teaching—and students and teachers adapted rather quickly to the changing methods of teaching, learning, and grading. This success, however, has led to widespread speculation that the pandemic has sparked a transformative change.

The truth is that the future is not so black and white anymore—there's a lot of grey in between. What we seem to be moving towards is a hybrid model of learning—a mix of online and offline. While in-campus teaching will definitely return, there will also be a wealth of options available online, for those who prefer it. But, will one take precedence over the other? Not really—because both have their unique characteristics that make them worthwhile. People will learn to use the two together. However, the truth is that online learning can never really replace an in-campus experience. The teacher plays a crucial role in the process. You can't transition an emotional or intellectual bond on-

line. Direct motivation and feedback are not to be replaced any time soon.

Learning subject content is a major purpose for online teaching. However, the students in the class experienced feelings of success in learning through online teaching and this has to do with their confidence in utilizing technology. While minimizing the limitations of not being able to meet in classrooms, we tried to maximize the benefits of online teaching and learning. Teachers presented visual materials on the screen more attractively through drawing on the whiteboard or showing picture stories on a PowerPoint. Online teaching and learning was supported by appropriate instructional strategies and collaborations. The joy of learning has been kept intact by conducting assemblies, sports day, CCA activities and exhibitions online.

The state government has allowed opening of educational institutions. The management of Mother's Public School, Unit 1 decided to resume classes for Std X

& XII students from January 2021 following the safety guidelines issued by the state government and after attending a meeting conducted by BMC on January 6, 2021. The school premises, classrooms, and washrooms are sanitized at regular intervals. An isolation room has been set up in case of any emergency.

Covid-19 will shape the education landscape and the next decades to come. As with the health impact of the pandemic, the educational impact will be mediated by how humans respond, by the actions or omissions of students, parents, teachers and school and system level leaders in anticipation and during the pandemic.

As we rebuild and reinvent ourselves in response to Covid-19, there is an opportunity to accelerate the thinking on how best to support quality education for all. In the months and years ahead, coalitions of evidence-to-policy organizations, implementation partners, researchers, donors, and governments should build on their experiences to develop education-for-all.

*Poly Patnaik is the founder-cum-principal of Mother's Public School*

## STATE-LEVEL CYCLOTHON ORGANISED

Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs Tusharkanti Behera flagged off the event as Chief Guest

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Astaranga, Feb 21:** The Odisha Paryavaran Sanrakshan Abhiyan organised its 5th State Level Cyclothon from Devi river mouth area, one of the prominent sea turtles' nesting zones like Gahirmatha and Rushikulya, Sunday. The theme of the programme was 'Preserve Coasts, Conserve Turtles'. With the support of Dakshin Foundation and Clean Beach India, Odisha Paryavaran Sanrakshan Abhiyan organised the event where more than 100 students, youths, local fishermen and leaders took part.



Olly Mascot led the cycling event from Jahania beach

Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs Tusharkanti Behera flagged off the event as Chief Guest. Clean Beach India founder Satyabratsanu Ratho, Gilherio Founder Surya Mishra, Wildies Founder member Subhendu Bhattacharya, Astaranga block chairman Swadhin Kumar Nayak, social activist Ramakrushna Mohanty were the other guests at the event.

Olly Mascot led the cycling event from Jahania beach and spread awareness on ways to protect the endangered species Olive Ridley sea turtles and their habitat.

## POLITICKLE by MANJUL



# Soon, court fees can be paid online

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 21:** The litigants as well as the advocates in the state will soon make payment of court fees through the online mode. The High Court's Registrar General, Malaya Ranjan Dash, has recently informed the state government about the selection of 'Stock Holding Corporation of India Limited' as the service provider for the rollout of e-payment services at various courts of the state including the High Court.

February 12, the Registrar in a letter to the state Chief Secretary also requested the state government to make provisions for the establishment of a support service centre in the premises of the Orissa High Court for the smooth functioning of the e-payment system.

"Necessary steps may kindly be taken to enable commencement of



online payment of court fees in the High Court of Orissa and District and Subordinate Courts by utilising the services of Stock Holding Corporation of India Limited in coordination with the honourable court," wrote the Registrar General.

Subsequently, February 18, the state Law department directed the Revenue, Finance departments and the Directorate of Treasuries and Inspection to take all the necessary

steps for the commencement of online payment of court fees across the state.

Earlier, the state Assembly has passed Court Fees (Odisha Amendment) Bill, 2020 to facilitate online mode of payment of court fees in October, 2020. Since the Court Fees Act, 1870 provides for payment of court fees through physical stamps only, amendment was required to provide for payment and

Necessary steps may kindly be taken to enable commencement of online payment of court fees in the High Court of Orissa and District and Subordinate Courts by utilising the services of Stock Holding Corporation of India Limited in coordination with the honourable court

HIGH COURT

refund of court fee through electronic mode (e-payment). In view of COVID-19 pandemic, the Orissa High Court and other subordinate courts adopted the virtual mode of functioning. The HC has also permitted electronic filing of cases which necessitates electronic method for payment of court fees.

# With 58 fresh cases, state's Covid tally rises to 3,36,636

ODISHA'S CORONAVIRUS DEATH TOLL REMAINED UNCHANGED AT 1,914 SINCE FRIDAY

PNN & AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 21:** Odisha's Covid-19 tally Sunday mounted to 3,36,636 after 58 more people tested positive for the virus, while three districts became coronavirus-free, a senior Health and Family Welfare (H&FW) department official said.

Of the new cases detected from 18 districts, 34 were reported from quarantine centres, while the remaining 24 were local contact cases, the official said.

The 18 districts had new cases in single digits. Gajapati, Kandhamal and Nabarangpur districts in the southern region of the coastal state became Covid-19 free, with no active cases left in the three districts, said the official. The state's coro-



navirus death toll remained unchanged at 1,914 since Friday.

As many as 53 other Covid-19 patients have also died due to comorbidities. Odisha currently has 616 active cases, while 3,34,053 patients have recovered so far.

The state has so far conducted over 81.67 lakh sample tests for Covid-19. Odisha's positivity rate stands at 4.12 per cent, the H&FW department said.

## Fire breaks out at OPTCL substation

AGENCIES

**Dhenkanal, Feb 21:** A major fire broke out at the grid substation of Odisha Power Transmission Corporation Ltd in Dhenkanal district Sunday, officials said.

There was no report of any casualty in the incident in which a 315-MVA transformer caught fire. At least 10 fire tenders were pressed into service to douse the flames.

"About 6,000 litres of foam and 1 lakh litres of water were used to douse the blaze," they said.

The cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained.



# MIN TEMP TO DIP BY TWO DEGREE C ACROSS STATE



AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 21:** After witnessing fluctuations in weather conditions in the past one week, the minimum temperature (night temperature) across the state is likely to witness a further drop, predicted India Meteorological Department (IMD), Sunday.

Though weather is most likely to remain dry, the minimum temperature across the state is likely to fall by two degree Celsius for

the next 48 hours, it said. "Minimum temperature (Night temperature) is very likely to fall by about 2 C at many places over the districts of Odisha during the next two days and no large change thereafter," read an IMD release.

As per IMD, the highest maximum temperature of 33 degree Celsius was recorded at Sundargarh and the lowest minimum temperature of 11 degree Celsius was recorded at Phulbani in the past 24 hours.

THE HIGHEST MAXIMUM TEMPERATURE OF 33 DEGREE CELSIUS WAS RECORDED AT SUNDARGARH

THE LOWEST MINIMUM TEMPERATURE OF 11 DEGREE CELSIUS WAS RECORDED AT PHULBANI

Similarly, there has been an appreciable fall in the minimum temperature at a few places over the districts of Coastal Odisha and at one or two places over the districts of interior Odisha.

"The trough in low levels east-erlies over west-central Bay of Bengal now lies over southwest & adjoining west-central Bay of Bengal coast to north Andhra Pradesh coast across north Tamil Nadu coast at 1.5 km above mean sea level," said IMD.

## FOREST FIRE



Fire brigade personnel douse flames that engulfed a portion of Balukhand sanctuary near Konark in Puri, Sunday

# The problem with 600 illegal brick kilns in Nimapara

The area will witness severe air pollution if immediate steps are not taken on the illegal brick kiln issue



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Nimapara, Feb 21:** Hundreds of illegal brick kilns have come up at several villages of Nimapara block here posing threat to the environment, locals said.

This apart, quite a few brick kilns are operating illegally at various places under Nimapara Notified Area Council (NAC), sources said.

Though the state government has put restrictions on brick kilns in residential areas, at least 600 brick kilns have come up at 32 gram panchayats of Nimapara block and several localities of Nimapara NAC, said a few locals.

According to the locals, one can find hundreds of illegal brick kilns at Denua, Miteipur, Viligram, Salang, Bannal, Haripur, Tamalo, Tulasiapur, Baharena, Podar, Kalapanchana, Chhanjang and other gram panchayats of Nimapara block. Besides, there are also plenty of brick kilns operating illegally at Patapur, Hatasahi, Nuarakiri, Dipisena, Alaka, Kiakanta, Bhubanpur, Talaandia and Andiasahi area of Nimapara NAC, they said.

"The officials of the Revenue department have turned a blind eye to the illegal brick kilns. As a result, the state government is losing huge amount of revenue. This apart, the illegal kilns are causing air pollution," said a social activist.

**The officials of the Revenue department have turned a blind eye to the illegal brick kilns. As a result, the state government is losing huge amount of revenue. This apart, the illegal kilns are causing air pollution**

SOCIAL ACTIVIST

**We would soon undertake raids on illegal brick kilns and take stern action against their owners**

RAMA CHANDRA JENA | TEHSILDAR, NIMAPARA

ing air pollution," said a social activist. Many villagers, meanwhile, alleged that some unscrupulous officials of the Revenue department are receiving huge sums as bribes from the owners of illegal brick kilns.

"These officials are indirectly encouraging people to set up brick kilns illegally. Nimapara area will witness severe air pollution if immediate steps are not taken on the illegal brick kiln issue. We would be forced to hit the street if the authorities concerned do not act on the issue," said a villager.

The villagers have urged Puri Collector, Revenue Minister, Revenue department secretary and 5T Secretary to look into the issue at the earliest. Nimapara Tehsildar Rama Chandra Jena said they would soon undertake raids on illegal brick kilns and take stern action against their owners.

## 100 fall ill after marriage feast

AGENCIES

**Kendrapara, Feb 21:** Nearly 100 people fell sick due to food poisoning after eating at a marriage feast in Kendrapara district, police said.

Residents of Matia village had attended the marriage function Saturday night.

They complained of vomiting, stomachache and nausea in the early hours of Sunday, a district health official said.

"It is a case of food poisoning as nearly 100 people had the same symptoms," health officials said.

At least 12 of them were undergoing treatment at the Pattamundi sub divisional hospital here.

"They are out of danger and their condition is being monitored," the district health official said.

## Police clampdown on theatre show running sans permission in Begunia

AGENCIES

**Begunia, Feb 21:** Concerned over the surge of COVID-19 cases in other states, the district administration of Khurda Saturday night closed down a theatre group for staging shows without permission at Begunia.

As per reports, a theatre group named Ranga Mahal was performing at Begunia when the police, after getting a complaint, played spoilsport and shut it down.

Sources said, the troupe arrived at Begunia February 19, 2021 and staged its first show on the same night. However, following a fresh order by the state government to enforce strict implementation of COVID guidelines, a team led by the Tehsildar of Begunia and accompanied by the police shut it down on the second day, February 20, 2021.

It was also found that the troupe was performing without permission from the administration.

Speaking about the clamp down, district Collector of Khurda, Sanat Kumar Mohanty said, "After getting a complaint about a theatre group operating without permission, I



Dignitaries including Linguist Debi Prasanna Pattanayak, Minister of State for Home Dibya Shankar Mishra, Odia Language Literature & Culture department Secretary Bishnupada Sethi and novelist Pratibha Ray release a book on vocabulary during the celebration of International Mother Language Day by Odia Bhasa Pratisthan at Sanskruti Bhawan in Bhubaneswar, Sunday

**After getting a complaint about a theatre group operating without permission, I directed the IIC of police station to intervene. After reaching there, we found that it was operating without permission indeed and no social distancing was being maintained there**

SANAT KUMAR MOHANTY | COLLECTOR, KHURDA

THE STATE GOVT HAS ALLOWED MAX 500 AUDIENCE MEMBERS

THE THEATRE ARTISTES SEEK THE NUMBER TO BE INCREASED TO 2,000 SO AS TO HAVE MEANINGFUL COMMERCIAL GAINS

THE THEATRE ARTISTES SATURDAY THREATENED TO LAUNCH 'FAST ON TO DEATH' AGITATION NEAR ODISHA ASSEMBLY FROM FEBRUARY 22 SEEKING PERMISSION ON THE SAME DEMAND

directed the IIC of police station to intervene. After reaching there, we found that it was operating without permission indeed and no social distancing was being maintained there."

"They can be allowed to perform the show if they apply for the same

following due process. However, they will have to adhere to COVID guidelines laid out by the government of Odisha," said Mohanty.

In addition to this, Mohanty has also directed all the field officers to keep a close vigil on social gatherings and enforce the COVID guidelines strictly.

It is worthwhile to mention here that the theatre artistes Saturday threatened to launch 'fast on to death' agitation near Odisha Assembly from February 22 seeking permission from the state government to allow them to organise opera with 2,000 spectators.

Though the state government has allowed staging of theatre shows with 500 audience members, the artistes claim that it is not enough to run shows and earn a decent living with such crowd.

## MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY

## One dead, 8 hurt in bus mishap in Kandhamal



**I was trying to stop the vehicle, but failed due to sudden failure of the brakes. It led to the accident**

IGNESH PRADHAN | DRIVER

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Baliguda, Feb 21:** A passenger was killed on the spot Saturday night and eight others sustained injuries after a bus in which they were travelling fell off a steep ghat at Petarabadi village of Partamaha panchayat under Daringbadi police limits in Kandhamal district.

The identity of the deceased person is yet to be established. According to sources, passenger Dekara Pradhan (70) was grievously injured in the mishap. He was admitted to MKCG Medical College and Hospital (MKCGMCH) Berhampur for treatment. The other injured passengers are:

Sunapa Pradhan (20), Swarna Pradhan (60), Nakul Pradhan (23), Sarita Pradhan (20), Mayanki Pradhan (74), Ignesh Pradhan (18) and Hirapa Pradhan (27).

The bus was on its way to Ranipanga from Daringbadi area in Kandhamal district. The driver of the bus lost control over the vehicle which skidded off the ghat, an eyewitness said.

"I was trying to stop the vehicle, but failed due to sudden failure of the brakes. It led to the accident," driver of the bus Ignesh Pradhan said.

On being informed by locals, Daringbadi police rushed to the accident site and launched a probe into the incident.

## 2 DRUG PEDDLERS HELD IN CUTTACK

THE ACCUSED WERE IDENTIFIED AS BIKASH SWAIN AND PRASANT KUMAR SAHOO OF ATHAGARH

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 21:** The Special Task Force (STF) of the state Crime Branch has arrested two persons from Ankula area under Athagarh police limits in Cuttack after re-



covering around 164 gram of brown sugar from their possession, an official said Sunday.

The accused were identified as Bikash Swain and Prasant Kumar

Sahoo of Athagarh.

The officials were tipped off about the peddling following which a STF team carried out a raid at a roadside eatery along the Ankula-Athagarh

Road Saturday and managed to recover the contraband and make the arrest. A case (34/21) has been registered at the Athagarh police station in this regard. "The duo was being interrogated to find out the involvement of others in the racket and the origin of the seized brown sugar," added the official.

According to sources, the STF teams have conducted six raids at various places during the last month. As many as six drug peddlers were arrested, while 2.976 gram of brown sugar has been recovered from their possession.

## Man approaches CB against cyber harassment, extortion

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 21:** A person has sought the help of state crime branch following repeated threats from an unknown person who has been reportedly trying to extort money from the victim. The cyber fraudster threatened the victim through social media and over phone.

According to sources, the victim identified as Dr Manoj Kumar

Mansingh has received several obscene phone calls and messages on his personal WhatsApp account from various phone numbers since April 25, 2020. The accused also asked Mansingh to pay a hefty amount else the former would kidnap the latter's son.

