

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | TUESDAY 18 | FEBRUARY 2020



Under the Dynamic Leadership of
Hon'ble Chief Minister
Thiru Edappadi K. PALANISWAMI
Hon'ble AMMA's Government

“STERLING THREE YEARS' PERFORMANCE TESTIFIED BY NUMBER ONE POSITION”

Hon'ble Chief Minister has approved 16,382 files during the past three years which has translated into numerous people centric schemes

Even after me, and even after the passage of many Centuries, this Government and this movement will function solely in the service of the people.

Puratchi Thalaivi
 Selvi J Jayalalithaa

We have always been doing only good work for the people. The people have given a place in their hearts only to us.

Edappadi K. PALANISWAMI
 Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu ranks first in the good governance index

Hon'ble Chief Minister's foreign visit has attracted investments worth Rs.8,835 crore

Cauvery Delta Region declared as protected Special Agriculture Zone

New Government Medical Colleges in 11 Districts

5 New districts created for administrative convenience

Rs.1,000 with Pongal gift hamper to 2.05 crore families

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

- Nadanthai Vazhi Kaveri Scheme to restore the pristine glory of Cauvery river and its tributaries at an estimate of Rs.11,250 crore
- Athikadavu Avinasi Scheme for Irrigation, Ground Water Recharge and Drinking Water Supply Scheme at a cost of Rs.1,652 crore
- Tamil Nadu Water Resource Conservation and augmentation mission as people's movement
- 4,865 Kudimaramathu works at a cost of Rs.930.25 crore
- Construction of barrage across Kollidam river in Adhanur-Kumaramangalam at a cost of Rs.494.60 crore
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- Groynes and Rubble Mound Sea Wall (RMS) at a cost of Rs.168.57 crore
- Mettur Dam - Sarabanga Lift Irrigation scheme at a cost of Rs.565 crore
- Tamil Nadu Irrigated Agriculture Modernisation Project at a cost of Rs.2,962 crore

HIGHWAYS AND MINOR PORTS DEPARTMENT

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- Administrative sanction given for road works between Ennore Port and Mamallapuram Pooncheri Junction at a cost of Rs.12,301 crore
- Chennai - Kannyakumari industrial corridor project at a cost of Rs.6,448 crore

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AWARDS AND RECOGNITION RECEIVED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU

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- Best State Award for organ transplantation consecutively for the 5th year
- 12 National Awards for e-Governance, capacity building, child care, grama sabha, etc
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INDUSTRIES DEPARTMENT

- An investment of Rs.3,00,501 crore has been attracted creating job opportunities for 10.5 lakh persons through Global Investors Meet
- Through Hon'ble Chief Minister's foreign visits a total of 41 MoUs were signed for an investment of Rs.8,835 crore which will create job opportunities for 35,520
- Total of 22 MoUs were signed for an investment of Rs.10,301 crore which will create job opportunities for 48,317 persons after Global Investors Meet 2019
- Tamil Nadu Aerospace and Defence Industrial Policy 2019 released
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OUR CRITIC'S RATING Outstanding ★★★★★ | Great ★★★★ | Good ★★★ | Okay ★★ | Poor ★ | Truly Terrible TT

Kal, Imtiaz Ali's films were irritating, Aaj it is insufferable

SUPARNA SHARMA

Kal, a girl in a blue skirt and a boy in khaki pants.
Aaj, a girl in shorts and a boy with questionable hygiene.

Kal, girl asking boy why he's chasing her.
Aaj, girl asking boy why he didn't sleep with her.

Kal, boy says, "Okay, I will stop chasing you".
Aaj, boy says, "You are special".

Kal, girl responded, "Did I ask you not to chase me?"
Aaj, girl says, "Whatevrrrr".

Kal, boy is Veer (Kartik Aaryan), girl is Leena (Aarushi Sharma) in Udaipur, circa 1990
Aaj, boy is Raghu (Kartik Aaryan), girl is Zoe (Sara Ali Khan) in Delhi 2020

Kal, Leena was a student in a convent school.
Aaj, Zoe has career plans of running an event management company.

Kal, Veer was studying to be a doctor.
Aaj, Raghu is a computer programmer.

Kal, Leena did kathak.
Aaj, Zoe does zumba.

Kal, Leena wore salwar-kameez with dupatta.
Aaj, Zoe wears small, trendy clothes and high heels.

Kal, Leena stood in balcony stealing furtive glances.
Aaj, Zoe has tequila shots in a pub.

Kal, Leena had a plait and was very scared of her mother.
Aaj, Zoe's hair is streaked and she shouts at her mother.

Aaj, a love guru, a philosopher-guide (Randeep Hooda) runs Mazi (past), a coffee shop cum co-working space that has a bar and booze.

He has a *kal*, and a room upstairs to make out with random girls.

Zoe works out of Mazi, and soon Raghu follows her with his laptop.

Whenever we are in *aaj* with love guru, we go to his *kal* for some love lessons.

Kal, Veer loved Leena, she loved him.

Aaj, Raghu loves Zoe, and she loves him.

Kal, Veer and Leena had a thing — whenever they met, she would suddenly, quickly kiss him.

Aaj, Zoe and Raghu make out and then she lies on top of him.

Kal, he had issues, complexes.
Aaj, she has issues, complexes.

Kal, Veer hurt Leena, but hurt himself as well.

Aaj, Zoe hurts Raghu, but hurts herself as well.

Kal, parson, tarson, narson, in fact for barson, Imtiaz Ali has been making the same film, over and over — *Jab We Met* (2007), *Love Aaj Kal* (2009), *Rockstar* (2011), *Cocktail* (2010), *Highway* (2014), *Tamasha* (2015), *Jab Harry Met Sejal* (2017).
Aaj, he has made the same film, again.

Kal, parson, tarson, narson, his heroes and heroines found themselves through love, else they felt lost-lost, sad-sad.

Aaj, his hero and heroine find themselves through love, and without it they feel lost-lost, sad-sad.

Kal, parson, tarson, narson, Imtiaz Ali's films were about the redemptive power of love.

Aaj, his film is about the redemptive power of love.

Kal, his heroines were child-babes.

Aaj, his heroine is a child-babe, one at least.

Kal, Imtiaz Ali was besotted with boys and girls with tiny IQs.

Aaj, he is still obsessed with a boys and girls with tiny IQs.

Kal, I thought Imtiaz Ali would grow up after having made the same film over and over.

Aaj, it is clear that

Love Aaj Kal (U/A) 141 min
CAST: Kartik Aaryan, Sara Ali Khan, Aarushi Sharma, Randeep Hooda, Simone Singh
DIRECTOR: Imtiaz Ali
RATING: ★

If you were planning a movie for your Valentine's date, I'd say cleaning public latrines in the service of Swachhh Bharat would be more fun than watching Love Aaj Kal.

suffering her dizzy gestures and chatter for a while, she actually started grating on my nerves.

