

IN BRIEF

9 HURT AS FOB AT BHOPAL RLY STN COLLAPSES

DC CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, FEB. 13

Nine people including a woman were on Thursday injured when part of foot over bridge (FOB) in Bhopal railway station collapsed.

The incident took place on platform number two and three.

One of the injured was stated to be critical, a railway spokesman said.

"Nine people were injured in the incident. We will investigate the matter and fix accountability on the people responsible for it," railway PRO I.A. Siddique said.

The victims were mostly passengers who were standing under the ill-fated foot over bridge, Siddique added.

Maoists run weapon making units in Bastar

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, FEB. 13

Maoists' weapon manufacturing units in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region are making rockets and bullets from the empty shells left behind by security forces after encounters.

A weapon manufacturing unit busted by the 204 COBRA (commando battalion for resolute action) battalion personnel at Irappali in Chhattisgarh's south Bastar district of Bijapur three days ago has brought to light the skill acquired by Naxals to make firearm ammunition in their 'factories' in

the jungles. "A gun making factory has been busted in Irappali. Tools used for making bullets for various firearms and rockets for Under Barrel Grenade Launchers (UBGL) has been seized.

Many empty cartridge and rocket shells have been found at the site. Besides pipes and tools for making guns, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and mortar bombs have also been seized at the encounter site", a senior CRPF officer posted in Raipur in Chhattisgarh told this newspaper on Thursday.

The seizures have led to disclosure that Maoists used to collect the empty

shells of firearm ammunition and rockets left behind by security forces after the encounters to reuse them by filling them up with explosives and other materials, the officer said unwilling to be quoted.

Naxals have filled their armory by looting firearms such as AK 47 and Insas assault rifles and UBGLs from security forces in the encounters with them.

They used to depend on their weapon supply chain to procure ammunition and rockets. However, the supply chains often used to be busted by security forces putting Naxals under pressure.

Two Cobra commandos were martyred and five others injured in the encounter with armed Maoists at Irappali, considered the bastion of Maoists' battalion number one, on February 10.

Body of a Maoist identified as Madvi Hunga, body guard of Sonu who commanded company number one of CPI (Maoist), was recovered at the encounter site. The counterinsurgency operation was launched by Cobra commandos following intelligence tip off on gathering of large number of armed Naxals including battalion number one commander Hidma in Irappali.

Prez keeps word, meets old friend and his family

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 13

In December 2019, President Ram Nath Kovind had a pleasant experience while attending the platinum jubilee celebrations of Utkal University in Bhubaneswar. He could recognise his long-time friend Birabhadra Singh sitting quietly in the audience.

He asked his officers to arrange a meeting post the celebrations.

During the meeting that lasted for 30 minutes, the President had invited Singh to Rashtrapati Bhawan.

Kovind kept his word and played host to Singh

and family who visited the Rashtrapati Bhawan on February 4.

Singh's happiness knew no boundaries when he narrated his feelings to mediapersons here on Thursday about his recent meeting with Kovind which lasted over 30 minutes.

Singh said President Kovind told my children that "I know your father and recognised him from his 'Pagdi' at Utkal University, Bhubaneswar. I knew him (Singh) by heart since the time we were together."

Birabhadra Singh and Kovind were Raja Sabha members from 2001 to 2005. It was during the valedictory session of Utkal University plat-

inum jubilee celebrations in December last year that the President met Singh after 12 years.

Though Singh then had expressed desire to meet Kovind much before his arrival and approached the President's security officers to allow him to offer a rose, his request was turned down due to security reasons.

However, Singh's dream came true when President himself recognised him sitting in the audience and immediately asked his officers to arrange a meeting.

"I told him that his decision to meet me was appreciated by media which termed the friendship to be that of 'Krishna and Sudama'," said Singh.

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DECCAN Chronicle

14 FEBRUARY 2020

Face up to cold truth: Stagflation here to stay

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman had recently told Parliament that green shoots in the Indian economy are clearly visible and the steps taken by the Reserve Bank of India would boost the growth further.

But little more than 24 hours later, another arm of the same government — the ministry of statistics and programme implementation — literally showed the mirror to the finance ministry through its monthly data which revealed that industrial growth has again shrunk while retail inflation has continued to shoot up to a six-year-high.

Though industrial growth in December 2019 has shrunk by 30 basis points, the situation would look more disconcerting if one looks at the details of the slowing industrial growth. There has been a secular contraction in all user-based segments except primary and intermediate sectors.

The production of consumer durable goods, which is a barometer for consumer confidence in the economy, has contracted by 6.7 per cent. Shrinkage in the production of consumer non-durable goods — by 3.7 per cent — shows that the people have rediscovered thrift in their lives.

The Narendra Modi government should not take the economy for granted and let politics take it hostage. As rating agency Standard and Poor's said in its assessment, downward pressure on India's sovereign credit ratings could emerge if the country's average economic growth over the next four years falls below the forecasted 7.1 per cent or if the general government deficit (including the Centre and states) rises or if political developments undermine the economic reform momentum.

Hafiz: Token step by Pak?

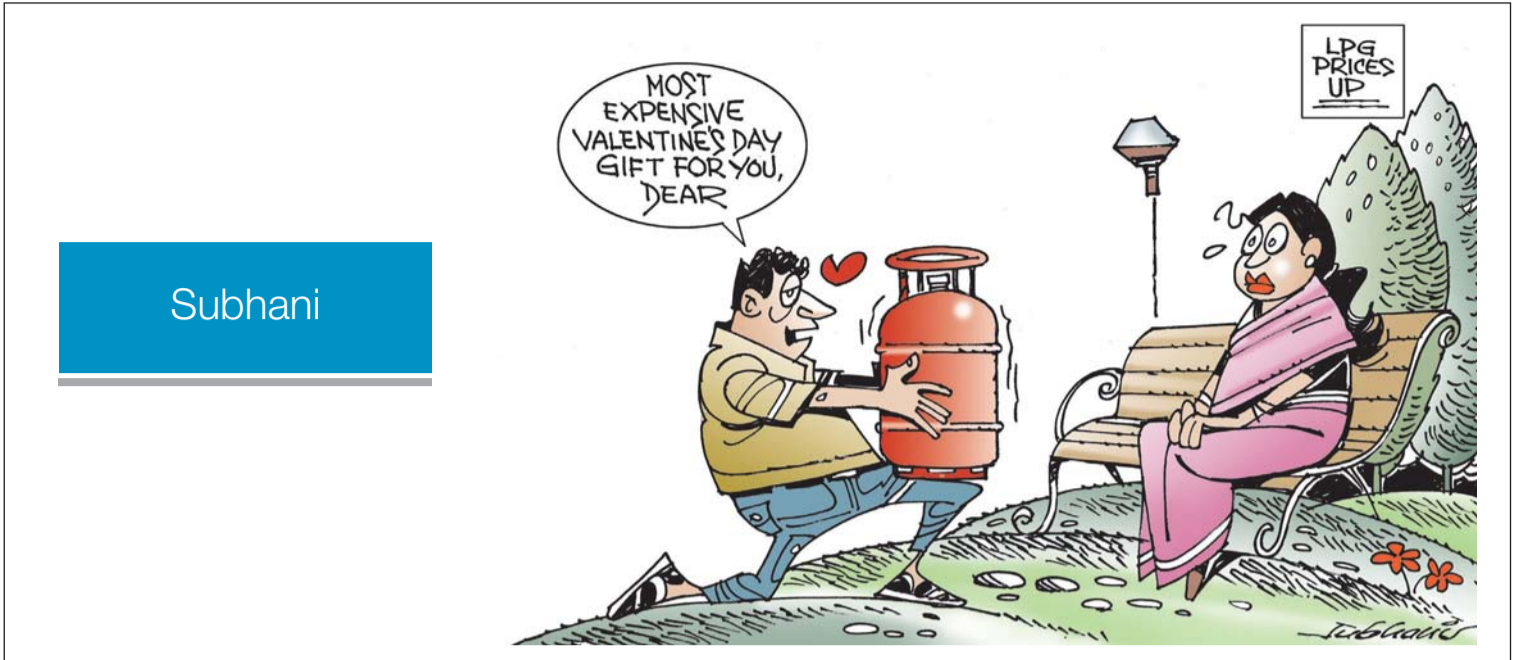
In October last year, the Paris-based international anti-terrorism watchdog Financial Action Task Force (FATF) didn't blackball Pakistan altogether on the terrorism question, placing Islamabad on its "grey" list for a period of four months.