Meanwhile, the victim received a call from a journalist from Balasore who informed Mansingh that a lady has sent an email to the scribe accusing

the victim of sending obscene messages to the lady on social media. On scrutiny, Mansingh found that the accused person has created a fake Facebook account in his name and sending obscene videos and pictures from the social media account with his morphed photos. He later lodged a case with the state Crime Branch in Cuttack. Sources also revealed that the CID team has succeeded in tracing out the accused person.

## Brainstorming on seed production, aquaculture

The training programme, attended by 202 people, was organised under the STC programme of the ICAR-CIFA

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 21:** A training programme on 'Seed Production and Modern Aquaculture practices' was organised by ICAR-Central Institute of Freshwater Aquaculture, Kausalyaganga, Bhubaneswar at the Odisha Special Armed Police 7th Battalion Campus.

The training programme was organised under the STC programme of the ICAR-CIFA, Saturday. A total of 202 people participated in the programme. Bijay Kumar Sahu, DCP (Armed) welcomed all the dignitaries and participants to the programme and to the 7th Battalion Campus.

Sudhansu Sekhar Sarangi, Commissioner of Police, BBSR was the Chief Guest on this occasion. He appreciated the role of Odisha police personnel showing their keen interest towards scientific



aquaculture practices. He appreciated the sincere efforts of the scientists of the premier research Institute ICAR-CIFA. He emphasised the need for greater linkage among the Odisha Police personnel and ICAR-CIFA for information sharing in freshwater aquaculture and more collaboration in future.

Saroj Kumar Swain, Director, ICAR-CIFA, Kausalyaganga, highlighted the role of ICAR-CIFA for

dissemination of freshwater aquaculture technologies to the tribal areas of the country including NEH states. He encouraged the participants to acquire as much knowledge about fish culture from ICAR-CIFA and use it not only for their livelihood development but as an additional source of income.

P. Routray, Principal Scientist, APED and Chairman, STC Programme of ICAR-CIFA informed

the gathering regarding the role of the institute for dissemination of aquaculture technologies to the tribal communities of India through STC schemes. In the afternoon session, he also narrated the various aquaculture concepts and practices to the participants. He stressed that the need of quality seed, water quality and feed are vital for the fish culture.

K.C. Das, Principal scientist, FNPD, ICAR-CIFA delivered a lecture on feed and feeding management on aquaculture. He explained the requirement for the different feeds for fish culture. He also mentioned the nutrient requirement of the fish at their various life stages. He also proposed the vote of thanks.

On this occasion 12,000 carp seeds were released into the fish pond located in the campus of the 7th Battalion by the dignitaries and a fish seed leaflet was also released.



## BOXING CAMP

Girls learn boxing at a camp at Bholanath Vidyapeeth in Puri, Sunday

OP PHOTO

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## ANTI-LIQUOR BRIGADE



Women of Nelung panchayat in Keonjhar district stage protests alleging bootlegging in villages. They seek ban on liquor sale

## KEREJANGA RLY STATION SHIFTED TO KHURDA ROAD DIVISION

# Sambalpur section to incur ₹250 cr annual loss

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Sambalpur, Feb 21:** The Kerejanga railway station in Angul district which is under the administrative control of Sambalpur railway division has been shifted to the Khurda Road railway division, following a decision by the Union Railway Ministry, a report said.

The decision has drawn sharp reactions from various quarters as the shifting will result in annual revenue loss of ₹250 crore for the Sambalpur railway division. The decision by the Union and the Odisha government to give their consent to such a move has sparked concern among the denizens. Earlier, the Union government had similarly shifted the Masir Hasaud railway station in Chhattisgarh under the administrative control of Sambalpur railway division to the Raipur division in 2011.

The development was confirmed by KK Khadanga, the Chief Public Relation officer (CPRO) of Sambalpur railway division. The shifting of the Kerejanga railway station follows a decision by the



### UNFAIR TREATMENT

Sambalpur railway division earns an annual profit of ₹1,000 crore out of which the contribution of Kerejanga railway station is 25 per cent. This is because large industrial firms like Jindal Power & Steel and others use the Kerejanga station for transportation of their goods

Former MP Bhabani Shankar Hota termed it as mean mindedness and part of a conspiracy. The decision has been taken to boost the revenue collection of Khurda Road railway division at the cost of Sambalpur railway division. He demanded to scrap the decision failing which he warned of a mass movement in coming days

Railway Board for which a final decision was taken February 15. According to available reports, the Sambalpur railway division earns an annual profit of ₹1,000 crore annually out of which the contribution of Kerejanga railway station is 25 per cent. This is because large industrial firms like Jindal Power

& Steel and others use the Kerejanga station for transportation of their goods. Moreover, the industrial firms have also built their stockyards in the railway station for which they pay rent to the Railways. As a result, the department earns substantial profits from the station. Moreover, goods and passenger

trains making halts at the station helps in earning more revenue. The distance of the Kerejanga railway station from the headquarters of Sambalpur railway division is only 130 km while the distance of Khurda Road division from it is 200 km.

Senior citizen Deepak Panda questioned the wisdom behind the decision which will result in loss of revenue and in maligning the image of the Sambalpur railway division. He alleged that the decision has been taken to boost the importance and development of Khurda Road sector. Former MP Bhabani Shankar Hota termed it as mean mindedness and part of a conspiracy. The decision has been taken to boost the revenue collection of Khurda Road railway division at the cost of Sambalpur railway division. He said that the Sambalpur railway division has its own identity for which more division and railway stations should be included into it to help it grow and prosper. He demanded a cancellation of the decision failing which he warned of a mass movement in coming days.

## Fire breaks out at OPTCL grid

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Dhenkanal, Feb 21:** A devastating fire broke out at the grid sub-station of Odisha Power Transmission Corporation Limited (OPTCL) in Dhenkanal district Sunday morning damaging property worth lakhs of rupees, an official source informed.

The mishap took place at about 7:00am. At least 10 fire-fighting teams have been engaged to douse the flames at the power grid near Meramundali area in Dhenkanal district.

No casualties have been reported in the incident so far.

Even though the exact cause behind the fire mishap is yet to be ascertained, a blast in the feeder due to overheating might have led to the incident, an OPTCL official said.

## Youth bludgeoned to death with stone

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Jeypore, Feb 21:** In a gruesome incident, a youth was bludgeoned to death Sunday with a stone in Jeypore town of Koraput district. The deceased was identified as Chandra Paraja, a resident of Malisahi.

According to reports, Chandra had come Saturday night to Kumbharsahi. Then he returned home with a friend. However, his blood-stained body was found near a dairy farm Sunday morning.

On being informed, police started an investigation with a forensic team. Preliminary investigation found that the head of the youth was smashed with a stone, which was recovered at the crime scene. His friend is absconding. Bhagwan Paraja, father of the deceased said that his son working in a hotel had not come home since last two years.

# Mega irrigation project hangs fire

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Baripada, Feb 21:** Aimed at boosting the farming sector through irrigation, construction of a mega-project was started in Mayurbhanj district six years ago. The project had then sparked hopes among farmers of being able to produce good crops with water available throughout the year. However, the hopes have taken a nosedive with the project getting delayed.

Locals have blamed the construction agency for delaying in implementing the irrigation project. Farmers are unsure of the execution of the project as they have been facing water shortage to save crops every year.

According to the report, the Odisha government decided to provide water through irrigation in Badasahi, Bangiriposi, Kaptipada, Rairangpur and Karanjia blocks in 2016. The cost of the project was estimated at ₹517 crore.

The mega project was split into 13 components/sub-projects. Four



irrigation projects are being set up at Balabhadrapur, Khuntal, Kudimunda and Damodarpur under Badasahi block; three projects at Bangiriposi, Hinjala and Kansala under Bangiriposi block; one project at Jamudiha under Kaptipada block; five projects under Karanjia and Rairangpur blocks.

Construction of all these projects is at different stages. Works of intake wells near different rivers, pump houses, staff quarters and

electricity supply of the minor subdivision and underground piping is going on.

It was learnt that the work is moving at a snail's pace since five years. Not even 25 percent work of 12 projects has been completed. KVPR, a construction agency was awarded with the work of implementing the project. It was mandated to complete the work by June 2019. The project has missed the deadline. The agency had sought ex-

tenation of nine more months to complete the work. Still, it has not been able to finish the work.

On the other hand, farmers alleged that over 50,000 hectares of land are awaiting irrigation in the project areas.

"We have been facing acute water shortage in summer while the project remains dysfunctional," lamented farmers like Basant Swain, Jagdish Rath, Suresh Chandra Pati and Hrushikesh Nayak.

They alleged that the agency is getting the work done by petty contractors. Petty contractors are delaying the work as the construction agency is not clearing their dues in time.

Executive engineer of the irrigation department Sunil Kumar Rout said that due to COVID-19 restrictions, the pace of the work has been affected. However, work will resume at full pace soon, he informed. However, farmers' outfits have been demanding steps to expedite the project work as soon as possible.

## Sex racket busted in Bhadrak; 4 women rescued, 2 arrested

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhadrak, Feb 21:** The Bhadrak town police Saturday evening busted a sex racket operating from a rented accommodation in Dagamunda area and arrested two persons in this connection. The cops also rescued four women.

According to a source, four women were staying in a rented house in Dagamunda locality. Local residents had been suspecting something unusual to be going on at the house. People had been visiting the house, more frequently during the night hours.

After learning about a well-organised sex racket operating from the house; locals tipped-off the police following which a team of Bhadrak town police station conducted a raid at the house. They rescued the four women and arrested two customers. The arrested customers were produced in a local court Sunday; it was learnt. They have been sent to police custody.

It was also learnt that a detailed investigation is underway to find out involvement of others in running the sex racket. Efforts are on to find out who is the owner of the house or whether it had been rented out.

## TWO BIKERS KILLED IN ROAD ACCIDENT

**Baripada:** Two persons riding a two-wheeler were killed on the spot following a head-on collision with a car in Mayurbhanj district Saturday night. The vehicle they were riding on was gutted in the fire that broke out following the mishap. The mishap took place on NH-61 along the Chitradra-Amarada road near Jhinkiria under Morada police limits. The car was on its way to Balasore town from Baripada. The ill-fated two-wheeler was coming from Rasagobindapur in Mayurbhanj district when it met with an accident, a police official said. Police recovered the bodies for post mortem.

## 4 days after marriage woman commits suicide

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Dhenkanal, Feb 21:** In a shocking incident, a newly-wed woman allegedly died by suicide four days after her marriage under mysterious circumstances. The incident took place at Bidabandh village under Sadar police limits in Dhenkanal district.

Jharana, daughter of Harihar Nayak of Kalanda village under Hindol police limits, married Madanmohan, elder son of Muralidhar Nayak of Bidabandh village February 17. She was found hanging from the ceiling fan with her saree Saturday. The incident has sent shockwaves through the village. Family members were busy finishing

the rituals of the fourth day Saturday. Some of the family members knocked on the door of the room in which Jharana was staying, but received no answer.

Madanmohan and his other family members broke open the door only to receive the shock of their lives. They found her hanging from the ceiling fan. She was immediately brought down and rushed to the Dhenkanal district headquarters hospital where the doctors declared her dead on arrival.

Police sent the body for post-mortem. Registering a case (Case No-9/21), they have launched an investigation into the incident.

Her father says, his daughter had neurological disorder.

# Central team: Septicaemia causing jumbo deaths

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Kesinga, Feb 21:** A three-member expert team has attributed high stress level in elephants' bodies as the reason behind the death of the pachyderms in Karlapat wildlife sanctuary that led to the outbreak of septicaemia resulting in death of seven female elephants within a span of two weeks, a report said.

The team members said this after conducting a probe at the elephant death sites of Tentulipadar and Ghurugudi villages in Karlapat Wildlife Sanctuary in Kalahandi district from where the carcasses of the elephants had been recovered Sunday.

Meanwhile, the decomposed carcass of an elephant calf was found Sunday morning inside Karlapat Wildlife Sanctuary in Kalahandi district. The carcass of the calf was



sighted at Ghurugudi village inside the wildlife sanctuary. With this new fatality, the death toll of jumbos owing to hemorrhagic septicemia reached seven in the last 20 days, an official source informed.

Prajna P Panda, national coordinator of Elephant, who was a part of the Central team said "All the deceased elephants were pregnant who were infected with sep-

pticaemia. As they were pregnant, stress level in their body was high which was very sensitive to infection."

"The team members visited five sites and collected some samples from five places which will be sent to the Indian Veterinary Research Institute. A detailed report will be submitted to the state government once the testing gets over," she

added. The team members joined a meeting with Collector Gavali Parag Harshad and apprised him about the reason of the death.

"The Central team analysed the sample and confirmed the deaths as cases of hemorrhagic septicemia. The team also appreciated our precautionary measures like disinfection and vaccination to cattle. These activities will be continued for a month," said the Collector Parag Harshad. Ashok Kumar, divisional forest officer and veterinary officials were present in the meeting. Centre for Wildlife (ICAR-IVRI Bareilly) scientist Karikalan Mathesh head of department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine at Ouat Prof Niranjan Sahoo accompanied the expert team.

## LOVE TO THE FORE

# Woman donates liver to critically ill husband

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Kamakhyanagar Feb 21:** At a time when incidents of conjugal life being torn apart due to several reasons are rife, Bijaylaxmi and Prithviraj, a couple from Dhenkanal district, have set an example for others.

Family members spent over ₹10 lakh in Prithviraj's treatment but it yielded no result. A test at a Bhubaneswar-based hospital confirmed that he is suffering from a critical liver disease



Bijaylaxmi married Prithviraj - son of Dhrubacharan Behera - a resident of Jamunakote village under Bhuban block in 2012. Then Prithviraj used to earn enough to manage family expenses. They led a comfortable life with son-Prince Biswajit.

Destiny played a cruel joke on them in 2019 when Prithviraj was first diagnosed with jaundice. The family spent over ₹10 lakh and Prithviraj underwent treatment for close to one year but it yielded

no result. A test at a Bhubaneswar-based hospital confirmed that he is suffering from a critical liver disease. As subsequent treatment did not yield good results, the doctors advised for liver transplantation at Institute of Liver and Biological Science in New Delhi.

As the family was contemplating to go to New Delhi, the pandemic cut short their plans. Lockdown was implemented for a lengthy period preventing the couple from travelling to Delhi. After the restrictions were

lifted, Bijaylaxmi took her husband to Delhi September 7, 2020. She donated 40 per cent of her liver and the same was transplanted on Prithviraj successfully December 21.

After Prithviraj's discharge from the hospital, the couple returned to Odisha. They reached their house February 14 - Valentine's Day, the day that stands for love.

The couple's love for each other, particularly Bijaylaxmi's sacrifice, recently came to the fore and has since been the talk of the town.

Orissa POST correspondent met the couple at their house and during the interaction Bijaylaxmi said they have spent over ₹30 lakh for the treatment of her husband. The hospital fee alone was close to ₹15 lakh. "However, all's well that ends well. My husband is cured now. I am thankful to god," she said.

Prithviraj said that his wife has given him a new lease of life. "If I am breathing today it is only because of my wife her. She has given me a new lease of life. I can never thank her enough," he said.

## AWARENESS DRIVE



A mobile team creating awareness about Covid-19 and precautionary measures among people in Tikiri area of Rayagada district, Sunday

Each new dawn brings the possibility of a new progress.  
**THE MOTHER**



# Managing Headlines

The farmers' agitation against the farm laws that put the government in a bad light both nationally and internationally is now pushed out of the main media headlines. Instead, a sideshow - the arrest of pro-farmer environment activist, Disha Ravi and proceedings in the court - is gaining front page prominence. Whatever the outcome of the legal process, the government has succeeded, at least for the time being, in achieving what it has become quite adept in, namely managing headlines.

Be it demonetization, passing of GST, collapse of the economy pushing the unemployment rate to 45-year high or killing of 46 CRPF personnel in Pulwama by terrorists, the government has time and again deflected public scrutiny of its performance. More than governance, it seems to have developed expertise in burying burning issues of the day under media headlines of its own choosing.

It has happened once again in the case of the farmers' agitation as well. The plight of the farmers camping at the borders of Delhi and their demand for repealing the three laws were getting traction throughout the country and abroad. Hardly any other news was getting greater media attention. The situation was going out of hand with international figures joining ranks with the agitating farmers and social media activists campaigning against government highhandedness in suppressing the farmers' unrest. No amount of calumny against the farmers' agitation and conspiracy theories spun by the government were of any help.