Kartik Aaryan and Aarushi Sharma barely have dialogue, in *kal* and *aaj*, and yet they try to hold the film with some attempt at acting. But neither love nor their acting can save this meandering, dull banality.

Though I enjoyed *Jab We Met*, and liked *Highway* to some extent, I have never been a fan of Imtiaz Ali and his worldview. But now, after *Love Aaj Kal*, I have developed deep contempt for his baby doll heroines who act out and throw tantrums all the time, and his indulgent, moronic filmmaking.

Somewhere in the middle of *Love Aaj Kal* sits a stand-up comic routine by one Justice Chaudhary who says that because the male members of cattle at his home are not into monogamy and don't wear any clothes, he too has decided to discard both, monogamy and clothes.

If you figure what that was about, do drop a line.

Else, please implore the mighty producers of Bollywood who will pour in money for yet another banal *bakwas*, to sponsor some therapy sessions for Imtiaz Ali and help him grow up a little. And if they feel that ship has sailed, then the therapy could at least help him create female characters that don't have the IQ, emotions and mannerisms of eight-year-old girls.

Imtiaz Ali has a very uneasy relationship with grown women and that is visible in the way he has created the character of Zoe's mother, who has an opinion on like. Played by Simone Singh, this mommy wears her hair and expression like Mrs Addam from Addams Family and may have well arrived to the sets of *Love Aaj Kal* on a broom with a black conical hat.

Love *Aaj Kal* isn't just an annoying, irritating film, it also moves at a glacial pace. At some point after interval, I tried to fixate my eyes on the head of the man sitting in front. Watching his hair grow was less excruciating than watching Imtiaz Ali's tantrum-throwing child-babe. If you were planning a movie for your Valentine's date, I'd say cleaning public latrines in the service of Swachhh Bharat would be more fun than watching this film.

Imtiaz Ali doesn't want to grow up and will keep making the same film over and over, and then again.

Kal, Imtiaz Ali knew how to write and had at least a semblance of a story.

Aaj, he has lost that skill as well, and instead of a story has only expository dialogue.

Love *Aaj Kal* 2020 has no story whatsoever and so most of the time is spent talking about love, how love feels, what love does, instead of showing it to us.

Imagine a road trip movie where instead of an actual road trip, the lead pair take turns to sit with an uncle at a coffee shop while he tells them about a road trip he once went on. But, rather than talk about interesting, fun stuff, the story he narrates goes like this: "I checked out a car, then I took it for a spin. It got a flat, I changed tyre. Again there was a puncture. Mileage wasn't good. The gear stick was wobbly, the wipers were not moving smoothly. When I put the window down, the breeze was nice, but her hair got tangled. She was not happy."

At one point, after we return from a flashback to *aaj*, Zoe says to cafe uncle, "Life, haan!"

The banality is just staggering. Zoe's character is so idiotic that she has a hissy fit before taking all life-altering decisions, all of which are based entirely on what someone else has said or experienced.

Usually, Randeep Hooda is good, but in *Love Aaj Kal* he is inept and quite unbearable. Sara Ali Khan is not just bad, she is terrible, as if she has regressed as an actor since *Kedarnath* (2018).

After



Breezy entertainer with a divine touch

OH MY KADAVULE

CAST: Ashok Selvan, Ritika Singh, Vijay Sethupathi, Vani Bhojan
DIRECTOR: Ashwath Marimuthu
RATING: ★★★

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN

Debutant Ashwath Marimuthu's rom-com *Oh My Kadavule* has everything that is associated with a similar genre—love, friendship, fun and good songs. But what makes OMK stand out is the creative approach given by Ashwath, packaging it with a fantasy spin. The writing is also solid.

Arjun Marimuthu (Ashok Selvan) and Anu Paulraj (Ritika Singh) are childhood friends who share lot of things. When Anu's dad (MS Bhaskar) arranges a groom for her, she tells Arjun that she would rather marry him and proposes at a pub. Arjun thinks for a while and gives his nod. They enter marital bliss and Arjun also gets a job in Paulraj's ceramic manufacturing company.

However, on their first night, Arjun finds it difficult to see his best friend as wife and hence they decide to let 'things' happens in their own course. They start fighting over petty things and with Arjun having hardly any romantic feel for Anu, their relationship starts straining. Meanwhile, the re-entry of Meera (Vani Bhojan), an aspiring filmmaker and Arjun's high school crush in their lives worsens the situation. Unable to cope up with his possessive wife and having aspired to become an actor and disliking his present job, Arjun seeks for a divorce. During the court proceedings, there's divine intervention (literally) and Arjun is given a second chance to go back and change his life. He has been given a 'Golden Ticket' by th Gods (played



by Vijay Sethupathi and Ramesh Thilak) to proceed with his second life. So, whom does Arjun choose between the two—Meera or Anu?

Ashok Selvan looks fresh and bubbly and aces in the romantic scenes. He performs naturally and proves his histrionics with the long single take breakup shot, which he gives while auditioning for filmmaker Gautham Menon.

Ritika is a treat to watch and does a fine job with her myriad expressions. Telly girl Vani Bhojan who makes a big screen debut gets a solid role and she utilizes it well. Sha Ra for once does not go overboard and plays to what his character demands. Veteran MS Bhaskar proves his versatility especially in the post interval scenes. Vijay Sethupathi and

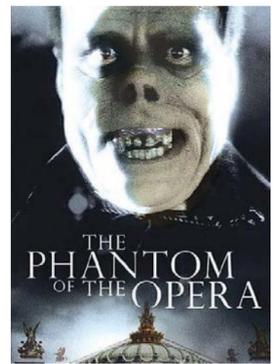
Ramesh Thilak in an extended cameo are quite entertaining. But the pace is somewhat slow and hence it reduces the fun quotient.

It's Ashwath Marimuthu's youthful treatment to the narration that works largely towards the film's favor. Yet another high-point is the fantasy element that elevates curiosity levels. The characters are well etched out and han-

dled with lot of sensitivity.

There are no real heartbreaking emotional scenes. While the first half is slow, post intermission the momentum picks up and stays till the end. Leon James music is a big plus with some of the songs propelling the story forward. OMK is a youthful entertainer worth a watch for its refreshing approach.

Roger Ebert's Great Movies



THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Released in 1925
Review written on December 19, 2004

It has always been a question whether *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925) is a great film, or only a great spectacle. Carl Sandburg, one of the original reviewers, underwent a change of heart between his first *Chicago Daily News* review (he waited for the Phantom's unmasking "terribly fascinated, aching with suspense") and a reconsideration written a month later ("strictly among the novelties of the season"). It was not, he added on the level of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* or *Greed*, mentioning two of the greatest films of all time.