The grey list categorisation meant that the so-called improvement in Islamabad's attitude on terrorism was being noted, but clearly it was far from enough. The improvement essentially lay in the Pakistan government taking over scores of seminars that preach the terrorism gospel.

With the four-month grace period ending soon, an anti-terror court in Lahore on Wednesday sentenced Hafiz Saeed, founder-chief of Jamaat-ud-Dawa, the mother outfit of Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, and an associate to 11 years of rigorous imprisonment on two counts of terror funding and money-laundering, indicating that it was observing the letter of FATF's instructions.

With the FATF threat looming, a court has meted out punishment, at least for the record. Years of diplomatic demands by India to proceed against the terrorist mastermind over the Mumbai 26/11 attacks of 2008, in which 166 persons were killed, had produced no results.

The chief US diplomat for South and Central Asia, Alice Wells, called the decision "a step forward" in combating terror funding. Washington needs to please Islamabad as US negotiations with the Taliban in the Afghanistan context are still to be over.



Subhani

A year after Pulwama, it's time for outreach in J&K



Syed Ata Hasnain

On February 14, 2019, a suicide car bomb attack on a CRPF convoy on the newly-rolled out highway from Srinagar to Qazigund led to a catastrophic loss of 40 Indian paramilitary personnel returning from leave.

The Indian response had to meet a couple of parameters. First, it had to begin with an action in the military domain to meet public sentiments and political necessity. This was mandatory since a lack of response would run hollow to the strategy the Indian government had adopted following the Uri terror attack.

Detailed deliberations on the choice of response led to the selection of a surgical airstrike against the Balakot training facility of Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), known to house a large number of terrorists under training, along with a seminary. The strike, 13 days later, was professionally executed by the Indian Air Force.

It hugely benefited the NDA government in winning a second term, while diplomatically the measured Indian response only against terror infrastructure and drawdown from escalation helped in maintaining moral ascendancy.

On August 5, with unprecedented security arrangements in J&K, the special constitutional provisions for J&K were legislatively annulled and the administrative setup of the state restructured to carve out two Union territories — Ladakh, and Jammu & Kashmir.

The mention of PoK and its re-integration as the remaining agenda, and the possible review of India's "no first use" nuclear doctrine, succeeded in sending out a message of far bolder intent.

The continuum into 2020 is seeing Pakistan psychologically on the backfoot with limited options to re-energise J&K. Two other factors are adding to the cascading effect of the events of 2019: first the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) scrutiny, and second, the rapidly deteriorating economy that was bailed out in 2019 through a \$6 billion IMF package.

With Afghanistan also in a state of transition, it may be beyond Pakistan's capability to simultaneously handle two borders and two turbulent regions. We can expect a cooler summer in J&K, and it is thus the moment for India to go all out with better governance, a better communications strategy and outreach and, most of all, much better political handling.

The writer, a retired lieutenant-general, is a former commander of the Srinagar-based 15 Corps. He is also associated with the Vivekananda International Foundation and the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies.

LETTERS CENSUS EXERCISE

I think the Census exercise is a routine one and should not raise any doubts (TS begins Census, sparks NRC fears, DC, Feb. 13).

However, it would be ideal if senior government officials, preferably the CM himself, had announced this as the times are very sensitive and the atmosphere all over the country is so surcharged.

Abbas A. Tyabji Hyderabad

GARBAGE CHARGES

GHMC officials seem to have no control over garbage collection agents (Greater Hyderabad residents are paying twice for garbage, DC, Feb. 13). They often try to extort money from households and don't turn up if they are not obliged.

Kumar Shastrri Moula Ali

Most residents and shopkeepers keep their premises clean by disposing off the garbage in the dustbins allotted in their respective areas. However, we often see roadsides and dump yards with huge garbage cans filled up and not cleared by the GHMC personnel.

Gudipati Shanti Priya Secunderabad

CONGRESS CRISIS

The Delhi Assembly poll verdict shows the leadership crisis plaguing India's grand old party, the Congress. Gone are the days when one could sit in Delhi and run the party (Chacko blames Sheila, faces flak, DC, Feb. 13).

P.J. David Hyderabad

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DECCAN CHRONICLE

ADITYA SINHA Editor

T. VENKATESWARLU Printer & Publisher

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:

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Even Oscars after-parties have now lost their shine

Reading about the Oscars this week, I couldn't help thinking back to a time when they actually meant something. When I lived in America in the mid-1990s, the Academy Awards were described as "the gay Super Bowl" which, although it sounded flippant, acknowledged their cultural significance.

before Graydon Carter, then the editor-in-chief, had managed to enlist the Los Angeles Country Sheriff's Department to check everyone's credentials. He needed to do that, too, because the party was mobbed by thousands of wannabes, all claiming to be on the guest list.

Gilbert Grape. A year later, I cornered Jim Carrey in the gents and was regaled with a ten-minute routine about attending a motivational seminar for celebrities by Tony Robbins. To this day, it remains the only party I've attended where people stood out for not being celebrities.

Other sponsors — such as Instagram, which used to have a photobooth at the event — have pulled out because the party's become so uncool. For the exhausted stars — there are more than 50 comparable parties during Oscars week — it has become a ten-minute photo-call on their way to one of the private bashes hosted by Madonna or Jay-Z.

movie stars, society scandals and true crime — with the mantra of "diversity, inclusion and equity", or DIE for short. News-stand sales have predictably declined. At this year's shindig, she boasted to a reporter that she'd been working to make it more inclusive. A laudable aim, no doubt, but hardly the way to attract A-listers.

By arrangement with the Spectator

Why is anti-Semitism creeping back in US, Europe?



Saeed Naqvi

Wide Angle

I had pulled out all my notes on Arvind Kejriwal and his Aam Aadmi Party machine, when a mail from Warsaw redirected me towards a different column. I'll get back to Mr Kejriwal next time. The mail said that creeping anti-Semitism in Europe and the United States was being largely ignored by the mainstream media in those countries. The mind went back to my school days when we became first acquainted with the term anti-Semitism because Mr Rayner, the only teacher who was allowed to smoke in class, took particular relish from the predicament of Shylock, the Jewish moneylender who is the central figure in William Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, which he taught. He

consistently posed the question: Was Shylock a victim or a villain? A pound of flesh closest to Antonio's heart was what Shylock had insisted on in the event of default. He sought revenge because he had been insulted by the Christians; he had had his "Jewish gabardine" publicly spat upon. But Shylock's grief reaches epic proportions when Christians inflict a nasty bit of "Love Jihad" on him — his daughter Jessica runs away with Lorenzo, a Christian. Worse, she runs away with his "ducats", the currency those days. "O my daughter; O my ducats". I cannot remember a courtroom with such nail-biting suspense as when Portia saves Antonio from Shylock's blade. Anti-Semitism, from much before Elizabethan times,

remained a sentiment in two powerful strands. One was the direct Christian prejudice against Jews in Europe, which climaxed with Hitler in Germany. The Islamic conquest of Spain in the eighth century had led to the flourishing of a composite culture in which Muslims, Christians and Jews contributed in equal measure. The Reconquista, or the return of Christian rule in 1478, led to the Spanish Inquisitions, which were harsher on the Jews than on Muslims. Countries from Morocco upto the Ottoman Empire accorded hospitality to the persecuted Jews. The basic conflict, whether in Northern Europe or in the Iberian Peninsula, was always between Christianity and Judaism, not the least because Christians blamed Jews for Christ's death. What has puzzled me always is the deafening Jewish-Muslim acrimony. I shall never forget the day in the Royal Palace in Rabat, Morocco, when I found myself seated in the office of Andre Azoulay, the late King Hasan's principal adviser. He was the second most powerful man in the kingdom. He was a

Sympathy for Jews has given place to an awe for the Jewish state. The exceptional achievements of Jewish people will always shine through, but individuals are being submerged in unwholesome Zionist excesses.

Sephardic Jew like so many others in the country who held key posts. A mandatory annual event was the jamboree hosted by His Majesty for Sephardic Jews in the diaspora. This sentimental reunion was a continuation of a medieval tradition. When 50,000 Jews were expelled from Spain after the Reconquista, Morocco and other North African states had accorded the new "refugees" extraordinary hospitality. Even after Jews from this part of the world had made their homes in Israel, they remembered how well Morocco had treated them. I have seen photographs of King Hasan dominate Sephardic drawing rooms in Jerusalem.