It was at this stage that the government realized that the social media tide was turning and so it wanted to create fear in the minds of its critics. The 'toolkit' edited and sent to Greta Thunberg by Disha and two others came handy for the government. The 22-year-old Disha was arrested to send the message across that campaign on social media platforms for the farmers could invite government crackdown. Reading the court proceedings would make it obvious to anyone that Disha's actions in no way could amount to sedition or treason. Although, incarceration - with or without substance - of collusion with terrorists such as Khalistani operatives outside India is made out as a charge. Interestingly, the government could think only of Khalistani terrorists and no other outfit since the farmers' agitation has drawn bulk of its supporters from Punjab.

Additional Sessions Judge Dharmender Rana of a Delhi court hearing the case was not convinced by the prosecution's arguments that Disha was in league with Khalistanis hatching a plot against the government. After the police counsel could not come up with a satisfactory answer to the judge's tough questioning on whether there is any direct link between Disha and the Khalistanis, the judge observed unless he could satisfy his conscience, he won't move ahead.

The judge's observation appears to be a welcome departure from some of the recent judicial pronouncements which look government-directed. Such a behavior of this judge could imply that chinks are showing in the armour.

In a queer development, several former judges and retired police officers, including CBI ex-chief Nageswara Rao, have written to President Ram Nath Kovind on Disha's arrest saying it was surprising that her age was being highlighted to prove innocence. They argued that age is immaterial and what matters is a series of actions that are "naturally anti-national." So much so that many are equating Disha with Ajmal Kasab and the Nirbhaya juvenile offender to prove that age is no criteria for judging a crime. The signatories include three former Chief Justices of High Courts, 17 former judges, 18 former Directors General of Police, a former Delhi Police Commissioner, a former member of the Central Vigilance Commission and a former special Director General of Central Reserve Police Force. What a galaxy indeed rallying behind the government.

Admittedly, while law should be equal for all those citizens who have reached the age of being a major, yet, comparing Disha with murderers is stupidity. By labeling farmers from Punjab as Khalistanis, the country is being subdivided once more. Earlier, we were told Moslems are traitors, Kashmiris are terrorists, JNU is "Tuke Tukde" gang, Liberals or 'Libtards' are communists, communists are anti-national, dissent is sedition, 'thinking' people are urban naxals and mediapersons were labeled 'Prestitutes'.

Such sub dividing of society can grievously hurt the fundamental idea of India. If religion could be the sole binder to create a nation, then Europe, as a catholic continent, would have been one country. While Hinduism may be the single big religion of this country, still, it does not contain a unified central theme. The Hindoo God Ayyappa could be completely unknown in Bihar. Similarly, the Bihari Hindoos' Bol Bom religious practice may be completely unknown in Maharashtra. If Rajasthan and Bengali Hindoos practiced Sati in the old days, that practice did not exist in Orissa. There are millions of differences within the framework called Hinduism. Those differences are the beauty and strength of this thought process. To label Hinduism as a religion is to demean its essence.

One is tempted to conjecture whether the siding with farmers can be labeled as an act against the nation. India of today could probably be the only country in the world which considers its farmers, whatever be their numbers, as enemies.

## WISDOM CORNER

- Generosity is giving more than you can, and pride is taking less than you need. **KAHLIL GIBRAN**
- Two roads diverged in a wood and I - I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the difference. **ROBERT FROST**
- Prejudice is a burden that confuses the past, threatens the future and renders the present inaccessible. **MAYA ANGELOU**

## WORDSWORTH

### Manicule

Not to be confused with manacle or manicure, this is a much rarer word that also derives from Latin manus for a hand, in this case from the diminutive manucula, a little hand, which Romans also used for a plough-handle. It has popped up through a discussion about it in a book on typography by Keith Houston, Shady Characters: The Secret Life of Punctuation, Symbols, and Other Typographical Marks. A manicule is a hand with its first finger pointing, once used in the margins of manuscripts and books to draw the reader's attention to passages of particular importance. We often encounter it as a direction pointer in old-fashioned public signs, though these days we notice it most often as the vertical-pointing shape your computer's cursor changes to when you pass it over a web link. Printers have given it a number of names, including fist and index. This last one is the official name, echoing the Latin word for a sign or pointer, as in index finger. The history of manicule in English is a bit of a mystery. It isn't recorded in the recent review of the letter M in the Oxford English Dictionary, nor is it in any other dictionary.

## LOL

### You should learn to be more polite

One day, Bill and Tom went to a restaurant for dinner. As soon as the waiter took out two steaks, Bill quickly picked out the bigger steak for himself. Tom wasn't happy about



that: "When are you going to learn to be polite?" Bill: "If you had the chance to pick first, which one would you pick?" Tom: "The smaller piece, of course." Bill: "What are you whining about then? The smaller piece is what you want, right?"



Bharat Jhunjhunwala

## UTTARAKHAND MUST GIVE UP ITS MISPLACED OBJECTIVE OF BUILDING HYDROPOWER, OBSTRUCTING RIVERS AND INVITING DISASTERS

There is a huge tectonic plate below the land mass of India known as the "Indian Plate." The rotation of the earth is causing this plate to continually move northward just like any matter moves to the top in a centrifugal machine. The Indian Plate crashes into the Tibetan Plate as it moves to the north. The pressure between these two plates is leading to the continual rise of the Himalayas and also earthquakes in Uttarakhand in particular. Thus, Uttarakhand has been having an earthquake every ten years leaving aside the last 20 years. A possible reason for earthquake not taking place in the recent period could be that the load of water in the Tehri Reservoir is acting like a cushion between the two plates just as two boxers stop for a moment if a small child stands between them. However, the Indian Plate continues to push against the Tibetan Plate despite this cushion. Consequently, a bigger earthquake may take place in the coming time. Landslides take place due to the tectonic disturbances and these have been putting large amounts of material into the river for thousands of years. This material has been carried to the plains by the Ganga. The entire land mass of India from Haridwar to Ganga Sagar has been made by such material. Therefore, we should not be under an illusion that such landslides can be prevented. The present tragedy at Rishi Ganga could have been precipitated due to the minute vibrations created by the northward movement of the Indian Plate combined with weakening of the glaciers due to global warming. The blasting done for making the tunnel of the Tapovan Vishnugad hydropower project did not help. Scientists say that the vibrations from the explosions do not travel very far. However, the minute vibrations may have added to the disaster just as minute doses of homeopathic medicines have a strong effect. The abovementioned natural work of Ganga carrying the material requires that the river be allowed to flow freely just as an elephant requires an open road. The hydropower projects make a barrage on the rivers that creates an

## FOCUS UTTARAKHAND

# HIMALAYAN BLUNDER



The present landslide has become a disaster because the Rishi Ganga and Tapovan Vishnugad projects had obstructed the flow of the Rishi Ganga and Dhaulti Ganga Rivers. These rivers would have carried the material of the landslide to the sea smoothly had there been no obstruction to their flow

obstruction to this free flow. The Ministry of Environment had constituted a Committee under the Chair of Ravi Chopra under the orders of the Supreme Court after the 2013 disaster. The Committee said that the damage in the 2013 disaster took place only above and below the hydropower projects. The Committee said that the landslide at Kedarnath turned into a disaster not because the rains were exceptional but because the flow of the Mandakini and Alaknanda Rivers was obstructed by a number of under-construction and commissioned hydropower projects. The present landslide has likewise become a disaster because the Rishi Ganga and Tapovan Vishnugad projects had obstructed the flow of the Rishi Ganga and Dhaulti Ganga Rivers. These rivers would have carried the material of the landslide to the sea smoothly had there been no obstruction to their flow.

Research Institute, Nagpur has found that the Ganga has about 200 types of 'phages' that can kill 17 types of disease-creating bacteria. Yamuna and Narmada, in comparison, have less than 30 types of phages. The Ganga also has more copper and radioactive thorium that kill bacteria. These unique qualities of the Ganga arise when her water absorbs the vegetations and rubs against the stones while flowing rapidly. Fish like Mahseer migrate from the plains to the high Himalayas and clean the water of pollutants. The hydropower projects create either a tunnel in which the water of the river is diverted; or they create a reservoir in which the water flows at a very slow speed. In both cases the rubbing action of the water is ended and also the migration of fish is obstructed. I have assessed that the cost of electricity generated from hydropower will become ₹18 per unit from the proposed Kotlibhel-1B project if the cost of environmental damage is added to the cost of electricity.

Lo! solar power is available at about ₹3 per unit against ₹7 to ₹18 from hydropower projects. A problem is that solar power is produced in the daytime while the demand is more in the morning and evening which are called 'peak'

times. However, daytime electricity can be converted into peaking power at a cost of mere 50 paise per unit. Therefore, solar peaking power is available to us a less than ₹4 per unit. The Uttarakhand Power Corporation has purchased peaking power from the India Energy Exchange at a price of about ₹3.50, ₹4.30 and ₹2.60 per unit in the last three years. Yet, the government of Uttarakhand continues to make these projects despite such huge cost. The argument is that hydropower projects bring 'development.' The alternative is that Uttarakhand develops the service sectors. A sanatorium for tuberculosis patients was established at Bhowali near Nainital about a century ago. Idea was that the patients will gain health in the clear and natural surroundings. The alternative before Uttarakhand is to make software parks, universities, hospitals and computer centers on the banks of the Ganga in the hills so that humankind makes use of the higher psychological qualities of the Ganga and the natural beauty in which she flows. This approach will lead to less environmental burden on the Himalayas and also beget more economic progress. The youth of Uttarakhand will get permanent jobs as nurses, doctors, teachers and programmers in these activities. At present they get low-paid jobs during the construction of these projects. Curiosity is that the government is bent upon promoting hydropower and disinterested in promoting the service sectors. The reason appears to be that hydropower projects require environment clearance, forest diversion, electricity license and land acquisition in which the government officials have a huge role. The development of services sector is ignored because software giants would not fall on their knees to get environment clearances like hydropower proponents would do. Uttarakhand must give up its misplaced objective of building hydropower, obstructing rivers and inviting disasters.

The writer is a former Professor of Economics at IIM Bangalore. Views are personal.

## SPECTRUM ODISHA

# Need of the hour: A Budget for SDGs

India is committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. As a large portion of India's population depends on public provisioning for essential services such as health-care, education, nutrition, and employment, adequate public spending on social sectors and efficiency in the delivery system are critical. Prioritising and fast-tracking actions for the last mile are crucial if the goal of "no one is left behind" is to be realised. Yet, there exist significant disparities in the achievement of some of the vital human development components. The deficits in human development, to a large part, are a reflection of low levels of public provisioning for social sectors over the decades. The disastrous effect of the pandemic has resulted in huge loss in employment and livelihood, increased hunger and malnutrition, increased destitution and poverty. The impact has been disproportionately borne by economically and socially disadvantaged sections. Simultaneously, the need for budget allocation in the areas of social sector such as health, education, WASH and food and nutrition security including agriculture have

emerged as priority areas than ever before.

As per the SDG Index by NITI Aayog, Odisha ranks 16th among the states. The state needs to improve its performance on key areas such as SDG-1; No Poverty; SDG-2; Zero Hunger; SDG-3; Good Health and Wellbeing; SDG-4; Quality Education; SDG-6; Clean Water and Sanitation; SDG-8 Decent Work and Economic Growth. Therefore, there are a lot of expectations that the State Budget for the year 2021-22 would address the multiple social sector deficit areas which have been further affected by the pandemic. Further, the 15th Finance Commission has recommended that health spending by states should be increased to more than eight per cent of their Budget by 2022.

Though the overall magnitude of the Union Budget has registered increase in absolute terms from ₹30.50 lakh crore in 2020-21 to ₹34.83 lakh crore in 2021-22, allocations for social sectors present a mixed bag at best.

Except a substantial increase in budget provision for drinking water and sanitation schemes, predominantly for the Jal Jeevan Mission, budget provisions for school edu-

cation, nutrition related schemes, rural employment, housing and agriculture have seen a reduction compared to the budget estimates for those for the year 2020-21. For some of the schemes, the budget provision for 2021-22 is lower than the actual expenditure incurred in 2019-20. The reduction in allocation in major schemes and programmes has an adverse bearing on the State Budget.

The 15th Finance Commission has submitted two reports. The first report consists of recommendations for the financial year 2020-21, and the final report has recommendations for 2021-26. The Commission has recommended 41 per cent of the net proceeds of Union taxes to states. Odisha's share in the net proceeds of Central taxes and duties seems to have been sliced from 4.629 per cent in first report to 4.528 per cent in second report. As a result, the state will be losing ₹760 crore as share in Central taxes for the 2021-22. This apart, being a revenue surplus state, Odisha will not get any post devolution revenue deficit grant.

As reported in the Economic Survey 2020-21, India, the combined public spending on social sectors by

the Union government and the states remained below seven per cent of GDP until 2018-19; though this figure had risen to 8.8 per cent of GDP in the Budget Estimates for 2020-21. We may note here that even at close to nine per cent of GDP, combined public spending on social sectors in the country is way below the level of budgetary support for social sectors not just in most of the developed countries but also in a number of large developing countries.

As per the report State Finances: A Study of Budgets by Reserve Bank of India, Odisha's social sector expenditure to total disbursement in 2020-21 (up to Oct 27, 2020) is 45.3 per cent, which is low compared to states like Andhra Pradesh - 52.5 per cent, Bihar - 56.7 per cent, Jharkhand - 50.6 per cent, and Chhattisgarh - 46.2 per cent. The expenditure on social sector should be increased to at least 50 per cent of total Budget 2021-22 to take care of emerging social sector needs - healthcare, education, food & nutrition security and livelihoods.

The writer is an Associate Director, Programme, Centre for Youth and Social Development. Views are personal.



Basanta Kumar Nayak

## PRIORITISING AND FAST-TRACKING ACTIONS FOR THE LAST MILE ARE CRUCIAL IF THE GOAL OF "NO ONE IS LEFT BEHIND" IS TO BE REALISED

## Resident foreigners

Sir, The recent army coup in Myanmar has impacted India and Bangladesh in entirely different ways. As for India, it is a wait and watch situation. There has been a close cooperation between the Indian and Myanmar armies on insurgency-related issues troubling the two countries. Hence, the relations between the two countries are likely to be normal. The impact of the coup on Bangladesh is profound compared with that on India. Myanmar authorities had agreed to rehabilitate over 40,000 refugees removed out of a list of 800,000 people by Bangladesh. When the newly elected NLD (National League for Democracy) government headed by Aung San Suu Kyi was ousted, it had aroused hopes that the 40,000 people could be repatriated to the Rakhine province in a short while. Now around 11,00,000 Rohingyas are sheltered in different parts of Bangladesh. Now that the military is in complete control of Myanmar after the coup, Rohingya refugees are even more afraid. The coup could make it more challenging for the Rohingyas to return home. The coup has taken place at a time when the two countries agreed to start the repatriation. The new military regime is unlikely to prioritise return of Rohingyas. As per the new citizenship law announced by Myanmar authorities, Rohingyas Muslims are "resident foreigners" and not citizens. Over the years, many ethnic cleansing raids have been carried out to drive out the community. According to the Burmese law, while the Rohingyas can stay in Rakhine, their children are not supposed to study beyond the primary level. They won't get official jobs or medical help either. The government also has the right to seize Rohingyas property. A great deal was expected from Aung San Suu Kyi. However, she took a tough stand on the issue. The world was shocked at how she treated the hapless Rohingyas. She approved the decision to marginalise the community and defended the army raids. There have been reports of genocide of the Rohingyas.

Venu GS, KOLLAM

## Incredulous act

Sir, Petrol prices surging north rapidly of late have put the common man on edge. The steep rise in the fuel costs has had a cascading effect on the price of essentials and other commodities, making it hard to eke out a living. With the cost of petrol per litre inching towards the three-figure mark (Rs 100), it is incredulous that the government has failed to take the bull by the horns.

NJ Ravi Chander, BANGALORE

# Letters

## TO THE EDITOR

Readers of Orissa POST are most welcome to contribute letters (200 words), articles and columns (between 750-1250 words). Contributors are requested to send their contact numbers and full postal address/email ID. They may also send in their valuable comments, opinion and suggestions, preferably by email, to: [edit@orissapost.com](mailto:edit@orissapost.com)

OrissaPOST  
B-15, Rasulgari Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

# 'Party's face in Valley': Azad moves closer to BJP

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 21: Sidelined by the Gandhi family, senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad was seen taking one more step in a direction that will bring him much closer to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. In what appeared to be a rare occasion, the Modi government Saturday rolled out the red carpet for Azad while inviting him to a gala cultural event organised by the Union Ministry of Minority Affairs.