He was right about that, and could have added the greatest of all silent horror films, Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), whose vampire may have influenced Lon Chaney's performance as the Phantom. But as an exercise in lurid sensationalism, straining against technical limitations in its eagerness to overwhelm, the first of the many Phantom films has a creepy, undeniable power.

The story is simply told — too simply, perhaps, so that all of the adaptations, including the famous Andrew Lloyd Webber musical, have been much ado about relatively little. In the cellars of the Paris Opera House lives a disfigured masked man who becomes obsessed with the young singer Christine. He commands the management to give her leading roles, and when they refuse, he exacts a terrible revenge, causing a great chandelier to crash down on the audience.

Christine's lover, a pallid nonentity, is little competition for her fascination with the Phantom, until she realises with horror that the creature wants her to dwell in his mad subterranean world. She unmasks him, is repelled by his hideous disfigurement, flees to the surface and her lover, and is followed by Phantom seeking violent revenge. There is no room for psychological subtlety here.

It is the idea of the Phantom, really, that fascinates us: the idea of a cruelly mistreated man going mad in self-imposed exile in the very cellars, dungeons and torture chambers where he was, apparently, disfigured in the first place. His obsession with Christine reflects his desire to win back some joy from a world that has mistreated him. Leroux and his adapters have placed this sad creature in a bizarre subterranean space that has inspired generations of set designers.

There are five levels of cellars beneath the opera, one descending beneath another in an expressionist series of staircases, ramps, trapdoors, and a Styxian river that the Phantom crosses in a gondola. The Phantom has furnished his lair with grotesque fittings: He sleeps in a coffin and provides a bed for Christine in the shape of a whale boat. Remote controls give him warnings when anyone approaches and allow him to roast or drown his enemies.

To Christine, he offers wealth, luxury and opera stardom, and she is in no peril "as long as you do not touch the mask" — oh, and she must love him, or at least allow him to possess her (although his precise sexual plans are left undefined). Perhaps warned by the fate of the hero in her current production of *Faust*, she refuses this bargain, although for an engaged woman, she allows herself to be dangerously tempted.

After taking over the leading role from an ominously ill prima donna, she follows a mysterious voice, opens a secret door behind the mirror in her dressing room, descends through forbidding cellars, is taken semi-conscious by horseback and gondola deeper into the labyrinth and sees the coffin where he sleeps. At this point, her sudden cry of "You — you are the Phantom!" inspired me to write in my notes: "Duh!"

Her lover, the Viscount Raoul de Chagny, is likewise not a swift study. After the Phantom has presumably claimed dozens of victims with the falling chandelier and threatened Christine with death if she sees him again, Raoul agrees to meet her at the Masked Ball. This is held in the Opera House on the very next night, with the chandelier miraculously repaired and no mourning period, apparently, for the dozens of crushed and maimed. Christine tells Raoul the Phantom will murder them if they are seen together; but then, when a gaunt and spectral figure in red stalks imperiously into the grand hall, Raoul unmasks himself, which is, if you ask me, asking for trouble.

The Phantom's unmasking was one of the most famous moments in silent film. He is seated at his organ. "Now, when he is intent on the music," Sandburg wrote, "she comes closer, closer, her fingers steal towards the ribbon that fastens the mask. Her fingers give one final twitch — and there you are!" There you are, all right, as Chaney, "the Man of 1,000 Faces" and a master of makeup, unveils a defacement more grotesque than in any later version, his mouth a gaping cavern, his nose a void, his eyes widely staring: "Peast your eyes, glut your soul, on my accursed ugliness!"

The other famous scene involves the falling chandelier which became the centrepiece of the Webber musical and functions the same way in Joel Schumacher's 2004 film version. In the original film, it is curiously underplayed; it falls in impressive majesty, to be sure, but its results are hard to measure. Surely there are mangled bodies beneath it, but the movie stays its distance and then hurries on. Much more impressive is the Masked Ball sequence and its sequel on the roof of the opera house. The filmmakers (director Rupert Julien, replaced by Edward Sedgwick and assisted by Chaney) use primitive colour techniques to saturate the ball with brilliant scarlets and less obtrusive greens. Many scenes throughout the film are tinted, which was common even in silent days.

The Phantom of the Opera is not a great film if you are concerned with art and subtlety, depth and message; *Nosferatu* is a world beyond it. But in its fevered melodrama and images of cadaverous romance, it finds a kind of show-biz majesty. And it has two elements of genius: It creates beneath the opera one of the most grotesque places in the cinema, and Chaney's performance transforms an absurd character into a haunting one.

IN BRIEF

Higher education topper

Tamil Nadu has become a leading State in ensuring access to Higher education, thanks to the Edappadi K. Palaniswami-led government's initiatives in the last three years. It has one of the highest enrolment rates for colleges. The better access has been enabled by government allowing more Government colleges to be opened. Like for instance, 14 University Constituent Colleges have been converted into Government Colleges in 2019-20. With the Government college of Engineering, Coimbatore, completing 75 years this year, the state will sanction a special grant of ₹ten crore for upgrading infrastructure facilities at GCE, Kovai.

Police Department vacancies brought down

A significant feature of the governance in the last three years is that the vacancies in the Police department have been considerably brought down and currently the working strength of the police force in 1.13 lakh. During the year 2019-20, a total of 10,242 police personnel have been recruited through the Tamil Nadu Uniformed Services Recruitment Board. In 2020-21, a further 10,276 uniformed services personnel will be recruited.

Keen eye on Disaster Management

With memories of the great Chennai deluge in 2015 very much alive, the Edappadi Palaniswami government has proposed a comprehensive 'Flood Mitigation Project' for Greater Chennai to the World Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank at a total cost of Rs. 3,000 crore, as a follow on project to the 'Coastal Disaster Risk Reduction Project', which will be coming to a successful completion.

Amma Unavagams to be strengthened

The popular 'Amma Unavagams' (canteens) where a large number of poor and migrant workers in particular frequent for cheap, quality food, have played a significant role in the last three years in easing food access to the people. Though there have been some problems, now the government has plans to make them financially stronger by forming a special purpose vehicle which will tie-up with companies to source funds under CSR scheme. In the budget for 2020-21, the government has provided Rs.100 crore as viability gap funding to place them on a stronger footing.

Housing for govt staff augmented

To cater to growing demands for rental housing for state government employees, one more residential tower will be constructed in Todhunter Nagar at Saidapet in Chennai by the public works department at a total cost of ₹76 crore. A master plan will be prepared to improve the layout of the residential complex at Todhunter Nagar and to provide better amenities for the stay of government servants.