By the 1980s the Jewish state and the international Jewry had become so powerful that even "reworking" Shakespeare became a legitimate intervention. Rather than discard the *Merchant of Venice* and select any one of Shakespeare's plays in 1989, director Sir Peter Hall chose to tweak Shakespeare and impart rationalism to Shylock's character. Dustin Hoffman virtually reimagined Shylock, toning down his usurious rate of interest, thereby enhancing the sympathy factor for the moneylender. A sort of Christian gangling up against a hapless "professional" was played up. Shylock's tragic end is ironically the heart of the play's mirth. The toning down of the Shakespearean prejudice against Jews was clearly a function of guilt on account of the excesses during the Second World War. The remarkable rise in anti-Semitism in recent decades by comparison leaves one aghast. Sympathy for Jews has given place to an awe for the Jewish state. The exceptional achievements of Jewish people will always shine through, but individuals are being submerged in unwhole-

some Zionist excesses. These excesses are being amplified by Donald Trump's singularly one-sided support for anything that Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu demands. The general projection of both as heartless bullies automatically accelerates anti-Semitism. Take the "Deal of the Century", Mr Trump's "two-state peace plan" for the Middle East, that only the duet and their closest supporters were ecstatic about. There will be a corresponding spike in ill-will. Do you think American campuses are falling over each other in adoration for Mr Trump and his buddy after he signed an executive order aimed at combating anti-Semitism on US college campuses. "This is our message to universities — if you want to accept the federal dollars you get each year, you must reject anti-Semitism." What must students do to become good boys entitled to federal funds? Abandon the "Boycott, Divest and Sanction Israel movement", which has been popular on campuses. Jewish lobbies in Poland, for example, were bringing to bear

their considerable clout on property transactions. Properties owned by Jews before the war were being successfully reclaimed by the old owners at throwaway prices. When a Polish law sought to deter these transactions, the US state department intervened. Officials in Washington would keep a watchful eye to protect Jewish interests. Imagine how the Poles would respond to such interference. The rise of anti-migrant, anti-Semitic leaders in Hungary, Germany, Austria and Poland is a depressing list. By their behaviour, the Trump-Netanyahu duet have only aggravated the situation. At an international conference in Warsaw last year, Israeli foreign minister Yisrael Katz accused the Polish leadership of anti-Semitism. His language was unbelievably coarse: "Poles suckle anti-Semitism from their mother's milk." How would this outburst have registered with the Primetime TV viewers in Poland? *The writer is a senior journalist and commentator based in New Delhi*

Schools of terror: How prisons fuel radicalism, create new extremists

Ian Acheson

Sometimes it appears as if, over the past 10 years, the British government has been actively trying to destroy the whole criminal justice system. It's like an evil experiment: impose a 20 per cent cut in the prisons budget, meaning a 26 per cent reduction in the number of operational frontline staff — then sit back and see what happens. What happened was predictable, with disastrous consequences for both inmates and the public. As a previous Conservative home secretary once said, Britain's prisons became places that "make bad people worse". Imagine a young man like Sudesh Amman arriving in prison after his first offence. He was already a drug user, known to have a cannabis habit. He was mentally unstable and radicalised by Islamist propaganda. He entered a prison that's usually overcrowded, frequently filthy and with too few staff struggling just to keep people alive (themselves included) from one end of the day to the other. Inside, all of his problems are not addressed but exacerbated. In most prisons there's a rampant drugs economy that destroys lives and drives much of the violence. It makes the task of reforming offenders near impossible. The money to be made from drugs inside is extraordinary. The predators can access their customer base without leaving their cells. Mobile phones actually designed and sold for their ability to be stored where the sun don't shine have handy apps to transfer the cash to the dealers. It's also convenient for the dealers that many of the captive consumers have

huge unmet needs with mental health problems. Finally, charismatic hate preachers are in close proximity to credulous, violent, addicted young men in search of meaning and excitement. The details of Amman's incarceration and early life are slowly emerging and they suggest a loner and a misfit, infatuated with death, who was eager for martyrdom to make sense of a failed and futile existence. This is a depressingly familiar profile for lone actor terrorists the world over, and it is often associated with mental illness. And this matters. The relationship between mental or developmental disorders and terrorism is frequently drowned out — either by commentators who see conspiracy to obscure the ideological origins of the crime, or by those who fear all mentally ill people will get labelled as dangerous. Such concerns are understandable — but those killed by insane terrorists are just as dead as those dispatched by "rational" killers. Amman's former cell mate at HMP Belmarsh has described him as someone who was "definitely insane and he never hid his intentions, so it's crazy how he even got out of jail". Amman's mother has claimed that her son was effectively brainwashed by material he viewed online in prison. It's still possible to be astonished at this. HMP Belmarsh is a relatively modern high-security prison housing a number of terrorists. It has a permanent presence of counter-terrorism officers within its security and intelligence department. It is relatively well-resourced. But as ITV's *Welcome to Belmarsh*

We must deal with things as they are. We need a framework for sentencing and releasing prisoners and this is in progress. The quantity of years given to an extremist is less important than the quality of the incarceration.

documentary showed, it needs the full attention of staff to struggle to contain 68 street gangs and entrenched use of psychoactive drugs. Who the hell would work in a place like this? Good question. While the gigantic Grayling-sized hole in the staff bucket has lately started to fill with emergency recruitment of new staff, they emerge from one of the shortest training courses in Europe to work in one of the most hostile environments outside a war zone. An Afghan veteran prison officer recently said that he had felt safer in Helmand. Little wonder then, that on the latest figures, over half of all prison officers hanging up their keys have less than two years' service. When stacking shelves pays more than being the state's punchbag, it's not hard to understand why. When I wrote my review of Islamist extremism in the criminal justice system in 2016, my team and I were unanimous that a prison solely for terrorists was not the answer to the threat we identified. We took the view that the only extremists who should be separated were the hate preachers; those likely to inspire others with extreme ideology. We recommended they should be cut off from their targets for as long as they persisted in their activities. We were mindful of the lessons from the past from Northern Ireland, but not hamstrung by them.

Now, I'm not so sure. We need secure and stable prisons that are fully in the control of the state; and too many prisons now fail this test. We cannot have environments where people like Usman Khan and Sudesh Amman degenerate into killing machines. We can't tolerate a system where the sole product of their time behind bars is the dehumanisation of themselves and others. It is increasingly hard to make the case for a "good prison" that puts brawlers and gangsters up in close proximity to death cultists. What would a terrorist prison look like? There are plenty of examples around the world to draw from. Many aren't good. The main argument for dispersing terrorist prisoners across a number of reinforced prisons (as we currently do) is that this reduces the potency and capability of the most dangerous. But dispersal was designed to deal with serious organised crime syndicates, not networked 21st-century jihadists with hinterlands of supporters in each of the six prisons they are likely to end up in. Metastasising the cancer of violent extremism across our prison system doesn't seem to be the right response to a movement whose modus operandi is global revolution through recruitment of new blood. But in the current environment, it's unlikely we will move to jihadi jails anytime soon. In the meantime we must deal with things as they are. We need a framework for sentencing and releasing prisoners and this is in progress. The quantity of years given to an extremist is less important than the quality of the incarceration. Of the 82,000-odd prisoners, only about 220 are terrorists, with hundreds more screened after being deemed at risk of radicalisation. We need to be more assertive in managing the challenge they pose — from

the start of their custody to their resettlement in the community. All the various arrangements for the supervision of terrorist offenders "in the community" (i.e. outside of prison) use structures and agencies that are philosophically and organisationally unsuitable for the management of this threat. There should be one terrorist prisoner management service, covering individualised treatment programmes, risk assessment, release decisions and resettlement supervision. People who go into the streets and stab strangers with impunity are in no conventional way rational. So we need to step up the surveillance, treatment and protection of those whose psychological disorders may predispose them to strike. No more generic, psychosocial interventions invented by well-meaning professionals. And finally: you can't defeat Islamism without Islam. We need an urgent step change in the recruitment, deployment and involvement of moderate and modern Islamic scholars to take on this fight. Indeed, we need to seek the support of communities when terrorists are released from prisons, working in partnership with the various protective services. It needs to be a joint effort. What of those who can't (or won't) surrender ideas that are completely antithetical to our national values, even to what it is to be human? We must find ways to keep the door open for them to change. We've no clear idea about the relationship between time and desistence for this new generation of terrorists. But let's be straight: that open door needs to be behind high walls and in the confines of prison custody. If necessary: for ever. *By arrangement with the Spectator*