Colourful posters and banners of the Congress stalwart were put up all around the Ambedkar International Centre, the venue of the event, where Union minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi and Minister of State (Independent Charge) Jitendra Singh welcomed the veteran Congressman, who was recently praised for his statesmanship by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the farewell speech for the outgoing MPs in the Rajya Sabha. Saturday's event was the second such incident in a series when the Modi government showered praises on Azad, who up till now is seen as a dissenter by the Rahul Gandhi camp. Once a diehard Rajiv Gandhi loyalist, Azad was not given another term in the Upper House. A few days back, Mallikarjun Kharge, considered to be close to the Gandhi



family, was appointed as the Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha in place of Azad. Posters of a Congress leader at an event organised by the Modi government were seen for the first time in the national capital. The audience at the Ambedkar Centre were surprised to see Azad seated alongside Jitendra Singh and Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi in the VVIP front row. Incidentally, Singh and

Azad both hail from Jammu and Kashmir. The event titled "Ek Bharat, Shreshth Bharat", a 'Mushaira' (Urdu poetry recital) organised by the government, officially acknowledged Azad as a guest of honour. Most of the Urdu poets, including Waseem Bareilly, a well-known personality in the Urdu literary world, also praised the Congress leader. Several other poets also mentioned Azad's name from

the dais and addressed their poetic recitals to him.

While the Congress has not given any important responsibility to Azad since he retired from the Rajya Sabha, Saturday's Mushaira is now being seen as an event which seems to have brought Azad closer towards the BJP.

"Azad sahab is a real statesman, he could be the face of the BJP in the Valley in near future. A person like him commands respect across party lines," said a BJP functionary present at the auditorium.

Earlier February 9, Prime Minister Modi bid a tearful farewell to the Congress veteran, saying that he respected Azadji as a "true friend" and will not let him retire, and will continue taking his advice. Modi said it would be difficult for Azad's successor in the Rajya Sabha to match him as he has set very high standards as an MP and as the Leader of the Opposition.

Vice-president M. Venkaiah Naidu also described Azad as a "voice of sanity in the nation's public life", and someone who "speaks softly but conveys his point of view effectively". Modi's emotional speech for Azad had led to speculation that the veteran Congress leader, sidelined by his party high command, might join the ruling party in days to come.

# Delimitation part of BJP's plan to divide communities: Mehbooba

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Srinagar, Feb 21: The delimitation of Assembly constituencies in Jammu and Kashmir is a part of the BJP's "larger plan to divide and pit" regions, religions and communities against each other, PDP president Mehbooba Mufti alleged.

Taking to Twitter, Mehbooba Sunday said the Centre was "railroading" delimitation in Jammu and Kashmir with a "tearing hurry", raising serious apprehensions about the motives of the exercise.

"The tearing hurry with which GOI (the Government of India) is railroading delimitation in J&K has raised genuine & serious apprehensions about the motives of this exercise. It's a part of BJP's larger plan to divide & pit regions, religions & communities against each other," she said.

The Delimitation Commission for Jammu and Kashmir was constituted by the Centre March 6 last year. The commission held its first meeting Thursday to seek suggestions/views on the process of delimitation in respect of the union territory.

The meeting of the commission was attended by two of the five associated members - Union Minister



The tearing hurry with which GOI (the Government of India) is railroading delimitation in J&K has raised genuine & serious apprehensions about the motives of this exercise. It's a part of BJP's larger plan to divide & pit regions, religions & communities against each other

Jitendra Singh and BJP leader and MP from Jammu, Jugal Kishore Sharma. The other three associated members of the commission - National Conference MPs Farooq Abdullah, Mohammad Akbar Lone and Hasnain Masoodi - did not attend the meeting.

The NC MPs informed the commission that they would not be participating in its proceedings as the abrogation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status was pending adjudication before the Supreme Court. In a letter to Chairperson Delimitation Commission Justice (Retd) Ranjana Prakash Desai, they expressed their inability to associate with the commission.

They also urged the chairperson not to go ahead with the delimitation process as the J-K Reorganisation Act, 2019 is under judicial scrutiny in the Supreme Court. "In our view, the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019 is palpably unconstitutional and has been enacted in disregard and violation of mandate and spirit of the Constitution of India and therefore not to be acted upon," the MPs said. "We have thrown challenge to constitutional validity of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, exercise of powers where-under the meeting in question is proposed to be held," they said.

# Cong says BJP looting in name of taxes, launches stir in Assam



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Guwahati, Feb 21: Ahead of the Assam polls, the Congress Sunday launched agitations in all the 34 districts of the state to protest against the rising fuel prices.

Senior Congress leaders including former Union Minister and AICC General Secretary Mukul Wasnik led the agitations, which has also become as a major agenda for the opposition parties before the Assembly elections slated for April-May.

While presenting the vote-on-ac-

spectively. The BJP is simply looting the people in the name of taxes," Bora said.

"I would simply like to ask the BJP government on what basis it decides the petroleum prices every day? What is the explanation for subjecting the people of Assam to this cruelty," state Congress Campaign Committee Chairman Pradyut Bordoloi said.

Congress' Deputy leader in the Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi said that the BJP government is looting the public by raising the fuel prices, amid the raging pandemic.

Congress Legislature Party leader Debabrata Saikia said that the common man is burdened with the price rise, so will the BJP government clarify whom it is busy levying tax for?

"Who are those being favoured by the government at the expense of making people suffer so much?"

All India Mahila Congress president Sushmita Dev, who is leading the protests in different districts, said that the "so called 'double engine' BJP governments at the Centre and the state are fooling the people".

"Reducing Rs 5 on petrol-diesel ahead of the state elections is a hoax! Reality is the Modi government at the Centre has increased tax to favour their corporate friends," alleged Dev, a former Lok Sabha Member and daughter of late Union Minister Santosh Mohan Dev.

count in the state Assembly, Assam Finance and Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma February 12 announced to remove the additional cess of Rs 5 levied on the petrol and diesel last year, when Covid-19 pandemic was at its peak. Assam Pradesh Congress president Ripun Bora while addressing a protest rally in Hojai said that the base price of petrol is Rs 33.46 per litre and that of diesel is Rs 31.82 per litre in the state. "However, the common man is forced to pay Rs 87 per litre and Rs 82 per litre for petrol and diesel re-

# AASU announces protest during PM's visit

AGENCIES

Guwahati, Feb 21: All Assam Students Union (AASU) has announced that it will hold agitations during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the state February 22 to protest against his government's alleged failure to implement Clause 6 of the Assam Accord.

Member of the students' organisation will wave black flags and wear black badges at all district and sub-divisional headquarters, AASU President Dipanka Kumar Nath and General Secretary Shankarjyoti Barua said in a release Saturday.

The BJP-led government at the Centre has failed the people of Assam by not implementing Clause 6 of the Assam Accord, failing to declare floods and erosion as national problems and not stopping construction of all big dams in the region, including the Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Project.

Nath and Barua that during floods, the prime minister did not



bother to visit Assam and had merely reviewed the situation over phone. "But now that state election is round the corner, he has come thrice within a month to seek votes," they said. The AASU leaders said that before the 2016 Lok Sabha election, the prime minister had said that all illegal immigrants will have to pack their bags and leave. "But the Centre is now conspiring to im-

pose the burden of additional foreigners on Assam by enacting the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). The prime minister during his two earlier visits did not make a single mention of the implementation of Clause 6 of the Assam Accord, they added.

The Centre had promised that it will implement the recommendations of the High Level Committee

to the last comma and full stop. It is now nearly a year that the report was submitted to the state government but it is yet to be sent to the Centre for its implementation, they said.

"We demand that the prime minister announces February 22 when the recommendations of the Committee will be implemented as constitutional safeguards are a legitimate rights of the people of the state", the leaders said.

AASU had organised protests against Modi's visit January 23 demanding repeal of the Citizenship Amendment Act that seeks to grant Indian citizenship to non-Muslim religious minorities from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan and implementation of Clause 6 of the Assam Accord.

As per the clause constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the culture, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.

# Ahead of polls, BJP hikes daily wages of tea garden workers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guwahati, Feb 21: Ahead of the Assembly elections in Assam, the BJP-led state government Saturday increased the daily wages of scores of tea garden workers from Rs 167 to Rs 217 per day, officials said.

The officials said that the Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal has decided to increase the daily wages of tea garden workers from Rs 167 to Rs 217 per day.

The meeting also decided that to recommend equal wage for small tea workers, a one-man committee under Principal Secretary J.B. Ekka would be formed.

Increase in daily wages of tea workers is an election issue in Assam with opposition parties, including the Congress, criticising the BJP-led government for deliberately delaying wage revision for the last several years.

The main opposition Congress claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had promised to revise the daily wages of tea workers in Assam to Rs 350 prior to the 2014 Lok Sabha polls.

While the tea garden workers in southern Assam are getting daily wages of Rs 145 per day, the workers in the remaining areas of the



state are getting Rs 167 per day.

February 6, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had distributed Rs 3,000 each to 7,46,667 tea garden workers in Assam under the 'Chah Bagicha Dhan Puraskar Mela' scheme. In the third tranche of the scheme, a total amount of Rs 224 crore was disbursed with Rs 3,000 getting transferred directly to 7,46,667 bank accounts of tea garden workers across the state.

The scheme was started by the Assam government in 2017-18 and that year Rs 2,500 each was provided to 6,33,411 tea garden workers, while a similar amount was deposited in 7,15,979 bank accounts

the next year.

Assam has over 10 lakh tea garden workers in the organised sector working in 850 tea estates. The state roughly produces 55 per cent of India's total tea production of 1389.70 million kg. Tea tribe communities determine the votes in 30 to 35 of the 126 Assembly seats in the state.

Saturday's cabinet meeting also decided to allot 10 bighas of land to the World Renewal Spiritual Trust in Kamrup, besides approving the purchase of 8,000 wheelchairs for the ensuing Assembly elections, which are likely to be held in April-May this year.

# ULFA(I) defers decision on fate of abducted oil firm staff

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guwahati, Feb 21: The banned ULFA(I) Sunday said, the outfit has "deferred" the decision to take any step on the fate of two abducted employees of an oil firm and will continue to hold discussions with authorities concerned for a positive outcome.

United Liberation Front of Assam-Independent (ULFA-I) chief Paresh Barua informed general secretary of Gauhati Press Club (GPC) Sanjoy Ray over phone that discussions on the release of the two employees were continuing and "We hope that there will be a positive outcome soon".

However, Barua said, there has to be a "definite time-frame to resolve the issue and negotiations for their release cannot go on endlessly".

Two employees of Quippo Oil and Gas Infrastructure Ltd were abducted by the insurgents December 21 last year from Kumchaikha hydrocarbon drilling site in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh.

Initially, the ULFA(I) chief had called the GPC president Manoj Kumar Nath asking him to provide a platform to him for clarification of certain facts allegedly 'misinterpreted in a certain section of the media' on the outfit's stand on the fate of the two abducted persons.

Accordingly, mediapersons gathered at the GPC where Barua was expected to brief the media over telephone which was put on amplifiers, but he could not contact the particular number on which he was supposed to brief journalists.

Barua subsequently called another journalist who was present



at the GPC, who connected him to the club's general secretary Sanjoy Ray and he was briefed by the ULFA(I) leader.

According to Ray, the ULFA(I) chief also said that he welcomes and respects the role of the civil society and their constructive suggestions to resolve the issue.

Barua said that a section of the media had misinterpreted the outfit's earlier statement about "the step" to decide the fate of the two abducted persons.

The two abducted men are Drilling Superintendent Pranab Kumar Gogoi and Radio Operator Ram Kumar. While Gogoi is from Assam's Sivasagar district, Ram Kumar hails from Bihar.

The outfit had reportedly demanded a ransom of Rs 20 crore for the release of the two employees and had set February 16 as the deadline.

The ULFA(I) in an email Friday had said that talks with the Quippo

authorities held from February 16 to 19 have "failed to reach any favourable conclusion and as such an ultimate step on the duo will be taken next week".

The email, signed by Rumel Asom of the outfit's Publicity department, said that it had "banned" the company from operating in South East Asia".

The family members of the employees had recently called upon Barua's brother who also appealed to the ULFA(I) leader to release the duo.

Following the ULFA(I)'s statement Friday, there was an appeal from several organisations, intellectuals and even Barua's former comrade Anup Chetia, who has joined the peace talks, not to harm the two persons.

Assam Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had also appealed to the outfit to release the two men unharmed.

# Terrorist hideout busted, weapons recovered in J&K

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Srinagar, Feb 21: A large quantity of arms and ammunition was recovered after police and security forces in a joint operation busted a terrorist hideout in South Kashmir's Anantnag district, officials said Sunday.

Police said the hideout was busted after the arrest of a conspirator of Krishna Dhaba attack in Srinagar.

A large quantity of arms and ammunition including three AK 56 rifles and two Chinese pistols were recovered from the hideout.

"Hideout busted in forest area of Anantnag by the police and security forces after the arrest of the conspirator of Krishna Dhaba attack. Arms and ammunition including three AK 56 rifles, two Chinese pistols, two grenades, telescope, AK/Pistol magazines and other incriminating material were recovered," police said.



Pertinently on Wednesday when a delegation of foreign envoys was on Kashmir visit terrorists had attacked famous food outlet Krishna Dhaba in Srinagar and injured the son of its owner. The police later said Krishna Dhaba terrorist attack was worked out within 48 hours and three terrorists of the Muslim Jaanbaz Force, which is an offshoot of Lashkar-e-Taiba were arrested.



These anti-farmer laws are death warrants to the farmers. With the implementation of these laws the crops will go to the hands of a few industrialists and the farmers of India will become labourers in their own land.

ARVIND KEJRIWAL | DELHI CHIEF MINISTER

## WB GOVT REDUCES TAX ON PETROL, DIESEL

The West Bengal government Sunday announced a reduction of tax by Re 1 per litre on petrol and diesel effective from midnight of February 22



## of the day quote

Primary education in mother tongue can boost childrens self-esteem and creativity and it should be made the primary medium of instruction at least until class 5



M VENKAIHAH NAIDU | VICE PRESIDENT

Love Jihad' is a term used by right wing activists to refer to an alleged campaign of Muslims forcing Hindu girls to convert in the guise of love



YOGI ADITYANATH | UTTAR PRADESH CHIEF MINISTER

Greetings on the occasion of the International Mother Language Day. This day inspires us to stay connected with our cultural heritage



AMIT SHAH | UNION HOME MINISTER

## SHORT TAKES

### 3 held over Cong leader killing

New Delhi: Three persons have been arrested in Delhi in connection with the killing of a 34-year-old Youth Congress leader in Punjab's Faridkot on February 18, the Delhi Police said Sunday. The Punjab Police has been informed about the arrest of Faridkot-residents Gurvinder Pal (the 32-year-old key accused), Sukhwinder Singh (23) and Saurabh Verma (21) in the killing of Gurlal Singh Bhalwan, a Delhi Police officer said. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Manishi Chandra also said two other associates of the arrested accused are still at large and efforts are underway to nab them. They all are allegedly members of the Lawrence Vishnoi Gang. Vishnoi is presently in Ajmer prison.

### Couple, 3 kids drown

Pune: A couple and their three daughters drowned in a stream in Pune's Mulshi tehsil on Sunday morning, police said. The incident took place near Kolwan village, some 40 kilometres from the district headquarters, under Paud police station limits, an official said. The deceased have been identified as Shankar Laygude (38) his wife Pornima (38), and daughters Arpita (20), Ankita (13) and Rajashree (12).

### Tiger captured

Madikeri: A tiger that killed two people in Kodagu district was captured by the forest department Sunday. The tiger captured in Manchalli village was found with injuries and aged approximately seven to nine years, an official said. "It was tranquilised by a veterinarian alongside help from tamed elephants Abhimanyu and Gopal from Mathigodu Elephant Camp". The tiger was later shifted to Mysuru Zoo.

### 11 boys rescued

New Delhi: Eleven boys, including an eight-year-old, working as bonded labourers were rescued from several places in north Delhi's Samaypur Badli area, a child rights body said on Sunday. Raids were conducted in seven places under the Samaypur Badli police station area on Friday following reports of children working as labourers in hazardous conditions, the Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR) said. Eleven children were rescued during the operation, it added.