How EPS emerged a strong leader

Hardwork and perseverance keep Palaniswami the front runner for 2021

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR | DC CHENNAI, FEB. 17

THREE YEARS OF PALANISWAMI RULE

Three years ago when the mantle of Chief Ministership fell on Edappadi K. Palaniswami skeptics said that his term would be short-lived. But today, it is not only clear that he will complete the term, taking his mentor J. Jayalalithaa's mandate to its logical end but is also a contender for the Chief Minister's throne in 2021.

So, how did the man from Salem emerge as a leader on his own right within the party? To put it succinctly it is hard work and perseverance. He was not bogged down by the criticisms that he had to face when he took over as Chief Minister or even later on and did not allow bickering within his party to weaken his position.

That he had come on his own and has consolidated his position in the AIADMK was evident when he returned from his maiden foreign tour - a 13-day visit to UK, USA and UAE. As he came out of the airport he not only seamlessly merge with the sea of party cadre welcoming him back home but also made every onlooker realise that he is their leader.

When he left abroad, Palaniswami was considered a 'lucky first among the many equals' in the party. But as vignettes of his visit to various overseas establishments poured in, he had seemingly struck a chord with his cadre and supporters. For, man whom many called the 'accidental Chief Minister,' was hailed as 'Revolutionary Leader's Heir' on his return.

In the special 80-page edition of AIADMK's newspaper, 'Namadhu

Amma' which was full of advertisements welcoming the Chief Minister back home, senior party leaders vied with one another to praise him and declare his pre-eminent position in the party. Even if 'Namadhu Amma' is not a staple household newspaper, no one is Chennai could have missed the ubiquitous wall poster with his photo accompanied by the legend: 'he went/saw/conquered.'

Actually the real conquest had happened back home and it first evident from the grand reception he received at the airport in the wee hours of Tuesday. The throngs of flag waving cadre at that untimely hour was reminiscent of the crowds that gathered to welcome past AIADMK Chief Ministers back home - be it Jayalalithaa returning from Bengaluru in the recent past or MGR coming home after medical treatment in 1985.

He never looked back after that and proved his mettle as one capable of leading a party in elections by ensuring that he won enough seats in the by-elections to the state Assembly, failing which would have spelt disaster for the AIADMK government. His managing to save the government from fall is an outstanding achievement, which also ensured that he continued as Chief Minister.

Winning adequate seats to keep the government going in that election in 2019 was significant because the results went against the prevailing political wave that helped the rival coalition sweep the Lok Sabha seats for which simultaneous elec-

tions were held. It was an anti-BJP wave in Tamil Nadu but Palaniswami did not let that affect his party's prospects in the by-elections, which send across the message that the people have accepted him as the Chief Minister, as the man competent to lead the party left behind by Jayalalithaa.

Fighting the electoral war, too, he tackled the opposition quite impressively. When his rival M K Stalin, president of the DMK, ridiculed him as an 'earthworm', he turned the tables on him, saying that earthworm is the farmer's friend. He, a real farmer, was proud of his calling and also described him as one.

It is perhaps an understanding of the farmers' problems led to his taking an extremely bold decision to announce the Cauvery delta region in the state as 'Protected Special Agricultural Zone (PSAZ)', flummoxing the rival parties. It was one decision that went to prove that Palaniswami had his fingers on a pulse of the people in general and the farmers in particular. For, it was a decision that earned him encomiums from several quarters.

Also the way he faced the 2019 elections was praised by many. Not only he managed to cobble up a rainbow coalition, he easily roped in two Chief Ministerial aspirants into his camp. Both PMK's Anbumani Ramadoss and DMDK's Vijayakanth had expressed their desire openly to lead the state. But they accepted Palaniswami as the Chief Minister and worked with him in the campaigns.



Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswami with a sheaf of corn harvested in a field at Siluvampalayam in Salem district during Pongal 2020.

If his political acumen was on display in the left manner in which he won the two by-elections to Vikravandi and Nanguneri constituencies, his popularity among the common people soared to the skies when he disbursed 'Pongal gifts', a scheme initiated by none less than Jayalalithaa herself, making the cash gift to ₹1000 per family and the sugarcane a full length one.

Finally, the recent achievement of Palaniswami was his party winning sizeable seats in the elections to the rural local bodies. AIADMK's successful reach of voters in the rural pockets in the absence of the party's charismatic leaders like M. G. Ramachandran (MGR) and Jayalalithaa happened under the leadership of Palaniswami and the victory on proves that he has won the hearts of the people, too.



Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswami at a function in Mettur dam, Salem district, to release water for irrigation in Cauvery delta area.

When Chennai avoided Day Zero

Modi-Xi summit gave Mahabs boost

B. VIJAYALAKSHMI | DC CHENNAI, FEB.17

Chennai faced severe water crisis last year. Open wells and borewells dried up. With water level in city's four major reservoirs in Poondi, Red Hills, Chembarambakkam and Cholavaram plummeting, metro water began tapping water from quarries in the Sikkarayapuram and Erumaiyur. More quarries were identified in Pulipakkam, Keerapakkam and Nallambakkam and Kanchipuram district to meet Chennai's water requirements.

Soon, the state government embarked on a project to bring water from Vellore to Chennai. Chief Minister K. Palaniswami allocated a sum of ₹65 crore to help mitigate Chennai's water woes. Tamil Nadu Water Supply and Drainage Board laid pipelines for drawing water from the storage tank near Jolarpet which receives water under the Vellore Combined Drinking Water Supply Scheme. The special train brought over 2.5 million litres of water from Jolarpet in every trip from July 12. The 50-wagon train carrying 50,000 litres of water in each of them started from Jolarpet at 7 pm every day and reached Chennai by midnight. The water was pumped to Kilpauk water treatment

The informal summit of PM Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping at Mamallapuram in October took the ties between the two countries to a new high. The 'Chennai connect' set the tone for a new era in India-China relations. The two leaders had in-depth exchange of views in a friendly atmosphere at

plant and then supplied to Central and North Chennai areas. The second rake also started operating from Jolarpet in the next few weeks. The services of the water train were stopped in October when monsoon rains replenished groundwater and filled the reservoirs.

During crisis period, the number of metro water tanker trips was doubled from 6,000/day to 12,000/day amid private water lorries fleeing residents in several areas. The civic body checked out rainwater harvesting structures in residential areas and ensured they were renovated.

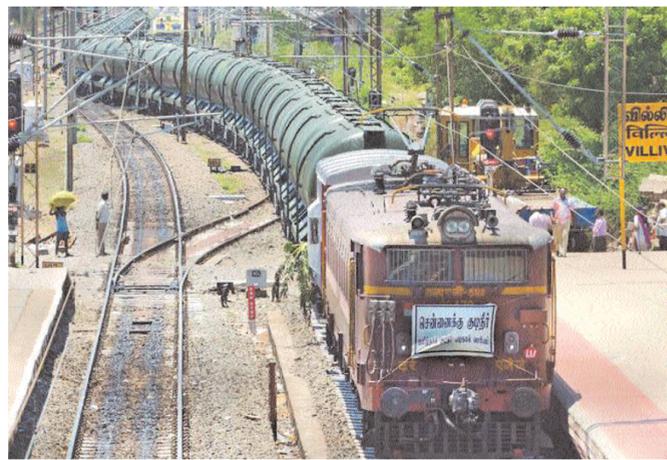
The state government's timely measures helped Chennaiites to manage water crisis till rains arrived.