Ship with coronavirus on board has turned into a floating prison



Rafia Zakaria

It appears to be a scene from a film. A large ship docked at a faraway harbour enveloped in grey mist. There are more than 3,700 people on the ship, a thousand of them crew members working hard below decks and the passenger staterooms. Yet, while the ship is docked, no one is permitted to get off except those who have already been stricken. To retrieve them, health workers arrive fully suited in white hazard protective gear. A makeshift decontamination chamber sprays both patients and health workers as they emerge from the ship. Everyone else must stay on board, where they have been confined since February 5. This is the very real story of the Diamond Princess, part of the Princess Cruises Line, which has been docked at Yokohama harbour in Japan for the past week. The ship, which was quarantined after it was discovered that a passenger who had boarded it at an earlier port had been diagnosed with the novel coronavirus, has the highest number of confirmed cases for a single location outside of China. According to the latest count, 136 passengers have been found to have the coronavirus. According to Japanese health authorities, the passengers will be allowed to leave at the end of the two-week quarantine period on February 19, barring any "special circumstances". There may well be "special circumstances". Experts have expressed concerns that the virus can spread even from asymptomatic individuals during its incubation period. Allowing the passengers and crew to disembark and catch a plane to their homes in Australia, Canada, the US and many other countries might mean that anyone who may have the virus could carry it to their countries. For all of these reasons, the 3,700-plus people remain on the ship. A cruise ship that was supposed to be a vacation destination has become a floating prison. According to reports, life on the ship is achingly boring and tedious. Even the best rooms are small, although passengers staying in these rooms at least have access to a balcony and hence fresh air. Those who have paid less are in interior rooms that have no windows at all. In these rooms, it is impossible to tell day from night, all of them melding into one long, interminable stretch. If the situation for the passengers is bad, that of the crew who continue to work non-stop below decks is even worse. According to the *New York Times*, at least two crewmembers are assigned to each one of the tiny cabins that function as their living space. Three, sometimes four, people have to share a bathroom. It is no surprise that at least 10 of the peo-

ple reported to be infected are crew members. It is a sad illustration of the cruelty of class systems. The crew, most of them from the Philippines and India, prepare and deliver the three meals that each passenger is allotted per day to their rooms so that the passengers remain sequestered (as per the instructions of Japanese authorities). On Sunday, an Indian crew member (there are hundreds of them) recorded a video that quickly went viral. In the video, he begs the Indian government to rescue the Indian citizens on the ship. Otherwise, he says, the virus that is spreading its tentacles ever deeper into the ship will also claim them. There are moral dilemmas here. How long should the thousands on the Diamond Princess, or for that matter the millions in Wuhan, be quarantined for? Is it humane to make a random sample of human beings, rendered unfortunate through chance and circumstance and having to bear the cost of ensuring that humanity remains relatively safe? Currently, the answer seems yes. Videos emerging from Wuhan, where many have literally been locked into their houses (padlocks installed outside by the police) show that authorities have to use increasingly severe measures to maintain the quarantine. The situation on the ship is calmer, but one wonders whether it will continue to be so in the event that the passengers learn they will not be leaving the vessel on February 19. In the meantime, the rest of us who are lucky enough not to have the virus or face the quarantine should take a moment to consider those in such difficult circumstances. How would one pass the endless stretches of time; how would one prevent a psychological breakdown; who would one wish to be quarantined with were such a situation to arise? These are useful mind experiments; more practical ones include the procurement of face masks, disinfectant and hand sanitiser (which are manufactured in China and likely to face shortages in the coming days). Meanwhile, the Diamond Princess remains docked at Yokohama harbour, taking periodic journeys out to sea so it can dispose of the wastewater that the ship is producing. As it does so, one cannot help but wonder if the planet we live on, one which is afflicted with this disease, is not simply a larger version of the Diamond Princess, some of us more adept than others at passing the time until the virus takes us. The lucky and the unlucky, the healthy and the diseased, the poor and the rich — all float together until the arrival of some unforeseen end. *By arrangement with Dawn*

Silence is a route towards God



Dominic Emmanuel

In a world that is getting noisier by the day, including the "silent sound" of the social media, the modern person is losing a sense of silence and, by extension, a sense of the divine. Can one really connect one's spirit with that of God's in a deafening marketplace? I have been privileged to spend the last few weeks at some spiritual centres and will do so in the next two months too. The basic

requirement of these places, surrounded by beautiful nature, is strict silence. Small signboards on pathways keep reinforcing it. The only sound that one hears, besides the sound of prayer and singing of hymns, is that of birds chirping. It is the peacocks' scream that wake us up by four in the morning. In his book, *"I want to see God"*, Rev. Marie Eugene writes, "God speaks in silence, and silence alone seems able to express Him.

For the spiritual person who has known the touch of God, the silence and God seem to be identified". Again Robert Cardinal Sarah in his book co-authored with Nicolas Diat, *"The Power of Silence"*, says, "At the heart of man there is an innate silence, for God abides in the innermost part of every person. God is silence, and this divine silence dwells in man. In God we are inseparably bound up with silence. The Church can affirm that mankind is the daughter of a silent God...". While mystics and saints emphasise the importance of silence in one's search for God, modern day psychologists suggest silence even as therapy. For, it is in silence

alone that a person becomes aware of one's self and the problems that lie in there, to uproot causes of unhappiness and turmoil in the subconscious. No wonder then that Jesus, despite being busy teaching and healing people was found "escaping" into a quiet place to commune with God. Practice of such silence would be an appropriate preparation to enter into the eternal silence when we breathe our last and be united with God, whose language is silence. *Father Dominic Emmanuel, a founder-member of the Parliament of Religions, can be contacted at frdominic@gmail.com*

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

BKD-Congress (R) accord on ministry

LUCKNOW, FEB. 13. The Ruling Congress in Uttar Pradesh succeeded in their efforts to reach an understanding with the BKD on the formation of a Government in the State. Mr. Charan Singh, BKD leader and Mr. D.P. Mishra of the Ruling Congress announced simultaneously tonight that "complete accord" had been reached between the two parties in the formation of a Government. While the terms of the agreement between the two parties have not been made known so far, it is understood that the Ruling Congress has, for the present "agreed to support a BKD government headed by Mr. Charan Singh.

IN BRIEF Haftar forces ban UN flights

United Nations: Eastern Libyan forces have said they would not allow the United Nations to use the only functioning airport in the capital Tripoli, hours after the UN Security Council passed a resolution demanding the warring parties commit to a "lasting ceasefire". The self-styled Libya National Army (LNA) led by renegade military commander Khalifa Haftar has been trying to capture the capital city from the internationally recognised government since April. The UN earlier warned flight restrictions were hampering humanitarian and mediation efforts in the oil-producing country embroiled in a conflict between loose alliances from western and eastern Libya since 2014. The LNA, which is backed by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, has been trying since last April to take Tripoli but has failed to breach the city's defences.

Sudan deal with USS Cole victims

Khartoum: Sudan's transitional government said Thursday it has reached a settlement with families of the victims of the 2000 attack on USS Cole in Yemen, in a bid to have the African country taken off the U.S. terrorism list and improve relations with the West. The settlement is the latest step from Khartoum to end its international pariah status. Earlier this week, Sudan's provisional rulers said they had agreed to hand over longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir to the International Criminal Court to face trial on charges of war crimes and genocide during the fighting in the western Darfur region. Also, Sudan's interim leader, Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, earlier this month met in Uganda with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who announced that Israel and Sudan would normalize relations after decades of enmity.

Funding: Harvard, Yale under probe

Washington: The U.S. Department of Education says it is opening an investigation of Yale and Harvard universities for failing to disclose hundreds of millions of dollars in gifts and contracts from foreign donors. The two Ivy League schools have been singled out in a federal crackdown on institutions of higher learning for allegedly not reporting foreign donations of more than \$250,000, as required by law under Section 117 of the Higher Education Act. The Department of Education said Yale failed to disclose a total of \$375 million in foreign money and that it was concerned that Harvard may not have fully complied with reporting requirements. "This is about transparency," Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos said in the statement. "If colleges and universities are accepting foreign money and gifts, their students, donors, and taxpayers deserve to know how much and from whom."

75 YEARS OF DRESDEN BOMBING

Dresden (Germany), Feb. 13: Germany's president is leading commemorations Thursday marking the 75th anniversary of Dresden's bombing by allied forces at the end of World War II, an event that has become a test for the way the country handles its Nazi past.

Historians say up to 25,000 people perished during the three-day bombardment from February 13-15, 1945, by American and British planes. That is comparable to the death toll in other large German cities. But the man-made firestorm, vividly captured by American author Kurt Vonnegut in his book "Slaughterhouse Five," and the destruction of large parts of the baroque city have become a rallying point for those seeking to portray Germans as victims in the war. The myth that as many as half a million civilians were killed in the bombing has been promoted by far-right activists for decades. Most recently their case has been taken up by members of the nationalist Alternative for Germany party, which has grown into a significant force in German politics since its founding seven years ago. The party, which goes by the German acronym AfD, has moved steadily to the right over the years.