# Farmers announce series of events to escalate stir



AGENCIES

New Delhi, Feb 21: From 'Pagadi Sambhal Diwas' to 'Daman Virodhi Diwas', protesting farmers Sunday announced a series of events from February 23-27 to further intensify their agitation against the three new agricultural laws as they accused the government of adopting "repressive" measures against them.

They also said they will soon devise a strategy to keep the protest going for long and will make their plans public February 28.

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), which is spearheading the protests, told a press conference here that under their proposed escalation programme, February 23 will be observed as 'Pagadi Sambhal Diwas' and February 24 as 'Daman Virodhi Diwas', essentially to underline that farmers must be respected and no "repressive measures" should be taken against them.

"The 'Pagdi Sambhal Diwas' will be celebrated February 23. This day will be celebrated in memory of Chacha Ajit Singh and Swami Sahajanand Saraswati. On this day, farmers will be wearing their regional turbans.

"On February 24, 'Daman Virodhi Diwas' is announced in which the farmers and citizens will protest against overall suppression against

the farmers' movement. On this day, memoranda will be given to the President of India via Tehsil and district headquarters," said Darshan Pal, a farmer leader. The Morcha said February 26 will be observed as 'Yuva Kisan Diwas' (youth farmers day) and February 27 as 'Mazdoor Kisan Ekta Diwas' (farmer-labourer unity day). "On February 26, honouring the contribution of youth in this movement, a 'Yuva Kisan Diwas' will be organised. On this day all the stages of SKM will be operated by the youth. Youth from various states are requested to join the protesters at Delhi Borders.

"On January 27, on Guru Ravidas Jayanti and martyrdom day of Shaheed Chandrasekhar Azad, 'Kisan Majdoor Ekta Diwas' will be celebrated. All the citizens are appealed to strengthen this movement by joining the protesters Delhi borders," Pal said.

A long-term plan for movement will be discussed in view of the Parliament session from March 8, and the strategy will be shared in the next meeting of SKM, he said. Darshan Pal, also alleged "repression" by the government. He said around 32 people have got bail out of 122 arrested by the Delhi Police in connection with the violence and vandalism in the national capital during a farmers' tractor rally on Republic Day.

## PM addresses BJP's national office bearers meet

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 21: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday asked BJP workers to strengthen and expand the party with the motto of 'nation first' and said its mission is to work for the country.

Modi was addressing the first meeting of the BJP's new set of national office-bearers, during which the party also passed a resolution thanking him for reforms in the agriculture sector and for his able leadership in effective handling of the COVID-19 situation. Prime Minister Modi at the meeting said the party's mission is to work for the country and its development, BJP general secretary Bhupender Yadav said at a press conference.

He also asked BJP workers to strengthen and expand the organisation with the motto of "nation first", Yadav said. During the meeting, which was chaired by BJP chief J P Nadda, Prime Minister Modi told party leaders to take the benefits of the new farm laws to the people.

The meeting was inaugurated by Modi and it started by paying tributes to those who lost their lives due to the coronavirus. The political resolution was passed thanking the prime minister for the reforms in the agriculture sector and his able leadership in effective handling of the pandemic, BJP vice president Raman Singh said.

He said the resolution also highlights the Garib Kalyan Yojana during the pandemic, comprehensive budget and diligent handling of the situation on the Line of Actual Control with China.

Earlier, BJP general secretary Arun Singh had informed that during the course of the meet, discussions will be held on farm laws, Atmanirbhar Bharat and upcoming state polls. The meeting, which was also being attended by BJP state unit presidents, assumes significance as it came amid fierce protests by a section of farmers in Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh against the three new farm laws.

# Shabnam files fresh mercy petition

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Lucknow, Feb 21: Death row convict Shabnam, who was awarded the death sentence for killing seven members of her family in April 2008, has filed a fresh mercy petition to Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel and President of India Ram Nath Kovind.

According to Anand Kumar, Director General (prison department and reform services), Shabnam had also approached the Uttar Pradesh Governor earlier for pardon, but Patel had rejected her petition.

"A copy of mercy appeal to the UP governor by death-row convict prisoner Shabnam through her lawyer regarding Supreme Court order dated May 25, 2015, was made available to our office to be forwarded," said Rampur jail superintendent.

Sources said that two lawyers had met Shabnam in Rampur jail on Friday and convinced her to send a mercy petition to the Governor of Uttar Pradesh.

Confirming that a second mercy petition has been sent to the Governor and the President of



India, Shabnam's lawyer Shreya Rastogi, in a press release, claimed that 'news reports should correct the factual and legal positions regarding the remaining remedies available to Shabnam.'

She said in the release, "Shabnam has several constitutional remedies that remain to be exercised. These include the right to challenge the rejection of her mercy petition before the Allahabad HC and the Supreme Court on various grounds. She also has the right to file a curative petition in the SC."

The development comes a day after 12-year-old son of Shabnam Ali appealed to the President of India

The development comes a day after 12-year-old son of Shabnam Ali appealed to the President of India on social media to consider his mother's mercy plea again

on social media to consider his mother's mercy plea again.

"President uncle ji, please forgive my mother Shabnam," read a placard that he was seen holding in a viral video.

Shabnam, now 38, has been convicted for killing seven members of her family - her mother, father, two brothers, sister-in-law, cousin and 10-month-old nephew - after they opposed her relationship with Salim, also a resident of the same Amroha village.

The two slit the throats of all the seven persons after serving them sedative-spiked milk. Shabnam was pregnant at that time.

# Priyanka's campaigns in UP may bolster Cong position

PRIYANKA GANDHI HAD RECENTLY TAKEN A HOLY DIP AT THE TRIVENI SANGAM IN PRAYAGRAJ ON 'MAUNI AMAVASYA' AND HAD TRAVELLED IN BOATMAN SUJIT NISHAD'S BOAT WHO INFORMED HER OF THE "ATROCITIES" BEING COMMITTED ON LOCAL BOATMEN

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 21: Just reduced to one seat from the state in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the Congress is looking to gain ground in Uttar Pradesh with party General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's campaigns for various sections seeking to change equations and make the party emerge as main challenger to the ruling BJP on the streets.

She is trying hard to make Congress a serious challenger to the BJP, by seeking to woo marginalised sections of society. Having raised the issue of farmers in western UP, she is now championing the cause of fishermen in eastern UP. Her target is a big chunk of the



OBC Nishad community, which has stood by the Samajwadi Party, the Bahujan Samaj Party, and is now

with the Bharatiya Janata Party. Priyanka Gandhi had recently taken a holy dip at the Triveni

## NO 'GANGA AARTI' WITHOUT PERMISSION NOW

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Varanasi (UP), Feb 21: Social organisations and even individuals, performing 'Ganga Aarti' at various ghats will now have to get registered with the Varanasi Municipal Corporation (VMC).

The decision has been taken by the district administration to check encroachments on the riverfront, which is a public property. The municipal authorities have also been asked to prepare the records of the 'Ganga Aarti'. District magistrate Kaushal Raj Sharma has asked the municipal authorities to prepare the records of the Ganga aarti and complete the registration process by March end.

Thereafter, no such activities would be allowed on the ghats without the registration and prior permission of the VMC. "The riverfront is a public property owned by the state government and being looked after by the Varanasi Municipal Corporation,"



said the district magistrate in a letter to VMC.

"It has been noticed that quite often that some people indulge in disputes over holding Ganga Aarti. The municipal corporation should make a specific regulation for organising the Ganga Aarti along the ghats. The VMC should register the aarti organisers with the allotment of space, which should be renewed every year. Besides, it should also be ensured that no aarti is organised by any individual or organisation without the VMC's permission," he said. The VMC has also been directed to nominate a nodal officer to look after the whole process.

# PONDICHERRY GOVT IN TROUBLE

Telangana Governor Tamlisai Soundararajan, who was handed over the additional charge of Pondicherry, had Thursday directed Narayanasamy to prove his majority by ordering a floor test February 22

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Pondicherry, Feb 21: Two more MLAs of the Congress- DMK alliance in Puducherry resigned on Sunday, delivering yet another jolt to Chief Minister V Narayanasamy, a day before he is scheduled to face a floor test in the assembly to prove his majority.

The resignation by Congress MLA K Lakshminarayanan and DMK legislator Venkatesan further reduced the strength of the ruling alliance to 11, while the opposition has 14 MLAs in the 33-member assembly, which has seven vacancies. Lakshminarayanan and Venkatesan submitted their res-



Congress MLA Lakshminarayanan gives his resignation to Assembly Speaker VP Sivakozhundu, a day before the floor test in the Assembly

ignation letters separately to Assembly Speaker V P Sivakolundhu at his residence here, the both said. Speaking to reporters, Lakshminarayanan said, "this government led by Narayanasamy has lost majority."

He said he has also resigned from the party membership. Later, Venkatesan told the media that he had quit the post of MLA only and continued to be in the DMK.

"I was not able to meet the needs of the people in my constituency since there was no allocation of funds under the MLA Local Area Development fund," he said. Four Congress MLAs—including ex-ministers A Namassivayam (now in

BJP) and Malladi Krishna Rao had quit, while another party legislator was earlier disqualified. Narayanasamy's confidante A John Kumar had resigned this week.

Telangana Governor Tamlisai Soundararajan, who was handed over the additional charge of Puducherry, had Thursday directed Narayanasamy to prove his majority by ordering a floor test February 22.

The resignation of two MLAs' comes on a day when the ruling party members are slated to meet CM to discuss the future course of action, though similar discussions on February 18 yielded no results.

## FIGHT RESUMES

# MAHA BANS GATHERINGS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Feb 21: Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday said that in view of the rising COVID-19 cases, religious, social and political gatherings will be prohibited in the state from Monday.

Asking people to follow "COVID-appropriate" behaviour and safety norms, he said he would observe for a week to 15 days and then decide whether to impose another lockdown. "Wear masks, observe discipline and maintain social distancing to avoid another lockdown," Thackeray told the people of the state.

In his televised address against the backdrop of the sudden surge in coronavirus cases, he said the number of daily infection cases has risen from 2,500 to 7,000 within 15 days. "The pandemic is raising its head in the state again, but whether this is a second wave will be known in eight to 15 days," he said.

Till a few days ago, the daily spike of cases was between 2,000 and 2,500, he said. There are 53,000 active cases in the state. Even in cities



like Amravati, the spike being witnessed now was not so high when the state saw a peak in COVID-19 cases earlier, he said, adding, "This is alarming."

"We felt that the pandemic is under control and a lot of hard work had gone into bringing it under control," the chief minister said. "Religious, social and political gatherings will be prohibited in the state from tomorrow. Political agitations with crowd will have to be stopped for some time...All of us need to expand and spread our political base including myself, my allies and the opposition parties," he said.

People should follow 'Mi zabaddar' (I am responsible) campaign, he said. "In the war against the virus there is no sword as yet but

face mask is the only shield. Vaccination has begun. Trials of two more vaccines are on. It is only after that common citizens will get doses," he said.

So far, nine lakh frontline COVID-19 warriors have been vaccinated and no serious side effects have been noticed, he said, and urged all the frontline and health care workers to get themselves inoculated. People who have become negligent should not let the sacrifices of the coronavirus warriors go in waste. If you can't be a COVID warrior, don't become a COVID "doot" (carrier), he said.

"The second wave is knocking at our doors. It is upto us to decide whether to allow it in our lives again. Wear a face mask, use sanitiser and maintain social distancing. I will observe for a week to 15 days to take a decision if it is the people who want a lockdown," he said. He asked the people to follow work from home practice and reschedule their work hours so that there is no crowding in public places.

## WOMAN FORCED TO DRINK LIQUOR, GANGRAPED

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Shahdol (MP), Feb 21: A 20-year-old woman was gang-raped allegedly by four persons in Madhya Pradesh's Shahdol district, police said Sunday.

She was abducted in a four-wheeler, forced to drink liquor in a farmhouse in Gadaghat area under Jaitpur police station limits and then gang-raped on February 18 and 19, said Shahdol Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Mukesh Vaish. "On February 20, the four accused dumped her in front of her house. She filed a police complaint on Sunday.

The victim was first taken to Jaitpur health centre and then shifted to the district hospital for treatment," he added.

The four were booked on Sunday, and police are verifying if one of them is the functionary of a political party, the Additional SP said. Efforts are underway to nab the four accused, he added.

of the day quote

It's a useful exchange on our defence cooperation. India will always be a reliable security partner for the Maldives



S JAISHANKAR | INDIAN EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER

We've come back to the early part of 2020 where again Iran is a potentially big threat



CHARLES FORRESTER | SENIOR ANALYST, JAMES

As the government has taken responsibility in verifying their safety and efficacy, we ask that you trust them and fully participate in receiving inoculation of the vaccines



CHUNG SYE-KYUN | PRIME MINISTER, SOUTH KOREA

SHORT TAKES

Oz begins vax drive

Canberra: Prime Minister Scott Morrison has become one of the first Australians to receive a coronavirus vaccine. Morrison Sunday morning received his first dose of the Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine alongside Chief Medical Officer Paul Kelly and a small group of aged care residents and staff and frontline pandemic workers, the Xinhua news reported. Jane Malysiak, an 84-year-old World War II survivor, was the first Australian to receive a vaccine, according to a media report.

Sudan floats currency

Cairo: Sudan took the unprecedented but expected step of floating its currency Sunday, meeting a major demand by international financial institutions to help transitional authorities overhaul the battered economy. The floatation is the boldest economic measure taken by the transitional government that has ruled Sudan after a popular uprising led to the military's overthrow of autocrat Omar al-Bashir in April 2019. Sudan's currency will now fluctuate according to supply and demand, according to a statement by the Central Bank.

Israel reopens economy

Jerusalem: Israel lifted many of its coronavirus restrictions and started reopening its economy Sunday as the country's vaccination drive and third nationwide lockdown have started to bring down infections. Most grade school and high school classes have reopened after a nearly two-month closure, along with museums, libraries, malls and markets. Some restrictions on the number of people in attendance remain in place.

UK hastens vax drive

London: The British government announced Sunday that it aims to give every adult in the country a first dose of coronavirus vaccine by July 31, a month earlier than its previous target. The new target also aims for everyone over 50 or with an underlying health condition to get a vaccine shot by April 15, rather than the previous target of May 1. The makers of the two vaccines that Britain is using, Pfizer and AstraZeneca, have both experienced supply problems in Europe.

Funeral and more protests follow deadly shootings in Myanmar



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Yangon, Feb 21: Crowds in Myanmar's capital attended a funeral Sunday for the young woman who was the first person confirmed to have been killed in protests against the military's takeover, just one day after security forces shot dead two more demonstrators.

Mya Thwet Thwet Khine was shot in the head by police Feb 9, two days before her 20th birthday, at a protest in the capital, Naypyitaw, and died Friday.

Mourners lined the entrance to a cemetery in the city as the hearse carrying her body arrived and was taken to a crematorium where more people had gathered. They silently raised their hands in three-fingered salutes — a sign of defiance and resistance adopted from neighboring Thailand — as the black and gold vehicle rolled slowly past.

Inside the crematorium hall, the lid on Mya Thwet Thwet Khine's coffin was partially removed to allow a last glimpse of her head resting on a bed of red and white roses before she was cremated. Members of the crowd outside chanted "Our uprising must succeed!"

Protesters elsewhere in Myanmar gathered again Sunday for street demonstrations that have been going on for more than two weeks.

In Yangon, Myanmar's biggest city, about 1,000 demonstrators began the day by honoring Mya Thwet Thwet Khine at a ceremony under an elevated roadway.

"I want to say through the media to the dictator and his associates, we are peaceful demonstrators," said protester Min Htet Naing. "Stop the genocide! Stop using lethal weapons!"

There were also protests in Myawaddy, on the border with Thailand, and at Inle Lake, a popular scenic tourist attraction, where dozens of its famous long tailed wooden boats were moored near shore and those aboard chanted anti-coup slogans.

Demonstrators turned out in force in Mandalay, the country's second-biggest city, where security forces shot dead two people on Saturday near a dockyard where the authorities had been trying to force workers to load a boat. The workers, like railway workers and truckers and many civil servants, have joined a civil disobedience campaign against the junta.

UN chief appreciates India's leadership in fight against COVID

AGENCIES

United Nations, Feb 21: UN chief Antonio Guterres has voiced appreciation for India's leadership in the global fight against the coronavirus pandemic and its efforts to bring a "much-needed supply" of the COVID-19 vaccines to the world market.