Mahabs. President Xi was overwhelmed by TN's hospitality and said he had a memorable experience.

The lighting arrangements in Arjuna Penance, Krishna's Butter Ball and Pancha rathas in the coastal town caught world attention. With global media spotlight falling on Mamallapuram, the tourism sector got the much-needed fillip.



Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswami welcomes Chinese President Xi Jinping at Chennai airport during his visit to Mahabalipuram for an informal summit with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2019.



A water tanker train from Jolarpet pulls into Villivakkam station to quench Chennai's thirst in 2019.

The smiling farmer from Salem district

M.R. VENKATESH | DC CHENNAI, FEB. 17

After long years since Rajaji was at the helm in the early 1950s at Fort St. George, the seat of power in Tamil Nadu, the political geography of Salem district has been in the limelight in the last three years, with Mr. Edappadi K Palaniswami being only the second 'Salem Man' to become Chief Minister.

Prior to C. Rajagopalachari, Rajaji as he was widely known, it was Dr Subbaroyan, a scion of the famous Zamindars of Kumaramangalam in former composite Salem district, who was Premier of erstwhile Madras Presidency before Independence.

The subsequent Kumaramangalam, Mohan Kumaramangalam and Rangarajan Kumaramangalam, were prominent as Central Ministers in the national political scene, but yet the State 'gaddi' eluded them.

Thus Edappadi K Palaniswami, coming to occupy the office of the Chief Minister of the State, by sudden turn of events here in the turbulent post-Jayalalithaa political scenario, has a Salem district political legacy to lean back even if his candidature was a cri-

sis-moment choice in the AIADMK at a critical juncture.

The dhoti-clad, low-profile smiling farmer from Salem, was more a backbencher in the Assembly when Ms. Jayalalithaa was the Chief Minister. A former one-time MP, though holding key portfolios in Amma's third term, the change in Mr. Palaniswami's political profile has been dramatic, more so in the last one year.

His three-nation foreign tour of UK, USA and Dubai in 2019 seeking more direct foreign investments into Tamil Nadu, saw a signal change in his sartorial statement, attired in coat and suit that gave him a different political silhouette, particularly in the visual media that seemed to give him a new USP.

But as his new attire abroad drew sharp responses in the social media locally, Mr. Palaniswami in the latter part of his foreign journey reverted to presenting himself as the 'dhoti-clad Tamilian', if only to reassure his image in the minds of the people as the 'smiling farmer from Salem'. He often refers to his agricultural roots with pride at public rallies, a la Tamil Nadu's own Deve Gowda.



CM Edappadi Palaniswami at an animal farm in Buffalo during his trip to US in September 2019. He enquired about the technology behind maintenance of the animals in the farm to implement in TN and saw high quality calves in the farm.



CM Edappadi Palaniswami in London in 2019 where TN signed an MOU with International skills development corporation, leading skill developers in the field of medicine, to train healthcare personnel in Tamil Nadu.



CM Edappadi Palaniswami launches mobile medical ambulance for animal care in November 2019, at the secretariat in Chennai.

IN BRIEF

Welfare of SC/ST Students

Chennai: In the interests of students from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes to pursue their education unhindered, the Tamil Nadu government has raised the hostel allowance to ₹1,000 per month to college students and to ₹900 per month to those studying in schools and staying in hostels built for SC/ST. In the last three years, basic amenities in Adi Dravid colonies have been improved, including providing roads, drinking water facility and street lights etc., at a cost of ₹100 crore. Tribal dwellings in Nilgiris district have been repaired at a cost of ₹five crore.

Freed from bonded labour

In freeing and rehabilitating people from demeaning bonded labour, as many as 914 bonded workers have been pulled out from their dehumanizing occupations and ₹1.68 crore disbursed to them for their rehabilitation. Over 13.04 lakh workers under the aegis of 'Unorganised Workers Board', have been assisted to the tune of ₹598.50 crore in the last three years. Further, conciliation talks have been held with 86 companies, resulting in ensuring legal entitlements including job regularisation for 1,92,691 workers. 'Job Fairs' held for educated unemployed youth have helped to place 1,90,248 job-seekers in appropriate jobs.

Arasu Cable TV Corporation

Thanks to the good offices of the Arasu Cable TV Corporation, as many as 313 'Aadhaar enrollment' centres were set up in which 29,92,425 new 'Aadhaar' cards were issued to the people and modifications, corrections made to 63,31,813 'Aadhaar card' holders. More than 12,805 e-Service centres were set up to help people access various government services online. The Arasu Cable TV Corporation had also provided cheap high quality digital cable TV links, providing a bunch of up to 200 channels, at a nominal cost of ₹130 per connection per month.

Marriage assistance for women

With Amma's government led by Edappadi K Palaniswami continuing to maintain its pro-women thrust in implementing social welfare programmes, under the state's marriage assistance scheme, gold weighing eight grams and cash assistance up to ₹50,000 is being extended to women in marriageable age. The government is also giving ₹1,000 monthly pension to Transgender above the age of 40. Monthly old age pension of ₹1,000 to senior citizens has benefitted an additional 29.80 lakh elders in the last three years.



J. Jayalalithaa

EPS turns crisis into opportunity

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB. 17

THREE YEARS OF PALANISWAMI RULE

As three momentous years have rolled since Mr. Edappadi K Palaniswami was sworn in as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu on February 16, 2017, the low-profile farmer from Salem district has managed to change a crisis narrative in a nebulous political situation after former Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa's demise, into one of renewed opportunities for higher growth.

From agriculture, irrigation, rural development, sanitation, health, education and social welfare, to attracting direct foreign investments (FDI) to keep the state's industrial momentum going, the AIADMK government headed by Mr. Palaniswami has, overcoming various obstacles, enabled a turnaround in many sectors to make Tamil Nadu a 'happening state' again. In the last three years alone, he has cleared 16,382 files, an indicator of his quick decision-making powers.

When the entire Cauvery delta area was simmering with discontent in the wake of the renewed drilling activities by oil companies prospecting for hydrocarbons, coming as 'crowning glory' for the government's achievements is the Chief Minister's recent announcement to declare the entire Cauvery delta region spread over eight districts, into a 'Protected Special Agricultural Zone (PSAG)'. The AIADMK Government intends to bring in a legislation to give effect to this and get the Centre's approval for the same to demonstrate its long-term commitment to the welfare of the farmers, their livelihood and State's food security. These districts include Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, Nagapattinam, Pudukkottai, Cuddalore, Ariyalur and Tiruchy.