Senate vote to rein in Prez

Use of forces against Iran only if Congress okays: Resolution

Washington, Feb. 13: The US Senate is scheduled to vote Thursday on a resolution calling for President Donald Trump to "terminate the use of US Armed Forces for hostilities against Iran" unless those actions are authorized by Congress. Trump rejects the measure, arguing it would be dangerous to limit his war-making power, and ahead of the vote he urged the Republican-majority Senate to oppose it.

"It is very important for our Country's SECURITY that the United States Senate not vote for the Iran War Powers Resolution," Trump said on Twitter. "We are doing very well with Iran and this is not the time to show weakness." Trump tweeted, "Americans overwhelmingly support our attack" on Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani, killed in a Trump-ordered drone strike last month at the Baghdad airport. "If my hands were tied, Iran would have a field day," he said. "Sends a very bad signal. The Democrats are only doing this as an attempt to embarrass the Republican Party. Don't let it happen!"

Senators will vote on the resolution with the possibility that five Republicans will join the 47 Democrats in the 100-member chamber to approve the measure. It is certain to face a Trump veto, with supporters of the resolution unlikely to muster a two-thirds vote to override it. Democratic Senator Tim



President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania with Ecuadorian President Lenin Moreno and his wife Rocío Gonzalez at the White House, Washington.

Kaine, the resolution's sponsor, told the Senate: "The resolution before the body today is about Congress reclaiming its rightful role in decisions about war. The resolution is pre-emptive. We should not be at war with Iran, unless Congress votes to authorize such a war." He added, "While the president must always have the ability to defend the United States from imminent attack, the executive power to initiate war stops there. An offensive war requires a congressional debate and vote." —Agencies

Pro-Prez group raises \$60m

Washington, Feb. 13: Pro-Trump groups raised more than \$60 million in January and have more than \$200 million on hand for this year's general election, shattering fundraising records on the path toward a goal of raising \$1 billion this cycle. The Republican National Committee and President Donald Trump's campaign have raised more than \$525 million since the start of 2019 together with two joint-fundraising commit-

tees. The RNC and the Trump campaign provided the figures to *The Associated Press*. The January haul coincided with most of the Senate's impeachment trial, which resulted in the Republican president's acquittal earlier this month. RNC Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel said, "We already have 500,000 volunteers trained and activated, and this record-breaking support is helping us grow our grassroots army even more." Trump's 2020 cam-

paign manager, Brad Parscale, said Democrats' "shameful impeachment hoax and dumpster fire primary process" have contributed to the "record-breaking financial support" for Trump's reelection. "With Trump's accomplishments, our massive data and ground operations and our strong fundraising numbers," Parscale said, "this campaign is going to be unstoppable in 2020". —AP

Super Tuesday: Poll in 12 states

Washington, Feb. 13: Nevada votes next and then South Carolina. But top Democrats vying for their party's presidential nomination are already looking ahead to the biggest prize on the primary calendar: Super Tuesday, the slate of contests when more than a dozen states go to the polls.

Senator Elizabeth Warren is holding a town hall on Thursday night in the Washington suburb of Arlington, Virginia, a day before Senator Bernie Sanders makes two North Carolina stops, then hits Texas.

Pete Buttigieg, the former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, will campaign in California between fundraisers in San Francisco and Silicon Valley. All four states vote March 3, along with a crush of others, from Alabama to Colorado and from Maine to Utah, as well as Warren's home state of Massachusetts and Sanders' native Vermont. More than 1,300 delegates to the Democratic National Convention are at stake, about a third of the total. The focus on Super Tuesday comes at a pivotal point in the campaign. For Sanders and Buttigieg, who have emerged in strong positions after contests in Iowa and in New Hampshire, the travel gives them an opportunity to show their national appeal and woo larger concentrations of nonwhite voters. For struggling candidates like Warren, it's

PREZ PRIMARIES

- Alabama.
- Arkansas.
- California.
- Colorado.
- Democrats Abroad.
- Maine.
- Massachusetts.
- Minnesota.
- North Carolina.
- Oklahoma.
- Tennessee.
- Texas.
- Utah.
- Vermont.
- Virginia.

a signal that they are still in the fight. And for everyone, it's a chance to prove they won't cede this swath of delegate-rich states to Michael Bloomberg, the billionaire former New York mayor who has spent months building his campaign around Super Tuesday. He campaigned in Tennessee on Wednesday and will be in Texas and North Carolina on Thursday. "All bets are off this cycle," said Texas Democratic strategist Colin Strother. —AP

Treason: Mush takes on Pak SC

Islamabad, Feb. 13: Pakistan's self-exiled former dictator Pervez Musharraf on Thursday challenged the Supreme Court Registrar's decision of refusing to entertain his appeal against the special court sentencing him to death for high treason, according to a media report. Musharraf filed the petition against the special court's decision despite his death penalty was quashed by the Lahore High Court (LHC) on January 13, the Express Tribune reported. The special court in Islamabad on December 17 last handed down the death penalty to the 74-year-old retired general, now based in Dubai, after six years of hearing a high-profile treason case against him.



Pervez Musharraf

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz govt led by former PM Nawaz Sharif had filed the treason case against the former army chief in 2013 over the imposition of an extra-constitutional emergency in Nov. 2007, which led to the confinement of a number of superior court judges in their houses and sacking of over 100 judges. However, last month Musharraf's trial in the high treason case was declared as "unconstitutional" by the LHC, leading to the annulment of the death sentence against the former president. The LHC declared that the formation of the special court was "unconstitutional" and that the treason case against Musharraf was not prepared in accordance with the law. —PTI

BILAWAL APPEARS BEFORE NAB

SHAFAQAT ALI | DC ISLAMABAD, FEB. 13

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) chief Bilawal Bhutto Thursday appeared before the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Rawalpindi in the JV (Joint Venture) Opal case. The anti-graft body handed over a questionnaire comprising 32 questions to the PPP chairman and summoned reply within two weeks. According to details, Bilawal Bhutto recorded his statement before a four-member team headed by Director General NAB Rawalpindi Irfan Naem Mangi. He was inquired whether he is the director of the Zardari Group of Companies. Bilawal Bhutto insisted to submit written replies of various questions. He was handed over a questionnaire afterwards. The PPP chairman talked to reporters after appearing before the NAB and said he is being politically victimized. —PTI

Terminal 21 inauguration



Buddhist monks during a ceremony to reopen the Terminal 21 shopping mall at Nakhon Ratchasima in Thailand on Thursday.

Pak Taliban leader killed in blast

Peshawar, Feb. 13: A senior Pakistani Taliban commander was killed by a bomb in eastern Afghanistan, militant and intelligence sources said on Thursday, the latest such incident to target the group in recent days. Sheharyar Mehsud, chief of a militant faction which is part of the umbrella Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, or Pakistani Taliban), was the target of the remote-controlled blast in Kunar province, a TTP commander in Pakistan said. A Pakistani intelligence official who confirmed

■ **SHEHARYAR MEHSUD**, chief of a militant faction which is part of the umbrella TTP, was the target of the remote-controlled blast.

the incident said Mehsud had fled to Afghanistan in 2016. The blast comes nearly two weeks after two other key TTP leaders — Khalid Haqqani and Qari Saifullah Peshawari — were killed in a clash with security forces. It

was not immediately clear who was behind the killings. They have come as the US and the Afghan Taliban — which is separate from the TTP — appear close to a breakthrough on a deal for an American troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. Islamabad has helped to facilitate the gruelling talks, which have stretched over more than a year. Pakistan was one of only three countries to recognise the Afghan Taliban regime, and its shadowy military establishment — particularly the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)

— is widely believed to back the bloody insurgency in Afghanistan. Islamabad denies the accusation. Pakistan has been battling a homegrown Islamist insurgency for over a decade, with thousands of civilians and security personnel dying in extremist attacks, especially after the TTP began their campaign of violence in 2007. But overall levels of extremist-linked violence have dropped dramatically in recent years, with 2019 seeing the fewest deaths since 2007 — the year the TTP was formed. —AFP

COSTLY RENOVATION ■ Roof & dials destroyed in May 1941 air raid, repair bill increases by millions of pounds

Nazi bombs damaged Big Ben more than thought



Picture for representation.