India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador TS Tirumurti tweeted on Saturday that Guterres, in a letter dated February 17, "extends his personal gratitude" to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar for "India's offer of 200,000 doses" of COVID-19 vaccines for UN peacekeepers.



The Secretary-General says "India has been a global leader in pandemic response efforts", Tirumurti tweeted, expressing his gratitude to the UN Chief.

In an excerpt of the letter tweeted by Tirumurti, Guterres says, "Indeed, India has been a global leader in pandemic response efforts having provided critical medicines, diagnostic kits, ventilators and personal protective equipment to more than 150 countries."

"Efforts by India in developing and manufacturing one of the two vaccines currently granted Emergency Use Listing by the World Health Organization brings a much-needed supply to the global vaccine market. I also appreciate your continued efforts to support and strengthen the COVAX Facility to ensure more equitable access."

COVAX is a global initiative aimed at equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines. Wednesday, India, which has been hailed as the pharmacy of the world, announced the gift of 200,000 COVID-19 doses for UN peacekeepers.

Peaceful protests for jailed rapper see more clashes

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Barcelona, Feb 21: A fifth night of peaceful protests to denounce the imprisonment of a Spanish rap artist once more devolved into clashes between police and the members of fringe groups who set up street barricades and smashed storefront windows Saturday night in downtown Barcelona.

Small groups made up mostly of young people began their nightly cat-and-mouse game with officers an hour after several thousand protesters gathered in the capital of Spain's Catalonia region, which also was where the worst violence took place during earlier demonstrations this week over rapper Pablo Hasel's detention.

Police were also pelted by rocks after a march in the Catalan town of Lleida, where Hasel spent 24 hours barricaded a university building before police took him away to serve a 9-month prison sentence for insulting the Spanish monarchy and praising terrorist violence in

Pakistan unlikely to exit 'grey list'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Islamabad, Feb 21: Pakistan is unlikely to exit the 'grey list' of the FATF as some European countries have taken the stand that Islamabad has not fully implemented all the points of a plan of action set by it, a media report said Sunday, on the eve of the plenary meeting of the global watchdog for money laundering and terror financing.

The Paris-based Financial Action Task Force had placed Pakistan on the grey list June 2018 and asked Islamabad to implement a plan of action to curb money laundering and terror financing by the end of 2019 but the deadline was extended later on due to COVID-19 pandemic. The virtual FATF plenary will be



held in Paris from February 22 to 25 to consider cases of various countries on the grey list, including Pakistan, and a decision will be made at the conclusion of the meetings, Dawn newspaper reported. In the last plenary held October 2020, the FATF concluded that

Pakistan will continue in its "grey list" till February 2021 as it has failed to fulfill six out of 27 obligations of the global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog that include failure to take action against two of India's most wanted terrorists - Jaish-e

SERAPHIC SMILE



An internally displaced Syrian girl looks out of a tent as she poses for a picture in northern Aleppo near the Syrian-Turkish border, Syria

Facebook takes down main page of Myanmar military

REUTERS

Yangon, Feb 21: Facebook Sunday deleted the main page of the Myanmar military under its standards prohibiting the incitement of violence, the company said, a day after two protesters were killed when police opened fire at a demonstration against the Feb 1 coup.

"In line with our global policies, we've removed the Tatmadaw True News Information Team Page from Facebook for repeated violations of our Community Standards prohibiting incitement of violence and coordinating harm," a Facebook representative said in a statement.

The Myanmar military is known as the Tatmadaw. Its True News page was not available Sunday.

The military spokesman did not respond to a Reuters phone call seeking comment.

Facebook in recent years has engaged with civil rights activists and democratic political parties



in Myanmar and pushed back against the military after coming under heavy international criticism for failing to contain online hate campaigns.

In 2018, it banned army chief Min Aung Hlaing - now the military ruler - and 19 other senior officers and organisations, and took down hundreds of pages and accounts run by military members for coordinated inauthentic behaviour.

Ahead of November elections, Facebook announced it had taken down a network of 70 fake accounts and pages operated by members of the military that had posted either positive content about the army or criticism of Suu Kyi and her party.

What's safe after COVID-19 jab? Don't shed masks yet

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Miami, Feb 21: You're fully vaccinated against the coronavirus — now what? Don't expect to shed your mask and get back to normal activities right away. That's going to be a disappointment, if not a shock, to many people.

But the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention hasn't yet changed its guidelines: At least for now, people should follow the same rules as everybody else about wearing a mask, keeping a 6-foot distance and avoiding crowds — even after they've gotten their second vaccine dose. Vaccines in use so far require two doses, and experts say especially don't let your guard down after the first dose.

"You're asking a very logical question," Dr. Anthony Fauci, the



top U.S. infectious disease expert, responded when a 91-year-old California woman recently asked if she and her vaccinated friends could resume their mah-jongg games. In that webcast exchange, Fauci only could point to the CDC's recommendations, which so far are mum about exceptions for vacci-

nated people getting together: "Hang on," he told the woman, saying he expected updates to the guidelines as more people get the coveted shots.

What experts also need to learn: The vaccines are highly effective at preventing symptomatic COVID-19, especially severe illness and death — but no one yet knows how

well they block spread of the coronavirus.

It's great if the vaccine means someone who otherwise would have been hospitalized instead just has the sniffles, or even no symptoms. But "the looming question," Fauci said during a White House coronavirus response briefing last week, is whether a person infected despite vaccination can still, unwittingly, infect someone else.

Studies are underway to find out, and hints are starting to emerge. Fauci pointed to recent research from Spain showing the more coronavirus an infected person harbors — what's called the viral load — the more infectious they are. That's not surprising, as it's true with other illnesses.

Some preliminary findings from Israel have suggested people in-

fectured after the first vaccine dose, when they're only partially protected, had smaller viral loads than unvaccinated people who got infected. That's encouraging if the findings hold up. Israel has vaccinated a large fraction of its population and scientists worldwide are watching how the outbreak responds as those inoculations increase.

Also critical is tracking whether the vaccines protect against new, mutated versions of the virus that are spreading rapidly in some countries. But most people should feel "more confident about going shopping, for example, or going to see your grandkids, or giving your daughter a hug".

That's because the chances of a fully vaccinated person getting seriously ill, while not zero, are low.

1st CASE OF BIRD FLU INFECTION IN HUMAN

Russia has confirmed the first case of human infection with the avian influenza A(H5N8) virus in the world, a Russian sanitary official announced



Our first goal is protection and that is what we see in with both the initial vaccines: Pfizer and the AstraZeneca vaccine

SCOTT MORRISON | PRIME MINISTER, AUSTRALIA



# business

## of the day quote

Climate change is already upon us as is evident by extreme weather events being witnessed across the world, be it the freeze in Texas, the deadly glacier-break in Uttarakhand or the changing winter pattern in Munnar

SUYASH GUPTA | DG, INDIAN AUTO LPG COALITION

Technology is becoming the lifeline for us as individuals and also businesses. If there was any doubt, the year 2020 showed how fundamental it has become. Technology played an important role in ensuring that the government's social schemes and assistance programmes in reaching out to the masses

AZIM PREMJI | IT CZAR

At the end of 9 months of this fiscal, we have grown at about 11%. And, we hope that the number will get accelerated further. We are expected to grow higher than 11% (by the end of March 2021)

PRASHANT TRIPATHY | MD & CEO, MAX LIFE

## SHORT TAKES

### Amara Raja sets up research hub

**Mumbai:** Amara Raja Batteries, the country's second-largest automotive battery maker, has opened the country's maiden technology hub to develop lithium-ion cells, at its Tirupati facility in Andhra Pradesh. The advanced lithium-ion technology research hub, the pilot project located in Tirupati, will become the country's first lithium-ion cell manufacturing facility in the private sector, Amara Raja Batteries CEO S Vijayanand said.

### RBI ropes in Punjabi rapper

**New Delhi:** Amidst an unprecedented rise in cyber frauds and manifold jump in online financial transactions, the RBI, in a quirky bid to drive its public awareness campaigns, has roped in Punjabi singer-rapper Viruss to drive home its points this time. Launched officially over the weekend on its twitter handle, the campaign features Viruss, whose 2017 indie hit 'Bam Bhole was recreated recently.

### Hopeful of reaching solution: Cairn

**New Delhi:** After three days of talks with top finance ministry officials, UK's Cairn Energy plc Sunday said it is hopeful of reaching an amicable resolution on \$1.4 billion that an arbitration award has ordered India to return, but insisted it will continue to take steps to protect shareholder interest. Cairn CEO Simon Thomson held discussions with Finance Secretary Ajay Bhushan Pandey and over half a dozen other senior officials between February 18 and 20.

### Govt may consider privatisation move

**New Delhi:** The government may consider privatising Oriental Insurance or the United India Insurance Co as their financial health has improved after a series of capital infusions, people aware of the development said. To further strengthen their financial health, the government is expected to infuse ₹3,000 crore in the public sector general insurance companies during the current quarter.



**We expect the domestic market to continue following the global markets in the coming week due to lack of any major domestic events. The GDP data for Q3 which is expected to show signs of economic recovery adding positive momentum in Indian market**

VINOD NAIR | HEAD OF RESEARCH, GEOJIT FINANCIAL SERVICES

## 'ZONAL RAILWAYS MUST ADOPT SUSTAINABLE IDEAS'

Railway Minister Piyush Goyal has directed all zonal railways to come up with "sustainable" ideas for reducing railway expenses and rationalising costs, to cope up with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic



## Centre to permit sale of 50 pc coal from captive blocks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 21:** The Centre plans to permit sale of 50 per cent of coal/lignite produced by captive blocks, a move aimed at augmenting the production and increasing the availability of dry fuel.

The government plans to do so through incorporation of a provision in the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR).

"In the note for consultation of Ministry of Mines, it is proposed to incorporate a provision in the Act to allow sale of 50 per cent of coal/lignite produced by captive mines on an annual basis. Further, an additional amount will be charged on the merchant sales of coal/lignite by the captive miners," the coal ministry said in brief note.

The ministry said that it has invited comments from the state governments of coal-bearing states



and stakeholders/general public on the said proposals.

The Ministry of Mines has also invited comments of the state governments, among others, on the proposals for additional amendments being considered in the MMDR Act.

"The ministry of mines has also sought comments of Ministry of Coal on the said draft proposal. Some of the said draft proposals

are applicable in the case of coal/lignite also....Before sending the final comments/response to the Ministry of Mines, it is considered appropriate to seek comments of state governments of coal bearing states...on issues relating to coal/lignite," the coal ministry said.

In India, the import of coal is increasing on year on year basis. In 2015-16, the country imported 203.95 million tonnes (MT) of coal which

was increased to 248.54 MT in 2019-20 and consequent spending of around 1.58 lakh crore in foreign exchange.

Coal being an important input for various core sector industries, increasing availability of coal will lead to Aatmanirbhar Bharat.

Allowing sale of coal from captive mines will help in increase in production of fossil-fuel from captive mines and increase availability of dry fuel in the market, leading to reduction in import of coal.

It is further proposed to specify the additional amount payable on such sale in the Act itself instead of leaving it to be specified under the rules framed under the Act in the same manner as will be specified for the other minerals.

The additional amount to be charged has been deliberated in the coal ministry, it said.

## Sunak plans new Tech Visas to boost UK fintech: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**London, Feb 21:** Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak is planning to lay out details of new fast-track "Tech Visas" in his Budget statement next month as part of efforts to boost the UK's financial technology industry, according to a UK media report.



The senior Cabinet minister has drawn up details for the scheme to attract global talent to UK start-ups and its GBP 7-billion fintech sector, proposals which are said to have the backing of his boss - UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

"The Daily Telegraph" quoted Whitehall sources with knowledge of the plans to say that the new visas are likely to be approved by Tech Nation, Britain's national network representing tech entrepreneurs.

"The final details are still being drawn up, but insiders expect it will be similar to the Global Talent Visa announced last year to attract the world's leading scientists to Britain," the newspaper claims.

## Jalan-Kalrock expects to restart Jet Airways in 4 to 6 months

AGENCIES

**Mumbai, Feb 21:** Jalan Kalrock Consortium, the winning bidder for Jet Airways, expects to restart operations of the defunct airline in four to six months after receiving approval from the NCLT for its resolution plan.



Jet Airways, the once-storied full-service carrier was grounded in early 2019 and subsequently is undergoing proceedings under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC). Against the backdrop of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) likely to take a final call on the resolution plan for the airline, the winning consortium's lead member Murari Lala Jalan told PTI that "everything is on track" as far as the revival efforts for the carrier are concerned.

Stressing that he is very positive about the Indian aviation sector, which is recovering from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, Jalan said that initially Jet Airways will resume flying with around 25 aircraft.

"After NCLT decision, we will be able to start the airline within four to six months. I am very positive about Indian aviation and the future is bright," Jalan said during a telephonic interaction.

## BUDGET 2021

# Private sector key driver of economic growth: FM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bangalore, Feb 21:** Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman Sunday said the Union Budget 2021-22 is about the role of government as a facilitator and the private sector as a key driver of economic growth, without which the country would be losing a big opportunity.

The most important component or input required here is the participation of the private sector. Unless the private sector is energised enough, unless the private sector is facilitated enough, India is just losing a very big opportunity, she said here during an interactive session organised by the Bangalore Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

Sitharaman underlined that the nation's growing and aspiring needs and demands across the various sectors cannot be served just by the state government and central governments put together.

According to the Finance Minister, the coronavirus vaccine was a big example of government-private partnership.

To be a world leader with that specific India touch, which is more humane, which is more about bring-



**Sitharaman pointed out that the stimulus package was aimed at sectors which provided multiplying effect like infra, budget funding, where public expenditure was going to be undertaken**

ing everybody together, which is peaceful, which actually wishes that the world progresses for everybody's good," she told the gathering.

"If that is the way India approaches its responsibility, that will be incomplete unless the government plays the role, it is expected to play the facilitator and unless the private sector plays the role of a key driver. So that's the message this budget has talked about, the Finance Minister said.

Sitharaman said the Budget was about setting the path for the decade. She pointed out that the stimulus package, which largely depended on government's borrowing, was

aimed at sectors which provided the multiplying effect such as infrastructure, the budget funding, where public expenditure was going to be undertaken.

She said the government has clearly funded stimulus with the borrowed money, and was aware of fiscal management.

Debt to GDP, another indicator which is important for a healthy economy, has to be carefully managed in such a way that sooner in a sense, in a reasonable timeframe, the fiscal deficit will also be kept under the healthy level and not let unattended for decades together, Sitharaman said.

## Muthoot Homefin aims to disburse ₹700cr loans in FY22

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, Feb 21:** Muthoot Homefin India Ltd (MHIL) Sunday said it aims to disburse ₹700-crore loans in the next financial year to cater to the affordable housing segment.

MHIL has disbursed over ₹2,600 crore over the past five years since its inception, the company said in a release.

"For the coming year, in addition to further penetration into the existing geographies, Muthoot Homefin also plans to expand its operations in the southern states of India and aims to disburse up to ₹700 crore of home loans in FY 2021-22," it said.

MHIL, which started its operations in 2016 to fulfil the needs of



aspiring Indian homeowners, said it has successfully transferred over ₹300 crore of loan subsidy under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana's credit-linked subsidy scheme from NHB.

The company has also received ₹225 crore of refinance from the National Housing Bank (NHB).

"Muthoot Homefin is aiming to disburse ₹700 crore of home loans in 2021-22.

# ALL-NEW TATA SAFARI SUV ROLLED OUT IN CITY

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 21:** The much awaited ideal SUV Tata Safari was launched Sunday in City at Dion Automotives. Tata Motors had earlier unveiled the new model. The new Safari was launched in the presence of Odia actress Archita Sahu and Dion Automotives GM Biswanath Begoray.

The New model is based on the old Land Rover D8 architecture that is called the OMEGARC by Tata Motors. It has more in common with the Harrier.

Tata Safari is powered by the same Fiat-sourced Multi Jet II 2.0-litre turbo-diesel mill mated to a 6-speed manual. Also, the Hyundai



sourced 6-speed automatic has also been equipped on the new Safari. New Safari is offering good performance with 170 hp and 350 Nm of torque. It is expected that Tata Safari may take on MG Hector Plus,

Mahindra XUV 500.

Tata Motors is offering the new Safari in six trims (XE, XM, XT, XT+, XZ, and XZ+), of course with the option of a diesel manual or automatic, but no petrol model or 4x4 option. The base XE variant offers dual airbags, all-disc brakes, and electronic stability program along with hill hold control and rollover mitigation.