Thanks to the government's persistent efforts, following Supreme Court's directive, Tamil Nadu got the Centre to set up the 'Cauvery Water Management Authority' that will oversee the implementation of the Cauvery Tribunal's Final Award as upheld by the Apex Court and Cauvery Water Regulatory Committee.

In other important pro-farmer steps, Mr. Palaniswami for the first time in 83 years, directed the de-silting of the Stanley Reservoir in Mettur. It not only helped to increase the

storage capacity of Mettur dam, but also the mined out alluvial soil to the extent of 2.37 lakh cubic metre, which was distributed free to 1,846 farmers that will help them to enrich their soil in their individual fields.

The massive de-silting and rehabilitation of system tanks and lakes across the State to help conserve excess rain water that will also enable groundwater recharge under the 'Kudimaramathu' scheme has been taken up in the last three years. A Rs.427.76 crore check-dam across Kollidam river at Adhanur-Kumaramangalam, the Athikadavai-Avinashi irrigation-cum-drinking water project at a cost of Rs.1,652 crore to benefit the drought-prone western districts of Coimbatore, Erode and Tirupur, and a massive Rs.11,250 crore project to clean-up the Cauvery and its branches in a bid to rejuvenate the river system by tackling the pollution issues are among his major initiatives for agricultural revival.

Permanent flood control measures in the western districts of Coimbatore and Nilgiris, besides in greater Chennai, relaying old roads and sanctioning new high-way projects like the Rs.1,075 crore Chennai Peripheral Ring Road project, and for road works with an outlay of Rs. 12,301 crore from Ennore port in North Chennai to Poonjeri in Mamallapuram, have augmented road infrastructure.

TRANSPORTATION: In the transport sector, the Palaniswami-led government has introduced 4,921 new buses to state transport undertakings in the last three years including luxury and air-conditioned buses for the convenience of the travelling public. Retirement benefits to the tune of Rs.4831 crore have been sanctioned to Transport corporation workers. The Government has also an ambitious plan to induct environment-friendly 2000 e-buses with assistance from KfW of Germany and an additional 12,000 buses for the STUs, both involving an outlay of Rs.5,890 crore.

EDUCATION AND HEALTH According to the highest priority to School and Higher education in the State, the

Palaniswami-led government in the last three years has upgraded 250 middle schools into high schools, 202 high schools upgraded into higher secondary schools. As many as 20 new primary schools were started, besides 120 higher secondary schools upgraded as 'model schools' with state-of-art infrastructure facilities at a cost of Rs. 33.60 crore.

The Government has appointed 3,355 teachers, besides improving the quality of school infrastructure by constructing additional class rooms, labs, toilets and other facilities. A separate educational television channel has been launched by the State to take the benefits of new ways of learning directly to the students.

While the government has been implementing four per cent reservation in state jobs for the physically challenged, in the realm of higher education, for the first time the State government has obtained Centre's approval to set up 11 medical colleges in just one year at a cost of Rs.3,575 Crore. These colleges will come up at Ramanathapuram, Virdhunagar, Nilgiris, Dindigul, Namakkal, Tirupur, Tiruvallur, Krishnagiri, Nagapattinam, Ariyalur and Kallakurichi districts.

In health care, under the Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme (CMCHIS), the total insurance coverage has been enhanced to Rs. five lakh per annum. In the last three years, 21.50 lakh patients have benefited under this scheme, involving an outlay of Rs.2,873.39 crore for various treatment given. The government recruited 5,282 doctors, 3,240 nurses and 13,437 para-medical staff for various public hospitals across Tamil Nadu in the last three years.

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT: Though Tamil Nadu is already highly industrialized, in these last three years growth in this sector received a big boost with the Chief Minister, Mr. Palaniswami travelling to the UK, USA and Dubai last year to attract additional FDI. As many as 63 MoUs were signed involving an investment commitment of Rs.19, 136 crore. This has the potential to create 83,837 new jobs.

Earlier through the second Global Investors Meet



CM Edappadi K. Palaniswami participating in a cricket match on February 4 conducted by the Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu, at the Marina Cricket ground in Chennai.

supply, underground drainage systems and storm water drainages, besides reviving public spaces like parks involving a huge combined capital outlay of Rs.7,263.26 crore, are among major social and ecological initiatives in the last three years to improve the overall health and sanitation for the people. The latter includes a capital outlay of Rs.3,034.31 crore for 25 'combined drinking water supply schemes' across various districts of Tamil Nadu. Chief Minister on January 13, 2020, also launched the 'Amma Youth Sports Scheme' with an outlay of Rs.76.23 crore, to provide play fields and sports equipment to village and town panchayats.

S O C I A L INFRASTRUCTURE: The Palaniswami-led government's determined effort to enforce the ban on one-time use plastics from January 1, 2019, as a measure of environment protection. In the area of urban rejuvenation, augmenting sources of potable drinking water supply in Chennai and other major urban agglomerations including launching the Rs.1259.38 crore sea water desalination plant at Nemmeli near Chennai, implementation of water

underground drainage systems and storm water drainages, besides reviving public spaces like parks involving a huge combined capital outlay of Rs.7,263.26 crore, are among major social and ecological initiatives in the last three years to improve the overall health and sanitation for the people. The latter includes a capital outlay of Rs.3,034.31 crore for 25 'combined drinking water supply schemes' across various districts of Tamil Nadu. Chief Minister on January 13, 2020, also launched the 'Amma Youth Sports Scheme' with an outlay of Rs.76.23 crore, to provide play fields and sports equipment to village and town panchayats.

AWARDS FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE: As a fitting recognition to the Edappadi Palaniswami-led government's development initiatives across sectors in line with Amma's motto of 'Peace, Progress and Prosperity', the Central Government has given various awards to Tamil Nadu. Under the

'Swachh Bharat', the State was recognised for its cleanliness campaign in rural areas, even as Tamil Nadu bagged the Centre's award under the scheme to protect and educate the girl child 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padoo'. Tamil Nadu under the stewardship of Mr. Palaniswami also won the 'Government of India Good Governance Award' for 2019. By ensuring law and order, Mr. Palaniswami has made Tamil Nadu a haven of peace and tranquility. This has been recognised by the Central government. The 'India Today' media group

has also awarded Tamil Nadu as the 'Best Performing State' in the country for two years in a row. Tamil Nadu was also chosen as the 'second best state' in overall governance by the Public Affairs Centre in Bengaluru. Tamil Nadu also bagged the national e-Puraskar Award for best e-governance in rural panchayats. All these prove that Tamil Nadu under Mr. Edappadi K Palaniswami's leadership has not just survived for three years but gone from strength to strength.