London, Feb. 13: The bill to repair London's iconic Big Ben clock tower has increased by millions of pounds after the discovery of World War II bomb damage, pollution and asbestos, Britain's parliament said Thursday. The cost of renovating the Elizabeth Tower housing the famous clock, which began in 2017, is now set to rise to nearly GBP 80 million (\$104 million, 95 million euros). The extensive damage requiring an extra GBP 18.6 million was only revealed once the project team was able to begin intrusive surveys for the

■ **IAN AILLES**, director-general of the House of Commons, said the task of restoring the Elizabeth Tower "had been more complex than we could have anticipated".

first time ever on the 177-year-old structure. However, the efforts to restore the tower "to its previous splendour" remain on track for completion in late 2021, according to officials. A spokesperson for the House of Commons Commission, which is overseeing the project, called the spiralling costs "very frustrating". Ian Ailles, director general of the House of

Commons, said the task of restoring the Elizabeth Tower "had been more complex than we could have anticipated". "With a 12m square (130 square feet) footprint and a prime location right in the middle of a busy working Parliament, understanding the full extent of the damage to the tower was impossible until the scaffolding was up," he

added. The work is to repair the clock faces and mechanism, cracks in the tower's masonry and corrosion in the roof, as well as to restore the edging around the clock faces to its original 19th-century colour. A lift will also be installed as an alternative to the steps up the tower, and the lights illuminating the clock will be replaced by low-energy LEDs. The renovations have meant Big Ben — whose chimes feature on British television and radio news bulletins — has been largely silent since 2017. —AFP



Representation only

IN BRIEF

Bezos sets record \$165m home buy

San Francisco: Billionaire Amazon chief Jeff Bezos has purchased a Los Angeles-area estate for \$165 million, setting a new record for the region, The Wall Street Journal reported on Wednesday. Bezos bought the Warner Estate from media mogul David Geffen, according to the Journal. It said the deal topped a Los Angeles-area home price record set last year when Lachlan Murdoch paid around \$150 million for a Bel-Air estate seen in "The Beverly Hillbillies," a 1960s television show. The Warner Estate spans nine acres (3.6 hectares) in Beverly Hills. It is a Georgian-style compound with a floor once owned by Napoleon, guest houses, a tennis court, and a nine-hole golf course.

Mars: Salt water may form annually

Washington: Salt water may form on the surface of Mars for a few days annually, according to a study. Researchers at the Planetary Science Institute in the US noted that liquid water is difficult to come by on the Red Planet, because ice rapidly dissipates into the atmosphere long before it reaches its melting point. This is because the atmospheric pressure on Mars lies near the triple point pressure of water molecules (H₂O), the minimum pressure necessary for liquid water to exist, they said. "Mars has plenty of cold ice-rich regions and plenty of warm ice-free regions, but icy regions where the temperature rises above the melting point are a sweet spot that is nearly impossible to find," said Norbert Schorghofer, a senior scientist at Planetary Science Institute.

OXFORD AMENDS 'YID' TO INCLUDE SPURS FANS

London, Feb. 13: The Oxford English Dictionary has updated its definition of the word "Yid" to include "a supporter of or player for Tottenham Hotspur Football Club", publishers announced Wednesday. The word has often been deployed as a term of abuse against Jews but a section of Spurs' support has taken to using it in terrace chants. North London club Tottenham have traditionally drawn a significant number of fans from the area's local Jewish community and this has led to anti-Semitic abuse from rival teams. The OED, regarded as the leading dictionary of British English, has also added the closely related word "Yiddo" among a number of changes and new entries made in January. The dictionary's publisher, the Oxford University Press (OUP), said in a statement issued Wednesday the word is labelled as "offensive and derogatory". "As we state at the closely related word YID... Tottenham Hotspur Football Club is traditionally associated with the Jewish community in north and east London, and the term is sometimes used as a self-designation by some Tottenham fans," the OUP statement added. "We will ensure the context for this connection is very clear in both definitions." The words derive from the Yiddish term for Jew but are thought to have been taken up as an insult during the 20th Century.

254: China's highest single day deaths

Authorities adopt a new diagnosis method after fatalities from the deadly coronavirus reach 1,367

Beijing/Wuhan, Feb. 13: China on Thursday reported 254 fatalities from the coronavirus outbreak — the highest in a single day and double than the previous record high — taking the toll to 1,367, as authorities adopted a new diagnosis method amid concerns that the crisis is nowhere near slowing down contrary to official projections. China's central Hubei province, the epicentre of the virus outbreak, reported 242 deaths and nearly 15,000 fresh cases on Wednesday, said Mi Feng, a spokesperson with the National Health Commission. Twelve fatalities came from other provinces, including two in Henan, and one in Tianjin, Hebei, Liaoning, Heilongjiang, Anhui, Shandong, Guangdong, Guangxi, Hainan, and the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, respectively.

The total deaths from the more than two-month-old virus outbreak as reported on Thursday stood at 1,367, with the total number of confirmed cases mounting to 59,804, health officials were quoted as saying by the state-run Xinhua news agency. The Philippines reported the first death outside China from the virus. So far 445 cases have been reported from about 26 countries including three from India.

2 officials replaced Amid growing public anger over the handling of the crisis, the ruling Communist Party of China replaced two high-ranking officials in Hubei province, where coronavirus first emerged in late December in provincial capital Wuhan. Xinhua reported that former Shanghai Mayor Ying Yong, 61, a close ally of President Xi Jinping, has been appointed as the new Hubei party secretary, replacing Jiang Chaoliang. The leader of Wuhan city, Ma Guoqiang, 56, has been replaced by Wang Zhonglin, 57, the party secretary of Shandong's provincial capital Jinan. Jiang, 61, is the highest-ranking political casualty so far in the virus outbreak. — PTI

JAPAN WOMAN WITH VIRUS DIES AS CRUISE SHIP CASES SOAR

Yokohama, Feb. 13: Japan on Thursday reported the first death of a person infected with novel coronavirus, as the number of cases on a quarantined cruise ship offshore soared over 200. The woman in her 80s was tested for the virus after being hospitalised, and was confirmed positive after her death, Health Minister Katsunobu Kato told a news briefing. However, it was not clear if the virus or other complications had caused her death, Kato warned. "The relationship between the new coronavirus and the death of the person is still unclear." In addition to the cases on the ship and a quarantine officer, Japan has confirmed 28 other infections — mostly among evacuees from Hubei. The Diamond Princess cruise ship off Yokohama has become the single largest cluster of cases outside China, with 218 testing positive for the COVID-19 virus. — AFP



PRINCESS CRUISES

Masked passengers are seen on the deck of the Diamond Princess docked at Yokohama port, near Tokyo, on Thursday.

— AP

● China's central Hubei province reported 242 deaths and nearly 15,000 fresh cases.

● The total number of confirmed cases mounted to 59,804.

● So far 445 cases have been reported from about 26 countries, including three from India.

■ "NOW WE need to cooperate as required. Our whole Wuhan, it's a 'War' period. Hope everyone understands. And, knows the situation," says a Hubei University notice

Beijing mobilises masses in people's fight

Beijing, Feb. 13: Banners rallying the nation behind a cause and panicked citizens who hide in their homes and report on each other: China's Communist Party has deployed an old toolkit to battle a new enemy. Authorities have tapped their propaganda powers to wage what President Xi Jinping has dubbed a "people's war" against the new coronavirus that has killed more than 1,300 people and infected nearly 60,000. Xi has paid tribute to "comrades... on the front-line" while state media has heralded the importance of patriotism in tackling the outbreak in a campaign reminiscent of Chairman Mao's cries to mobilise the masses. Zhao Yiling has not left her apartment in eastern Beijing since January 23. "The committee said you have to be patient and not

INDIAN AND PAKISTANI STUDENTS IN WUHAN PANIC

Beijing, Feb. 13: Indian and Pakistani students in China's Hubei province, the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak, have made desperate pleas to their governments to evacuate them after Chinese officials decided to convert their university gymnasiums and dormitories into makeshift hospitals amid a big surge in infection cases. Three Indian students studying at Hubei University of Chinese Medicine

made desperate pleas to the Indian government to evacuate them after the university announced plans to convert the gym into a hospital. India has already evacuated 647 Indian nationals, mostly students from Wuhan and Hubei. Ten Indians could not board the two special flights due to fever. Indian officials say 80 to 100 Indians are still left in the area. About 1,000 Pakistani students are currently in Hubei province. The Pakistani government came under heavy criticism for not evacuating them. A number of Pakistani students too have complained that the dormitories are being converted into hospitals with virus patients. Pakistani daily Dawn reported Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday directing the Foreign Office to take every possible step to help Pakistani students stuck in novel coronavirus (NCV)-hit Wuhan city of China. — PTI

stan government came under heavy criticism for not evacuating them. A number of Pakistani students too have complained that the dormitories are being converted into hospitals with virus patients. Pakistani daily Dawn reported Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday directing the Foreign Office to take every possible step to help Pakistani students stuck in novel coronavirus (NCV)-hit Wuhan city of China. — PTI