XM variant provides the multi drive modes and touch screen music system. iRA connectivity, fully automatic climate control and a panoramic sunroof is available from XT variant. On other hand, XZ variant is equipped with xenon HID projector headlamps, terrain response modes.

# IN FOCUS 'India imports bauxite despite vast reserves'

Leveraging abundant domestic bauxite reserves is crucial for self-reliance & global competitiveness of Indian aluminium industry

The strategic importance of aluminium for India to achieve the vision of becoming a \$5 trillion economy cannot be overstated. Aluminium finds critical usage in core sectors like defence, aerospace, transportation, energy security, building & construction many more. It gives all that contemporary time demands: speed, saving & sustainability. As India emerges from the global public health crisis, it continues to be the third largest producer of aluminium globally, with domestic aluminium demand expected to double in next five years from the current 4 million tonnes to 8 million tonnes per annum.

To keep up with this fast-surging domestic demand, production of bauxite - the ore from which alu-

minium is produced, needs to grow from the current levels of 22 million tonnes to 50 million tonnes per year @ 6T on bauxite per 1 ton aluminium. Growth of bauxite mining and aluminium is estimated to attract fresh investment of over ₹2 lakh crore.

Already, sizeable investments of over ₹1.5 lakh crore in the bauxite mining and aluminium sector have created over 20 lakh livelihood opportunities. This has also developed over 4,000 MSMEs in the hinterland where there were limited opportunities thereby connecting them to the economic mainstream of the country. This industry has potential to create additional employment

opportunities for 1million people. India possesses world's fifth largest reserve of bauxite. Despite this, there has been not a single successful auction of any Metallurgical Grade Bauxite Mine in last five years by the state governments, since inception of auction regime. This has led to a surge in import of bauxite, one of India's most abundant ores, to feed the rapidly increasing domestic consumption and has caused a loss of \$400 million to the Indian exchequer.

This has also severely impacted the opportunity to generate mass

scale employment and socio-economic development in aspirational districts of the country.

The opening of a single bauxite mine has the potential to generate over 10,000 livelihood opportunities leading to poverty alleviation in these far-flung areas, as well as contributing an additional ₹5,000 crore to the state revenue.

Bringing India's 3.8 billion tons of bauxite reserves into auction and increasing the capacity of existing mines by at least 50% will be key to moving India towards becoming 'Atma Nirbhar' by improving the global competitiveness of country's aluminium industry.

The primary reason for various state governments not being able to auction the bauxite min-

eral blocks is due to the present pricing structure which links the selling price of the end product to the back calculated method of determination of the Average Sale Price (ASP) of metallurgical grade bauxite without factoring transportation cost; thus eroding cost advantage of Indian bauxite and rendering aluminium production unviable in the country. This has also led to a pause in additional investment of over ₹50,000 crores in the aluminium sector due to the futility of the current bauxite ASP determination methodology.

With our tremendous wealth of natural resources, it is time for the government to find a solution to reduce the import dependency of bauxite by enhancing domestic production.



(Dr Tapan Kumar Chand is the Ex-CMD of NALCO & author of the book - "Aluminium: The Strategic Metal")

SERBIAN CLAIMS RECORD-EXTENDING NINTH AUSTRALIAN OPEN CROWN

# Djokovic dismantles Daniil

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Melbourne, Feb 21: Novak Djokovic's Australian Open dominance remained intact as he won his ninth title here Sunday. It was expected to be a tough match for the No. 1 seen as Daniil Medvedev had been playing very well till the final. But in the end it turned out to be a cakewalk for Djokovic as he steamrolled past Medvedev 7-5, 6-2, 6-2. It was his third title win in a row. The victory means that Djokovic is slowly catching up with Rafa Nadal and Roger Federer both of who have 20 Grand Slam titles apiece. Djokovic's tally went up to 18 with Sunday's victory.



**CONCENTRATION PERSONIFIED:** Novak Djokovic's eyes say it all as he hits a backhand during his Australian Open final at the Melbourne Park, Sunday; (Inset) With the men's singles winner's trophy

ROLL OF HONOUR

Year	Opponent
2008	Jo-Wilfried Tsonga
2011	Andy Murray
2012	Rafael Nadal
2013	Andy Murray
2015	Andy Murray
2016	Andy Murray
2019	Rafael Nadal
2020	Dominic Thiem
2021	Daniil Medvedev

Djokovic used superb serving speed and angles and his usual relentless returning and baseline excellence to grab 11 of 13 games in one stretch. The 33-year-old Serbian improved to 18-0 combined in semi-finals and finals on the hard courts of the Australian Open.

The No. 4-ranked Medvedev was appearing in his second Grand Slam final - he was the runner-up to Nadal at the 2019 US Open - but is still trying to collect his first such championship.

Djokovic ended the 25-year-old Russian's 20-match winning streak. Medvedev also had won his previous 12 matches against top 10 op-

ponents. By the third set, he kept looking up at his coach with palms up as if to ask, "What can I possibly do here?"

Medvedev's flat, wrap-the-racket-around-his-neck forehand was iffy at first, missing wide, long and into the net in the initial 10 minutes. Djokovic grabbed 13 of the match's initial 16 points and a quick 3-0 lead and the tone of the final was set. Medvedev broke back to make it

three-all, but then Djokovic just simply raised his level.

From five-all, Djokovic stepped up, and Medvedev stepped back. Djokovic held at love, then broke to claim the set when Medvedev slapped a forehand into the net just after someone in the crowd called out during the point.

Medvedev broke early to lead 1-0 in the second set. But that dominance faded away in a jiffy.

Medvedev immediately gave back that early break in the second set by relinquishing two of his own service games back-to-back. There was no stopping Djokovic after that. He won most of the baseline rallies and picked up 73% of the points on his first half. A near-desperate Medvedev could only smash his racket on the court as the Djokovic brilliance simply swept him away.

LIVERPOOL'S TITLE HOPES DISAPPEAR

# Everton break 22-year-old jinx

AGENCIES

London, Feb 21: Twelve months ago Liverpool were ripping up the record books on the way to their first English top-flight title in 30 years. However, a loss Saturday to Everton left them mulling a host of far less flattering statistics. Their 0-2 defeat at Anfield was their first loss at home to city rivals Everton since 1999. It was their fourth home league defeat in succession - something they have not experienced since 1924.

Manager Juergen Klopp's hopes of retaining their Premier League crown were already effectively over after a spectacular drop in form since defeat by Burnley ended a 68-match run without a home league loss. But Everton's win - courtesy of a third-minute goal by Richarlison and a controversial penalty scored by Gylfi Sigurdsson - means Liverpool are now in a scrap to even finish the season in the top four and qualify for the

Champions League

Everton's first win of any description over Liverpool since 2010 - after a run of 23 games without a victory - lifted Carlo Ancelotti's seventh-placed side level with the champions on 40 points although the latter have played a game less.

Liverpool remained in sixth spot but are three points behind fourth-placed Chelsea who drew 1-1 at Southampton. Chelsea trailed to a goal by Takumi Minamino but Mason Mount levelled with a penalty after the break.

Few could imagine Liverpool's fall from grace after their title-winning season featured a plethora of English top-flight records such as 24 successive home league wins and the best-ever start to a season in Europe's five top leagues - 26 wins and a draw from their first 27 games.

"We stand here having lost 2-0. I know how important it is. We feel it deep inside," Klopp said. "But from tomorrow, I have to use all the good stuff," he added.



**MOMENT TO CHERISH:** Everton players celebrate Saturday their win over Liverpool

# Messi's record goes to waste

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Barcelona, Feb 21: Cádiz snatched a late penalty Sunday to draw 1-1 at Camp Nou and deal Barcelona an unexpected setback in their bid for the Spanish league title here. Five days after being beaten 1-4 by Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) in the Champions League, Ronald Koeman's side saw two points slip away when substitute Alex Fernández converted an 88th-minute penalty conceded by Clement Lenglet.

Lionel Messi appeared to put Barcelona on their way to an easy win in his club record 506th league appearance in Spain. However, after Messi scored from the penalty spot in the 32nd minute, Barcelona were unable to finish off many scoring chances.

The draw leaves Barcelona in third place at eight points behind leader Atlético Madrid, who lost 0-2 to Levante, Saturday Real Madrid were the biggest beneficiary of the round, moving three points behind Atlético after winning 1-0 at Valladolid also Saturday. Real have played one more match than Atlético and Barcelona.

"These are two hard blows this week," Barcelona defender Gerard Piqué said after the slip to Cádiz. "There is a long way to go in the league, but we didn't count on this. If we can get on a good run of play and get good results, we can still have a shot. It is going to be difficult though," Piqué said.

Earlier Saturday, it was the turn of Real to mount their title challenge beating Valladolid. Casemiro scored with a 65th-minute header off a cross by Toni Kroos to give Real the win two rounds before they visit Atlético at the Wanda Metropolitano Stadium.

On the other hand, José Luis Morales scored in the 30th minute and Jorge de Frutos added another goal in stoppage time for Levante at the Metropolitano, handing Atlético their first league loss since December. It was indeed a stunning loss.

SHORT TAKES

Tragedy strikes

**Chennai:** Aloysius Clement, a former under-18 player of ISL team Chennaiyin FC, died in a road accident in Kerala, the club announced Sunday. The 18-year old Aloysius was killed Saturday in a collision involving two motorcycles at Avanakuzhi in Kerala, family sources informed. "We are deeply saddened at the untimely demise of our former U-18 player Aloysius Clement. May his soul rest in peace. All of us at Chennaiyin FC send our heartfelt condolences to Aloysius' family and friends, and hope they find strength during this incredibly difficult time," Chennaiyin FC posted a message on its twitter feed.

Pugilists shine

**New Delhi:** Vinka (60kg) and T Sanamacha Chanu (75kg) clinched gold medals as Indian youth boxers continued their outstanding show Saturday at the 30th Adriatic Pearl Tournament in Budva, Montenegro. Apart from the two gold medals, the Indians added two silver and three more bronze to their tally on the penultimate day of the competition. Earlier, Alfia Pathan (+81kg) secured India's first gold in the on-going tournament. Vinka blanked her opponent Kristina Kriper from Moldova 5-0 in the final, while in an all-Indian clash in the 75kg category, Manipuri girl Sanamacha, outpunched Raj Sahiba 5-0. India bagged their second silver of the day when Gitika (48kg) lost to Farzona Fozilova of Uzbekistan in the final.

Bayern stunned

**Berlin:** Bundesliga champions Bayern Munich were stunned 1-2 by Eintracht Frankfurt here Saturday. The loss meant that the league leaders are just five points ahead of their nearest rivals Leipzig. They had drawn 3-3 in their previous game. Amin Younes was the star for Frankfurt scoring a goal and setting one up. Frankfurt took the lead in the 12th minute when Younes set up Daichi Kamada to score the first goal. The provider then turned scorer in the 31st minute with a powerful strike. Robert Lewandowski pulled one back in the 53rd minute for Bayern.

# New target awaits 'workhorse' Ishant

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 21: On the sidelines of a Ranji Trophy game in 2019, Ishant Sharma had called himself 'the last flicker in a lamp' while politely making his reluctance known to three scribes, who had approached the self-effacing beanpole for an interaction.

Ishant was then standing at 96 Tests. Nearly 14 months later, during which he missed five Tests due to an injury, Indian cricket's most adorable 'lamb' (tall) is shining bright. He is on course to become only the second Indian fast bowler, after the great Kapil Dev, to complete 100 Tests for the country.

"Arre yaar mera interview karke kya karogey? Main toh bujhta huya diya hoon (Why do you want to interview me? I am like the last flicker in a lamp)," Ishant had then said at the Kotla. But now he continues to glow brightly.

In terms of sheer talent and craft, Ishant wouldn't be in the same league as Zaheer Khan, Mohammed Shami or Javagal Srinath but with his longevity, he has proved that 'workhorse' isn't exactly an abused word, which is used to sum up the veteran pacer. "I think I will say this with cer-

**100-Test feat**

Sachin Tendulkar	200
Rahul Dravid	164
VVS Laxman	134
*Anil Kumble	132
*Kapil Dev	131
Sunil Gavaskar	125
Dilip Vengsarkar	116
Sourav Ganguly	113
Virender Sehwag	104
*Harbhajan Singh	103

\* Denotes bowlers who have played 100 Tests or more. Kapil Dev, however is an all-rounder

tainty. Ishant will be the last Indian fast bowler to play 100 Test matches. I don't see anyone playing 100 Tests. With majority of the fast bowlers preserving themselves for IPL and white ball games, it will be increasingly difficult to play 100 Tests for India," former India wicket-keeper and Ishant's ex-Delhi teammate and coach Vijay Dahiya said.

Ishant's mate for the last 16 years, current Delhi captain Pradeep Sangwan said that the pacer bowler is a 'perfect' captain's man. "He bowls what his captain wants," Sangwan said.

CRUCIAL GAME FOR MEN IN BLUE AT WORLD'S LARGEST CRICKET STADIUM

# India prepare for pink ball challenge

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ahmedabad, Feb 21: Captain Virat Kohli led a vigorous training session as the Indian team Sunday looked to get used to the swinging pink ball and a swanky arena in Motera ahead of the Day/Night Test against England starting Wednesday. The four-match series is currently tied at 1-1 with the visitors winning the first Test in Chennai by 227 runs, and India coming back strongly with a 317-run triumph in the second game at the same venue. This Test is crucial for India's fortunes at the World Test Championships (WTC). If they have to make it to the final, they cannot to lose another game in the series.

The big guns - skipper Kohli, his deputy Ajinkya Rahane, the flamboyant Rohit Sharma and the swashbuckling wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant - batted in the nets as the likes of Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj ran in and tested themselves under the blazing sun.

Pace spearhead Bumrah is bracing for a comeback after missing the second match at Chepauk and the seasoned Ishant Sharma, who is standing on the



**MUSCLING UP:** India skipper Virat Kohli goes through some stretching drills during India's training session at the Motera Stadium, Sunday

cup of playing in his 100th Test, was also seen in action. The BCCI released a small clip of the training session while the local body

- Gujarat Cricket Association (GCA) - captured the moments as the players went through the drills. President Ram Nath Kovind is

# Rohit 'extra cautious'

**Ahmedabad:** Set to play in only his second pink ball Test, India opener Rohit Sharma said Sunday he will be 'extra cautious and focussed' while batting during the twilight phase of the day-night match against England here. "So far I have only heard from fellow teammates that it plays on mind. I played just one pink ball Test against Bangladesh, but didn't get to bat at that (twilight) time when sun was about to set," he said. "It's obviously a little challenging, the weather and light suddenly change. You have to be extra cautious and focussed, you need to talk to yourself. All batters are aware of these challenges. We just need to be mindful of the situation and play accordingly," he added.

scheduled to watch the upcoming Test match with Union Home Minister Amit Shah after inaugurating the new stadium. The stadium has a capacity of 1,10,000, the largest in the world.

# 'Surreal' for Suryakumar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Feb 21: Finally rewarded for his consistency, prolific Mumbai batsman Suryakumar Yadav described his feeling as 'surreal', a day after he earned a maiden India call-up for the upcoming T20 International series against England.

Suryakumar was overlooked for the limited overs matches in Australia late last year despite a fine IPL, leaving many in the Indian cricket fraternity surprised. "The feeling is surreal," tweeted Surya along with his picture at the DY Patil Stadium here.

The 30-year-old Mumbai batsman has been a constant performer in the IPL for his franchise Mumbai Indians (MI) and also in the domestic circuit. He was rewarded for his performances Saturday.

Suryakumar has captained Mumbai in Ranji Trophy and other domestic tournaments. He has played 77 first-class matches and amassed 5,326 runs.



Some former India cricketers also took to Twitter to express their satisfaction at the right-handed batsman's selection in the national team. "So good to finally @surya\_14kumar in Team India. Good Luck," wrote veteran off-spinner Harbhajan Singh. "Finally the wait is over for @surya\_14kumar congratulations buddy. Goodluck @ishankishan51 @rahultewatia02 for your debut guys," said former

India seamer Irfan Pathan. India are scheduled to play England in five T20s after the conclusion of the ongoing four-match Test series. Suryakumar said that he had apprehensions he may miss the bus once again. "I was keeping my fingers crossed this time also. I did not know what to expect. I was however, determined that I would continue to work hard," he stated.