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Ministry of Railways, Government of India invites applications from eligible persons for the post of Director (Projects & Planning), Kolkata Metro Rail Corporation Limited (KMRC), Kolkata.
For detailed advertisement, kindly refer to www.indianrailways.gov.in/railwayboard. Applications (02 copies), along with enclosures may be sent to: Director (Deputation) Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) Room No. 110-A, Rail Bhawan, New Delhi-110001. Last date for receipt of applications is 05:00 PM on 18.03.2020. Applications received late will not be considered and no correspondence entertained in this regard.



An official at 'I.P. Switch-Smart Grid' in Sufflok, UK, explains the new renewable energy technique to Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami in his visit in 2019.



CM Edappadi K. Palaniswami at the famous Kew Botanical Garden in London on September 1, 2019.

Kudimaramathu, boon to tanks, lakes

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB. 17

With the emphasis more on restoring the water bodies, lakes and even reservoirs, the Kudimaramathu scheme, has revolutionised the manner in which the AIADMK government took up the initiative to conserve water resources in the State. Spending close to Rs. 1,000 crore in restoring the water bodies spread across Tamil Nadu including the Mettur Dam, the lifeline of Cauvery delta farmers, is no mean achievement.

And as Tamil Nadu steps into an election year in 2021, AIADMK's Co-Coordinator and Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami will have something concrete to woo the rural voters. "This scheme involves the local farmers and common people too in cleaning up the lakes and tanks and even makes them feel responsible for the upkeep of the water bodies in their villages.

Moreover, the Kudimaramathu scheme is far more transparent than a tender floated to execute the

work," Mr. Palaniswami had once said.

This Chief Minister from Western Tamil Nadu was also instrumental in banning illegal sand mining and ensured online tender process for sale of sand for construction activity. He is probably the first CM to take up the desilting of major tanks and lakes across the State and facilitated the completion of 4,965 works at a cost of ₹930.25 crore, so far.

About 2,919 waterbodies have been fully restored from 2016 till 2018 Desilting

of 1,519 lakes were taken up since 2016-17 fiscal, and of them work on 1,513 lakes has been completed. Work on the remaining six could not be carried out due to internal problems of the farmers' associations there. In 2017-18, out of 1,511 lakes chosen for desilting, 1,406 have been cleaned so far. The remaining lakes have not been desilted owing to problems in the farmers' associations.

For 2019-2020, around ₹500 crore was allocated for rejuvenating 1,829 water bodies.

FDI: Die cast for big TN industrial push

J. V SIVA PRASANNA KUMAR | DC CHENNAI, FEB. 17

With nearly 59 projects commencing the commercial operations in a year after the second Global Investors Meet held by the state government here in January this year, and another 213 are in various stages of development, Tamil Nadu which has been a mere spectator to the development around in the past, suddenly turned into a cynosure of all eyes, thanks to the efforts of Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami who chased foreign investors

to fetch hefty investments to the State. His maiden trip abroad, the first overseas visit by a CM to attract global investors, cast the die to transform Tamil Nadu. After the GIM, the State had signed 63 agreements to attract investments around Rs. 19,136 crore. After setting up a high-level committee headed by Mr. Palaniswami, 36 industrial projects worth Rs. 14,728 crore have been awarded various approvals to start the operations. This would create 22,763 jobs.

Apart from the electric vehicle manufacturer BYD

and major mobile phone designing and manufacturing firm Wintech, many firms have started taking steps to set up their manufacturing facilities in Tamil Nadu, according to the CM. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flow into Tamil Nadu saw an increase of around Rs. 47,000 crore in the last three years, pegging it at around Rs. 1,80,000 crore now, Mr. Palaniswami said recently.

The State has been constantly attracting new investments across sectors including Information Technology. The recent investments by

TCS and Infosys alone, are expected to create 31,000 direct IT sector jobs in the State, he added.

Perhaps, the belief among a section of the people that the southern districts languish while the northern districts prosper will change for the better ensuring equitable development, once the petroleum refinery and petrochemical products facility comes about in the southern coastal town of Thoothukudi. The Kuwait-based Al-Kharafi is likely to invest around Rs. 49,000 crore to set up a petroleum refinery and petrochemical prod-

ucts facility at Thoothukudi. Mr. Palaniswami said Al-Kharafi is expected to set up a petroleum refinery in compliance with BS-VI emission norms adhering to the environmental standard to manufacture petrochemical products.

"This will bring in economic growth in the southern part of the State similar to that which took place in Jurong Island in Singapore and Dahej and Jamnagar in Gujarat," the Chief Minister said after laying the foundation stone for DLF Down Town Chennai.

90th BIRTHDAY GREETINGS

Dr. G. SANJEEVA REDDY GARU
Ex M.P (Rajya Sabha)

President
Deccan Chronicle Employees Union
President, All India INTUC
Vice-President, International Trada Union Council (ITUC)

CWC Member,
Former Labour Minister, Gov. of AP

We wish him a happy & long life on his 90th Birthday, Tuesday 18.02.2020 Sri Raja Annamali, Mandram, Paris Corner CHENNAI

May Almighty bless him with good health & long life to serve the cause of working class, organised & unorganised labour sector farming community and downtrodden.

With best wishes from
Deccan Chronicle Employees Union & All the Employees of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Ltd.

IN BRIEF

EPS greets T'gana CM on birthday

Chennai: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister K Palaniswami on Monday greeted his Telangana counterpart K Chandrasekhar Rao on the latter's 66th birthday. "On the joyous occasion of your birthday, I extend my heartiest greetings and best wishes to you," Palaniswami said in a message to Rao. "I pray the Almighty to grant you many more years of happiness and health, to steer Telangana to greater heights," he added. — PTI

Chain-snatcher held in Chennai

Chennai: A man who has more than 30 chain-snatching cases against him in Hyderabad has been arrested in Chennai in connection with four such cases reported in Anna Nagar area for the past three months. A special team from the Tirumangalam police arrested Amol Bala Saheb Shinde (29) of Parbhani in Maharashtra with the help of inputs from police from four states. Sources said that a special team had travelled around 2,000 km, combed more than 60 CCTV camera footages, monitored the call records of about 20 mobile phone numbers, checked over 100 lodges in the city and carried out vehicle check for 10 days at a stretch before nabbing him. After three chain-snatching cases were reported in December 2019 in Anna Nagar, a special team was formed to arrest the offender. With the help of CCTV footages, he was identified by Maharashtra and Telangana police. Investigations revealed that a two-wheeler used by the man for the offence had been stolen from Hyderabad. Meanwhile, on Sunday he was nabbed during routine vehicle checkup. As many as 20 sovereigns of jewellery and a two-wheeler were seized from Amol. He was remanded in judicial custody.