She said she follows the directives of the neighbourhood committee -- which enforce the orders of the ruling Communist Party -- to the letter. They have been the ones applying discipline around registration and self-quarantine for people returning from hard-hit areas. But she admits that amid the constant messaging from the government, she is now "terrified" about the virus. Outside her residence, a banner with large white characters on a red background has been hung, calling for the epidemic to be brought under control. "Track, alert, isolate and treat as quickly as possible," it reads. — AFP

Virus cannot pass from pregnant mom to baby

Beijing, Feb. 13: Researchers have found that the deadly coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cannot be passed from mother to child late in pregnancy, a study has revealed. According to the study, published in the journal The Lancet, there is currently no evidence that the COVID-19 causes severe adverse outcomes in neonates or that it can pass to the child while in the womb. In the study, there were two cases of fetal distress, but all nine pregnancies resulted in live births. The research also revealed that symptoms from COVID-19 infection in pregnant women were similar to those reported in non-pregnant adults, and no women in the study developed severe pneumonia or died. The new study comes after the news of a newborn (born to a mother

infected with COVID-19) testing positive for COVID-19 infection within 36 hours of birth, which prompted questions about whether the virus could be contracted in the womb. "It is important to note that many important clinical details of this case are missing, and for this reason, we cannot conclude from this one case whether intrauterine infection is possible," said study lead author Yuanzhen Zhang, Zhongnan Hospital of Wuhan University in China. "Nonetheless, we should continue to pay special attention to newborns born to mothers with COVID-19 pneumonia to help prevent infections in this group," Zhang added. — Agencies

European Union health ministers agreed to boost preparations and organise a coordinated response to prevent the virus that emerged in China, from further spreading across Europe. "Fragmentation of effort will make us all collectively more vulnerable. Unity on our part would also support China's efforts to contain the virus, and mitigate any further transmission within and into the EU," said European health commissioner Stella Kyriakides.

Fear more harmful than the virus

Beijing, Feb. 13: Even as the number of new coronavirus cases being detected each day are dropping, fears over the outbreak refuse to cease. The viral infection has so far killed over 1,100 people in China — the epicentre of the outbreak — with 97 more deaths recorded Wednesday. Despite the death toll, the novel coronavirus epidemic, later renamed by the WHO as COVID-19, is not a life-threatening illness. Most of the infections are in Hubei in China, though the daily tally of new cases detected in the province fell when compared to previous days. Hubei recorded 2,097 new cases Monday, compared to 2,618 a day earlier. The total number of cases have now hit 44,653, including 2,015 new cases on Tuesday, the lowest daily rise in new cases since January 30. In comparison to the SARS epidemic of 2002-2003, the novel coronavirus is less fatal than



Paul Molesky (L) gets a DNA swab test in his cabin room on the Diamond Princess, anchored at a port in Yokohama, near Tokyo on Thursday.

— AP

the epidemic which resulted in around 800 deaths 17 years ago. Like the 2019-nCoV or Wuhan virus, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is also caused due to a type of coronavirus, called the SARS coronavirus (SARS-CoV).

Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, in a video message to his citizens, has underlined how "fear can do more harm" than the virus itself. Singapore has reported 47 cases of coronavirus. Its biggest bank, DBS, evacuated 300 staff

from its head office on Wednesday after a confirmed coronavirus case in the building, according to sources. Emphasising his administration's preparedness to deal with cases, Lee appealed to citizens to remain calm and not give in to rumour-mongering. "Having overcome SARS once, we know that we can pull through this too," he says in the video in a comforting tone, explaining how the virus isn't as fatal as it is made out to be. SARS infected 8,000 people the world over and resulted in over 800 deaths, which gives a mortality rate of roughly 10 per cent. So far, with more than 40,000 cases and a little over 1000 deaths, the mortality rate for nCoV is roughly 0.2 per cent. Seasonal influenza, meanwhile, has a mortality rate of 0.1 per cent. "So, in terms of mortality, the new virus is much closer to influenza than sars," Lee said. — AP

GOOD NEWS ■ Signals end to months-long crisis that claimed 33 lives nationwide

Oz bushfires contained: Firefighters



The fires had affected millions of Australians.

Sydney, Feb. 13: All the blazes in Australia's hard-hit state of New South Wales have been brought under control, firefighters said on Thursday, signalling the end of a months-long crisis that claimed 33 lives nationwide. "As of this afternoon, all fires in New South Wales have now been contained," a Rural Fire Service spokesman told AFP, as fresh rainfall helped extinguish blazes that have burned along the east coast since September. "It is very good news." Blazes scorched more than 10 million hectares in the country's east and south, killing at least 33 people and an estimated one billion animals while destroying more than 2,500 homes. The crisis cloaked major cities like Sydney in smoke for weeks on end, saw towns cut off and prompted the deployment of the military to rescue stranded citizens. The fires were exacerbated by prolonged drought and worsened by climate change in the country's hottest and driest year on record. But days of rainfall the heaviest in 30 years have extinguished the largest fires and brought those that remain under control. Beleaguered volunteer firefighters have fought the blazes day-in-day-out in what has been described as Australia's "black summer".

"After what's been a truly devastating fire season for both firefighters and residents who have suffered through so much this season, all fires are now contained in New South Wales," New South Wales Rural Fire Service Deputy Commissioner Rob Rogers said in a Twitter video. "Not all fires are out, there's still some fire activity in the far south of the state but all fires are contained so we can really focus on helping people rebuild." In the Australian Capital Territory around Canberra firefighters are still trying to bring one fire under control, but the blaze was not said to be threatening. — AFP

INDONESIAN VOLCANO SPEWS LAVA, ASH



Molten lava streams down the crater of Mount Merapi on Thursday. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

Panghal is best in 52kg category

New Delhi: World silver-medallist Amit Panghal (52kg) has been ranked number one by the IOC's Boxing Task Force ahead of next month's Olympic Qualifiers, making him the first Indian pugilist in over a decade to achieve the global top position in his category. In 2009, Olympic bronze-medallist Vijender Singh did it for the first time after he opened India's account at the world championships with a bronze in the 75kg division. The 24-year-old Panghal holds the numero uno position with 420 points. "It is a great feeling and obviously means a lot to me because it will help me in being seeded at the qualifiers. Being World No. 1 also gives you a renewed sense of confidence," Panghal said. "I hope to secure an Olympic spot in the first qualifier itself," added the diminutive boxer from Rohtak. — PTI

Sandhu ousts Fadte in quarters

Chennai: The experienced Harinder Pal Sandhu quelled the youthful exuberance of Yash Fadte, beating him in straight games on Thursday to storm into the semifinals of the men's singles in the 77th Senior National Squash Championship at the ISA courts here. Meanwhile, Delhi's Sanya Vats, a former junior star, ousted the seasoned and higher seeded Urwashi Joshi of Maharashtra in the women's singles. Sandhu, seeded in the 3-4 bracket, gave a lesson in stroke-play to the young Goan (seeded 5/8), winning 11-2, 11-7 to book a spot in the last four. The top seeds in the men's and women's sections respectively — Saurav Ghosal and Joshna Chinappa — had no trouble in advancing to the semifinals. — PTI

EB settle for draw against Punjab FC

Kalyani, West Bengal: Already out of the reckoning for a playoff berth, East Bengal settled for a 1-1 draw against Punjab FC in their I-League clash here on Thursday. Liberian forward Ansumana Kromah gave East Bengal a ninth minute lead with his powerful long range strike to give the home side a dominating start. However, they failed to hold on to their lead with attacking midfielder Girik Khosla producing a fine finish after being set up by Sergio Barboza in the 40th minute. East Bengal kept making inroads with a flurry of attacks in the second-half but Punjab FC defence managed to hold on to settle for one point from their away fixture. The easiest second-half chance for the red-and-gold came in the 74th minute with Kromah in the frontline once again but it was Anwar Ali who managed to pull off a goal-line clearance. Second-placed Punjab now have 18 points from 12 matches, while East Bengal (12 points from 12 matches) managed to jump one spot to ninth place on goal difference with NEROCA. — PTI

JAMSHEDPUR, HYDERABAD IN A STALEMATE

Hyderabad: An injury-time goal from Sumeet Passi helped Jamshedpur FC eke out a 1-1 draw against Hyderabad FC in an Indian Super League match at the GMC Balayogi Stadium here on Thursday. Nestor Gordillo's 39th-minute strike looked to be enough for the hosts to get only their second win of the season, but Passi's late equaliser put paid to the hopes of Hyderabad team. With this draw, Hyderabad continue to be at the bottom of the league table after 17 games with seven points, while Jamshedpur are now seventh with 18 points. Hyderabad FC had the first chance of the game from a corner-kick in the fourth minute. Marcelinho's delivery was headed onto the post by Adil Khan before a panicked defence cleared the danger. Jamshedpur struggled to make an impact in the final third of the match. — PTI

Doubles trouble

India lose to Malaysia after doubles pairs flop

Manila (Philippines), Feb. 13: Doubles specialist Satwiksairaj Rankireddy's absence proved crucial as the Indian men's team suffered a 1-4 loss against a young Malaysian side in their second Group B match of the Badminton Asia Team Championships here on Thursday. With Satwik pulling out the event due to an ankle sprain, India were forced to field two scratch pairs — M.R. Arjun and Chirag Shetty and Dhruv Kapila and Lakshya Sen, both of whom lost their respective ties.