# Air India refutes Manu's complaint

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 21: Two days after 19-year-old shooter Manu Bhaker demanded action against Air India (AI) officials at the capital's IGI Airport for alleged harassment and seeking of bribes, the national carrier denied the allegations against its employees. In a statement Sunday, the airline said that CCTV footage nullifies the claims of Bhaker over alleged seeking of bribes and snatching of her mobile phone.

"Our employee Manoj Gupta was at the counter throughout and had, at no point, communicated directly with Bhaker. This is also corroborated by the CCTV footage. Hence, the allegation of misbehaviour by him simply does not arise," Air India said in a statement. "The moment she furnished the required document to the Air India check-in and security personnel, her baggage, including the arms were accepted," it added.

GAURS INCH TOWARDS PLAYOFFS

# FC Goa end BFC aspirations

AGENCIES

Margao, Feb 21: FC Goa equalled another ISL record by extending their unbeaten streak to 12 games thanks to a 2-1 win over Bengaluru FC (BFC) here Sunday at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium. The crucial win over BFC - the Gaurs' first at the eighth time of asking - helped Juan Ferrando's men reclaim the third position on the table, taking them an inch closer to securing their place in the playoffs.



Redeem Tlang wheels away in celebration after scoring FC Goa's 2nd goal against BFC

Igor Angulo's 13th strike of the season put the Gaurs ahead early in the game before Redeem Tlang scored his first in FC Goa colours within a few minutes to double their lead. BFC made it interesting as Suraj Wangjam struck in the first half to reduce the margin. However, Goa, kept a tight leash on the proceedings in the second half to secure the all-important win.

FC Goa dealt the first blow in the 20th minute as Angulo came up trumps for the Gaurs. Glan Martins was quick on his feet to steal the ball from Erik Paartalu in an advanced area before playing in Angulo. The Spaniard needed no second invitation to tuck it low and past Gurpreet Singh Sandhu in the BFC goal.

Three minutes later Goa were two up as Tlang scored his first goal for Goa. The spade work for the goal was done by Seriton Fernandes who floated a lovely box into the box for Tlang to score.

# national

## of the day quote

The great soil of West Bengal has nurtured extraordinary individuals who have contributed towards national progress. It's our vision and effort to ensure West Bengal gets top quality development



NARENDRA MODI | PRIME MINISTER

Hunar Haat will see indigenous handmade rare products from every nook and corner of the country under one roof



MUKHTAR ABBAS NAQVI | UNION MINISTER

The increase in additional taxes, especially on petrol and diesel, by the Centre and states is resulting in skyrocketing prices, and the burden is increasing almost everyday on crores of poor and unemployed people. Has the Constitution ensured such a welfare state principle



MAYAWATI | BAHUJAN SAMAJ PARTY CHIEF

## SHORT TAKES

### One more held in IED recovery case

Jammu: An over ground worker (OGW) of Al-Badr outfit has been arrested in connection with the recent recovery of a powerful improvised explosive device (IED) here, an official said Sunday. Nearly seven kilogram IED was recovered from the possession of a nursing student in the Jammu bus stand area on February 13, foiling a major terrorist plan to set off an explosion at a crowded place on the second anniversary of the 2019 Pulwama terror attack in the winter capital.

### Man held for spitting on dough

Meerut: A man was arrested in Uttar Pradesh's Meerut after he was caught on a camera, spitting on the dough while preparing 'rotis' at a wedding function. The accused was identified as Naushad. In a police complaint by Hindu Jagran Manch Meerut chief Sachin Sirohi, Naushad has been accused of spreading the coronavirus.

### Security beefed up at Singhu border

New Delhi: In order to avoid any untoward incident at the protest site, farmers protesting against the three farm laws enacted by the Centre government at Singhu border have beefed up the security at Singhu border and adjoining areas. Around 100 CCTV cameras at both the stages and many locations including the areas outside restrooms earmarked for women protesters have been installed along with heavy deployment of police personnel near the barricades close to the protest site.

### Drug seized

Mumbai: Mumbai police have seized mephedrone drug worth over ₹12.50 crore from the city and arrested three persons in this connection, an official said. A Dongri police team, led by Assistant Inspector Prakash Linge, had nabbed Iqbal Hussain Sayyed (38) early Thursday and recovered mephedrone worth ₹60,000 from him, he said.

### One killed in fire

Thane: A labourer was killed and another one injured after a fire broke out in the quarters of construction workers at a housing complex in Dombivli township here in Maharashtra Sunday morning, a fire official said.

# 'Disengagement process along LAC complete'

AGENCIES

Salem (TN), Feb 21: The disengagement process by India and China in eastern Ladakh is 'complete' after nine rounds of diplomatic and military level talks between the two neighbours, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said here Sunday as he hit out at Congress for 'doubting' Indian soldiers' bravery. He also lashed out at the Congress and its southern ally DMK for 'creating a controversy' over the Indo-French Rafale fighter jet deal and said the CAG among others had given 'clean chit'. It had blunted the opposition criticism that "chowkidar chor hai" (the watchman is thief), a barb aimed at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and rather proved "chowkidar is pure hai," he asserted.

Addressing a state conference of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha in this town in western Tamil Nadu ahead of the assembly polls likely in the next two months, he pitched strongly for the BJP-AIADMK alliance. The pair of "lotus and two leaves" alone can bring prosperity

## Herd immunity difficult to achieve: Guleria

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 21: Herd immunity is "very difficult" to achieve and one should not think of it in "practical terms" in India, especially in the times of "variant strains" of COVID-19 and "waning immunity", claimed AIIMS director Randeep Guleria on Sunday. Guleria was speaking at the ongoing edition of Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF) in a session on his book "Till We Win: India's Fight Against The Covid-19 Pandemic" -- co-authored by public policy and health systems expert Chandrakant Lahariya and renowned vaccine researcher and virologist Gagandeep Kang.

"Herd immunity is something that is going to be very, very difficult to achieve and it is something one should not really think of in practical terms... Because the variant strains and varying immunity with times can lead to a chance where people may have reinfection or get infection again," the All India Institute of Medical Sciences

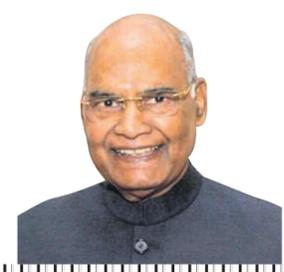


(AIIMS) director said. "And one should also remember that large number of people have had mild infections and we do know that those with mild infection tend to have less antibodies production, their antibodies tend to wane over a period of time," he added. Experts say herd immunity is said to have been developed in a population segment if at least 50-60 per cent of those are found to have the presence of antibodies in a sero-prevalence survey.



## Shah VS Rahul in Pondicherry

Kiran Bedi's unprecedented removal as Lieutenant Governor of Pondicherry when she was in the midst of reviewing the COVID-19 vaccination drive was part of a well-crafted strategy by Union Home Minister Amit Shah. Highly placed sources say the Centre's action was not abrupt. When the BJP high command was confident of its numbers to pull the plug from under the feet of Congress Chief Minister V Narayanasamy, it decided to send



Saints do not belong to any caste, sect or region. They take steps which are for the welfare of the entire humanity

RAM NATH KOVIND | PRESIDENT



to the state, he said, alluding to the respective poll symbols of the BJP and the AIADMK. Speaking about the border stand-off, the Defence Minister said after nine rounds of diplomatic and military level talks between India and China, a solution had been found, referring to the mutually agreed disengagement process in eastern Ladakh. "After nine rounds of military and diplomatic dialogue, the disengagement process is complete. But unfortunately the Congress is doubting Indian army's bravery... Isn't it

## FOR A CAUSE



A member of Panchamshali community during a Panchamasali convention to demand for inclusion in the 2A reservation category, in Bangalore

## Mercury likely to soar by 5°C in northwest India: IMD

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 21: Mercury is likely to rise by four to five degrees to settle at 32 degree celsius (C) over most parts of northwest India in the next three to four days given an increase in moisture and variable wind direction, the Indian Meteorological Department said Sunday.

The maximum temperature recorded in Delhi on Saturday was 27.3 degree C, three degrees above normal while the city recorded minimum temperature on Sunday at 10.1, over one degree C below normal. Meanwhile, the temperature in the day is forecasted to reach 28 degree C in the national capital. The department said that two western disturbances are prevailing the weather condition which may bring rain and thunderstorms to the western Himalayas.

"Normally temperatures go up when there is a Western



Disturbance," said Kuldeep Shrivastava, head, regional weather forecasting centre. The weather department also informed that the first western disturbance (WD) started approaching on Friday while the second one is likely to approach on Monday. However, the department said that its impact is likely to be concentrated around the hills only. "The impact of the WDs will be limited to the hills mainly in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and upper tranches of Uttarakhand. Light rain is also likely over Punjab, but over the rest of northwest India, temperatures will rise due to increase in moisture and variable wind direction," Shrivastava explained.

## U'KHAND TRAGEDY: ONE MORE BODY RECOVERED

One more body was recovered from a tunnel at the NTPC's flood-ravaged Tapovan-Vishnugad project site Sunday, taking the toll in the disaster that struck Chamoli district a fortnight ago to 68



# BJP NOT SERIOUS CONTENDER IN KERALA: THAROOR

Tharoor claimed that the BJP will find it difficult to make any inroads in Kerala during the upcoming Assembly elections

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 21: With E Sreedharan throwing his hat in the political ring by deciding to join the BJP, senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor Sunday said the technocrat is likely to have a "minimal" impact on the upcoming Kerala Assembly polls, and asserted that the BJP is not a serious contender except in a few seats in the state.

In an interview with PTI, Tharoor said he was surprised at the announcement that Sreedharan was going to enter the political fray and join the BJP. India's 'Metro Man' E Sreedharan will have no major impact on the upcoming Kerala Assembly elections, Congress leader Shashi Tharoor said adding that the BJP is not a serious contender in the state.

He said Sreedharan's entry came as a surprise to him because the technocrat had a long innings executing engineering projects, not making or implementing policies in a fractious democracy. "It's a very different world," he added. Asked what kind of impact Sreedharan could have on the Kerala Assembly polls, the MP from Thiruvananthapuram said, "Since he has no political background or experience, I think his impact is likely to be minimal."

"When I joined politics at 53, I thought I had left it too late to make the kind of impact I felt I was capable of. What can I say about someone who is 88?" Tharoor said. On whether Sreedharan's entry will make the Kerala polls a three-way contest and the BJP will emerge as a serious contender alongside the Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the United Democratic Front (UDF), he said the BJP is not a serious contender at all except in a hand-



ful of seats, and it will be very difficult for the party to improve upon the one seat it won last time. Known as the 'Metroman' and for completing big infrastructure projects, the 88-year-old technocrat has also said his main aim is to help the BJP come to power in Kerala.

## Reduce fuel prices: Sonia to PM Modi

Accusing the government of "profiteering" off "people's misery", Congress chief Sonia Gandhi on Sunday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi over "spiralling" fuel prices, urging him to follow 'Raj Dharma' and reduce the prices by partially rolling back excise duty. In a three-page letter to Modi, she said the truth is that as GDP "nosedives", the prices of gas, diesel and petrol continue to rise unchecked. Gandhi also said governments are elected to ease the burden of people and at the very least, not work directly contrary to their interests.

# Chandrayaan-3 launch delayed further to 2022

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 21: Chandrayaan-3, India's third mission to Moon, is likely to be launched in 2022, ISRO chief K Sivan has said.

The COVID-19 lockdown has hit several projects of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) including Chandrayaan-3, which was scheduled to be launched in late 2020, and Gaganyaan, the country's first manned space mission. Unlike its predecessor, Chandrayaan-3 will not have an orbiter.

"We are working on it. It is the same configuration like Chandrayaan-2 but it will not have an orbiter. The orbiter launched during Chandrayaan-2 will be used for Chandrayaan-3. With that we are working on a system and mostly the launch will be next year in 2022," Sivan told PTI. Chandrayaan-2, aimed at landing a rover on uncharted Lunar South Pole, was



FILE PHOTO

launched on July 22, 2019 on board the country's most powerful geosynchronous launch vehicle.

However, the lander Vikram hard-landed on September 7, 2019, crashing India's dream to become the first nation to successfully land on

the lunar surface in its maiden attempt. Chandrayaan-3 is critical for ISRO as it will demonstrate India's capabilities to make landing for further interplanetary missions.

He said ISRO is targeting December to launch the first unmanned mission under the Gaganyaan project. The mission was originally scheduled to launch in December last year. It will be followed by another unmanned mission and the third leg is the main module, he said.

Gaganyaan envisages to send three Indians to space by 2022. The four test pilots selected for the mission are currently undergoing training in Russia. When asked about the launch of the third module of Gaganyaan - the manned mission - Sivan said, "A lot of technology needs to be demonstrated. We will decide on the time (of the manned mission) after checking whether all the technology is perfect."

Bedi packing. The CM whose government is on the brink of a collapse, has been robbed of a major poll issue; turning his fight between a duly elected south Indian government versus north Indian police officer. The selection of Bedi's successor was also a part of a well-crafted strategy. The jolt to Congress comes at a time when Rahul Gandhi has been overseeing its affairs and appointed his key man Dinesh Gundu Rao as in-charge of Pondicherry.

## Rahul proposes, Piyush disposes

If Rahul Gandhi had thought of stumping the Modi government by seeking details of contracts obtained by the Ambanis and Adanis from FCI and BJP-ruled state governments for construction of godowns since 2014, the objective ended in total disappointment. Reason: Piyush Goyal, Consumer

Affairs & Food Ministry, gave Rahul Gandhi a 14-page written reply in Lok Sabha listing every detail of 93 contracts given to private players for augmenting storage of food grains capability. It clearly emerged after scrutiny of documents placed on the floor of the Lok Sabha that the Ambanis did not obtain a single contract. However, the Adanis secured nine out of 93 across India. In fact, the biggest beneficiary of Private Entrepreneurs Guarantee (PEG) Scheme to attract private investments was Canada's Prem Watsa, who owns Fairfax India, which in turn, owns National Collateral Management Services Limited (NCML). Watsa secured 15 contracts from the FCI and none from the state governments. Incidentally, it's the Canadian PM who ran into controversy over farmers' demanding scrapping of three farm laws. Though the PEG scheme was launched by the Manmohan Singh government in 2008 to ramp up modern storage

capacity, Rahul Gandhi had asked Piyush Goyal details of contracts given only after Modi became PM in 2014. Under the PEG scheme, the private players can opt for any of the two models; Build - Operate & Own (BOO) and Build, Operate & Transfer (BOT).

## Modi's olive branch to Azad

Whether it was an emotional gesture or deep politics, no one can vouch safe. But it was rarest of the rare moment in Rajya Sabha Tuesday last when PM Modi told Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad, "I would not let you retire, I will continue taking your advice. My doors are always open for you." Azad is bidding adieu to a 41-year-long parliamentary career. It transpires that the Gandhis were upset with him for something and, hence, he was not re-nominated to the Rajya Sabha and left high &

dry. On his part, Ghulam Nabi Azad made no secret of his chemistry with Modi saying, "Two people always greeted me during festivals and my birthday for many years - Congress president Sonia Gandhi and PM Modi." This was the Prime Minister's second compliment for Azad in a week. "Ghulam Nabi ji always speaks decently; never uses foul language. Azad has praised elections held in J&K local bodies, but I am concerned. I believe your party will take it in the right spirit and not make the mistake of doing the opposite by taking it as the view of the G-23," the PM had said earlier.

## Discontent between Congress and NCP

There is a long history of love and hate relationship between the Congress and NCP since 1999. But they joined hands again after burying the hatchet to form the

MVA government and it was business as usual. But the Congress high command in Delhi has always been suspicious of Sharad Pawar's power games. Pawar is unhappy because the Congress torpedoed his plans to emerge as a leader of the Opposition parties at a national level replacing Sonia Gandhi. Pawar is now on his own trip and NCP, TMC, SP, BSP, YSR-Congress, TRS, BJD and others do business with him. Rahul Gandhi keeps the company of DMK, Left, IUML etc. It is also surprising that RJD is keeping a safe distance from Congress. The Opposition parties say that Rahul Gandhi is not consistent and Congress is facing huge internal issues. It goes one way in Rajya Sabha and another way in Lok Sabha. The appointment of Nana Patole as PCC Chief turned out to be the last straw in the camel's back as Pawar feels it is part of Congress move to destabilise the Maharashtra government. What's in the store in Maharashtra, no one knows.