Kidambi Srikanth was the only shuttler to register a win as world no. 11 B. Sai Praneeth and H.S. Prannoy too went down in the other singles in straight games at the Rizal Memorial Sports Complex.

After this loss, India finished second in the group and will now take on Thailand in the quarterfinals on Friday.

India locked horns with Malaysia and with Satwik missing, the onus was on Praneeth to give India a good start but the world championships bronze medallist lost 18-21, 15-21 to world no. 14 Lee Zii Jia.

Chirag and Arjun then lasted just 31 minutes before going down 18-21, 15-21 to world no. 8 Malaysian combination of Aaron Chia and Soh Wooi Yik as India lagged 0-2.

Former world no. 1 Srikanth then struggled past 23-year-old Cheam Jun Hong, a 2017 World Junior Championships silver medallist and a 2017 Asian Junior Champion, as he went down 10-21, 15-21 in 34 minutes to hand



India's Kidambi Srikanth in action during his men's singles match against Cheam June Wei of Malaysia.

17 pair of Ong Yew Sin and Teo Ee Yi, losing 14-21, 14-21 in 27 minutes as Malaysia took an unassailable 3-1 lead.

In the third singles, Prannoy was no match for Leong Jun Hao, a 2017 World Junior Championships silver medallist and a 2017 Asian Junior Champion, as he went down 10-21, 15-21 in 34 minutes to hand

Malaysia a comfortable 4-1 victory.

It will take an extraordinary effort from India to get across Thailand.

Thailand boasts of quality players such as World No.12 Kantaphon Wangcharoen, three-time world junior champion Kunlavut Vitidsarn and 2018 Japan Open runners-up Khosit Phetpradab in the singles. — PTI

Manpreet named Player of the Year

Becomes first Indian to win international hockey honour

Lausanne, Feb. 13: National men's team captain Manpreet Singh on Thursday became the first Indian to win the International Hockey Federation's (FIH) Player of the Year award, capping a memorable 2019 season in which he led the side to Olympic qualification.

The 27-year-old midfielder, thus, became the first from the country to win the accolade since the awards were introduced in 1999.

He beat competition from Belgium's Arthur Van Dorren and Lucas Villa of Argentina, who came second and third respectively.

Manpreet polled a total of 35.2 per cent of combined votes, which includes National Associations, media, fans and players.

Van Dorren, on the other hand, got combined vote share of 19.7 per cent while Villa polled 16.5 per cent in his favour.

Manpreet, who had represented India at 2012 London and 2016 Rio Olympics, has enjoyed a long career in the national team since he made his debut in 2011. He now has 260 international appearances under his belt. Last year, Manpreet led India to victory in the FIH Olympic Qualifiers, securing their Tokyo Olympics spot.

Talking about the last season, Manpreet said: "If you look at our year, we did well in every tournament we participated in. Be it the FIH Series Finals in June or the test series in Belgium where we played the hosts as well as Spain and beat them."

"Our biggest goal in 2019 was to book our berth at the Olympics," India captain added. — PTI



HOCKEY IS NOT NATIONAL GAME, SAYS RTI REPLY

Mumbai, Feb. 13: The Union Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports has said that the Centre has not declared any sport as the 'national game' of the country.

The ministry said this in response to an RTI query filed by a school teacher from Dhule district of north Maharashtra.

There is a popular perception that hockey is the national sport of India. The RTI query had sought to know when was hockey declared as India's national game.

Mayuresh Agrawal, who teaches in V.K. Patil International School in Sindkheda tehsil of Dhule district, has received the reply letter from the ministry dated January 15, 2020.

He said he had filed the query after his students asked when hockey was declared as the national game of the country.

"The government has not declared any sport/game as the National Game of the country, as the objective of the government is to encourage/promote all popular sports disciplines," the reply from the ministry stated. — PTI

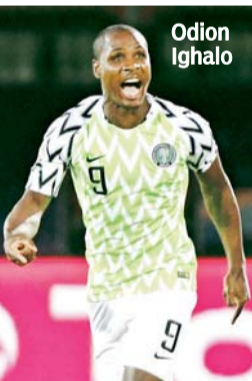
CORONAVIRUS | SCARE

United signing Ighalo trains away from side

London, Feb. 13: Odion Ighalo, Manchester United's January signing from China, has been training away from the club's facilities as a precaution due to the coronavirus outbreak, British media reported on Thursday.

The 30-year-old Nigerian international striker joined United on loan until the end of the season on January 31 — transfer deadline day — from Chinese club Shanghai Shenhua.

He is due to meet with his United team-mates for the first time this weekend ahead of Monday's clash with



Chelsea as they have been away at a training camp in Spain — Ighalo did not travel because of fears he might have

problems re-entering the United Kingdom.

Both *The Times* and *The Daily Mirror* reported Ighalo had been told to stay away from the club's Carrington training centre — where hundreds of staff work — as he went through a 14-day quarantine period.

The former Watford star — who has not played a competitive match since December 6 — has instead been put through his paces by a personal trainer at the GB Taekwondo Headquarters in Manchester, not far from rivals Manchester City's ground. — AFP

Ruiz helps Napoli edge past Milan

Milan, Feb. 13: Fabian Ruiz scored the only goal as Napoli shocked Inter Milan 1-0 in their Italian Cup semifinal, first leg tie in the San Siro on Wednesday.

The Spanish midfielder broke through after 57 minutes to get Gennaro Gattuso's side back to winning ways after their 2-3 league defeat at home to lowly Lecce last weekend.

Ruiz picked up a Giovanni Di Lorenzo cross, beating three Inter defenders to curl in past a helpless Daniele Padelli.

"This is the real Napoli. Big compliments to my lads," said Gattuso, whose side are 11th in the Serie A table.

But he warned: "There's no reason to smile, we still haven't achieved anything yet."

Antonio Conte's side looked sluggish days after their thrilling 4-2 derby win over AC Milan which put them top of the Serie A table. Both sides had their chances in the first half with Lautaro Martinez nodding wide with

● **Fabian Ruiz broke through after 57 minutes to help Napoli beat Inter Milan 1-0 in their Italian Cup semifinal game.**

Padelli denying Piotr Zielinski just before the break in front of a crowd of nearly 60,000 in northern Italy.

Conte sent on Cristian Eriksen after 65 minutes and the Dane threatened but David Ospina held firm in the Napoli goal.

Napoli, who last won the trophy in 2014, now take a slim advantage into the second leg at their Stadio San Paolo on March 5.

"The derby certainly took away a lot of energy," said Conte.

"But we're talking about Napoli, who beat Lazio, Juventus, Liverpool.

"It's a team of substance despite its position in the standings."

The final will take place in the Stadio Olimpico in Rome on May 13. — AFP

BILBAO DEFEAT GRANADA IN COPA FIRST LEG

Bilbao (Spain), Feb. 13: Captain Iker Muniain scored the only goal as Athletic Bilbao defeated Granada 1-0 in the first leg of their Copa del Rey semifinal on Wednesday.

Muniain, 27, had been red-carded in his team's 2-1 defeat to Real Sociedad in La Liga at the weekend.

However, he was the toast of the city on Wednesday when he latched onto a cross from Inaki Williams just three minutes before the interval to score the game's only goal.

Athletic coach Gaizka Garitano named the same team which shocked Barcelona in the quarter-finals last week and they will consider themselves unfortunate not to have won by a greater margin on Wednesday after having two strikes ruled out for offside.

The second, scored off a fine volley in the 61st minute by Ander Capa, needed an intervention by VAR. — AFP