Principal sessions court issues summons to Stalin

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB. 17

The principal sessions court in Chennai on Monday issued summons to DMK president M.K. Stalin in connection with defamation case filed against him by the state government for allegedly making malicious remarks made against Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami. On behalf of the CM, the city public prosecutor filed two complaints before the principal sessions court last month.

According to a complaint, Opposition leader M.K. Stalin had questioned how the Centre had adjudged Tamil Nadu as the leading state in the Good Governance Index, when the state topped in only two of the nine parameters. Stalin charged that this was a ploy by the BJP to ensure that Tamil Nadu does not prosper. In the statement Stalin stated that the fact that the BJP government at the Centre wants to prop up the AIADMK government with such ranking, shows their close relations and raises suspicions that their relationship is beyond just being alliance partners.

He also questioned the rationale behind the rankings, when TN came first only in two out of the nine parameters and asked how the Centre was able to rank Tamil Nadu first in "public security", when there were issues like the Polachi rape cases, the killing of protesters during the Sterlite protests, and the state ranking second in the rape of minor girls. The statement was published in DMK's Murasoli newspaper on January 28.



School students wait to watch Assembly proceedings in Chennai on Monday. — DC

Sakthikumar died due to prolonged illness: Family

From P3

They further said Sakthikumar died due to his "prolonged illness of his lungs and liver", besides the jaundice he was recently suffering from.

"So, he lost his life and not because of any other reason," family sources said. The social media was needlessly playing it up to divert attention, they said.

Meanwhile, the health department officials secured all the medical files related to his treatment in the last two years and have sent the same to Chennai for clinical analysis. The police seized his passport and are investigating.

Shock in TN health circles

The first suspected death due to the novel Coronavirus in Tamil Nadu has come as both shock and surprise as the State was among the first to put in place an extensive surveillance at all airports to check all passengers arriving from China and its neighbouring countries for presence of any symptoms of the disease.

State Health minister, C Vijayabaskar had only

"700 passengers who arrived at different airports in the State from China and neighbouring countries, have been quarantined in their homes. All of them were free of any nCoV symptoms and so far not a single case had tested positive for the virus in Tamil Nadu"

last week said that more than 700 passengers who arrived at different airports in the State from China and neighbouring countries, where the nCoV infection has been reported, have been quarantined in their homes. All of them were free of any nCoV symptoms and so far not a single case had tested positive for the virus in Tamil Nadu.

The minister had said that even the passengers who had travelled with the girl from Kerala, who had tested positive for the virus, were also under observation by doctors. Mr. Vijayabaskar appealed to the people to stay calm and not panic as there was no threat of the virus spreading in Tamil Nadu.

Further, for the safety of doctors and para-medical staff, the government had provided enough medical equipment including res-

piratory masks, he had disclosed. The Madras High court, hearing a PIL few days back, had also asked the State government to file a detailed report on the preventive steps taken so far.

It is in this backdrop, the first suspected death from nCoV has somewhat rattled the medical fraternity. In Sakthikumar's case, sources said he comes from an agriculturist's family who had gone to China to set up an eatery there.

Sakthikumar, after a few trips, had recently returned home on February 4 as his jaundice turned severe, but had been missed by the elaborately set-up surveillance system at the airports. Unlike in the case of other China returnees, Sakthikumar had eluded the airport scans, possibly because he had said he was suffering from 'jaundice'.

After his sudden death, public health department have now camped at his village, some 100-km from the district headquarters town of Pudukkottai, to thoroughly investigate whether Sakthikumar's death was caused by nCoV or was due to other medical factors, sources added.

Hypnotic drug worth ₹3.4cr seized at airport

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB. 17

Customs officials at Chennai international airport seized 6.8kg of methaqualone (sedative-hypnotic drug), worth Rs 3.4 crore, on Sunday.

Officials of the courier intelligence unit of the air customs acted based on information that a parcel containing some narcotics drugs were likely to be smuggled out of the country through a courier in the guise of apparel accessories. They detained a parcel at a courier warehouse in the city.

The consignor had declared the parcel to contain ribbon rolls and other apparel accessories. On examination, the parcel was found to contain items as per declaration but the ribbon rolls were found to be unusually heavy. When the ribbons rolls were cut open, a hollow cavity was found inside in which plastic pouches containing white crystalline powder were concealed. Total 57 plastics pouch-

Methaqualone is a central nervous depressant that acts as a sedative and hypnotic. The drug takes 30 minutes to kick in and its effects can last up to eight hours. The drug was made famous in the 1970s by rock band Rolling Stones and also in the famous Hollywood movie "The Wolf of Wall Street"

es were recovered from ribbons rolls containing a white crystalline powder. The powder was tested with a narcotics testing kit. It prima facie tested positive for methaqualone. A total 6.815 kg of methaqualone, valued Rs. 3.4 crore, was seized under the NDPS Act, 1985.

The parcel was found to be booked by a Chennai-based person and was consigned to Australia. Searches were carried out at the address submitted by the consignor at the time of booking. The addresses were found to be fake. Efforts were being made to apprehend the consignor and to find the source of the seized drug. Further investigations are on.

Three held for robbery at house

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB. 17

The city police on Monday arrested three persons in connection with robbery at a house in Valasaravakkam.

According to police, on January 28, Arumugan, a builder and a resident of Radha Avenue in Valasaravakkam, lodged a complaint with the police that nearly 130 sovereigns of gold were missing from his house. The robbery took place while the family had gone out for dinner. Police arrested 3 persons and recovered 63 sovereigns of gold, Rs. 4 lakh in cash.

Stripped of our cheque-issuing powers, cry panchayat heads

R.VALAYAPATHY | DC TIRUCHY, FEB. 17

In a serious development, the members of the federation of Tiruchy district village panchayat presidents have submitted a memorandum to District Collector S. Sivarasu pointing out that the government has snatched away their cheque-issuing powers and introduced the

EPS releases souvenir on AIADMK's 3-yr achievements

D SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, FEB. 17

Consolidating all the policy pronouncements, programmes and achievements of the Edappadi K Palaniswami-led AIADMK government in Tamil Nadu in the last three years, a special souvenir in Tamil was released by the Chief Minister at the Secretariat here on Monday.

A beaming Mr Palaniswami, handed over the first copy of the document, titled 'Amma Arasin Muthirai Patitha Moondru Aandu, Mudhal Idame Adharku Saandru', to the Deputy Chief Minister, Mr. O. Panneerselvam at a simple function in the presence of ministers and top officials including Chief Secretary K Shanmugam. The publication is by the State Information department.

The souvenir highlights the achievements of the Edappadi Palaniswami-led government which have left an imprint on the socio-economic sectors.

Topping among them are the 'Kudimaramathu' schemes to rejuvenate water bodies across the state, declaration of Cauvery delta area as



Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami and Deputy CM O. Panneerselvam release souvenir on their regime's 3-year achievements in Chennai on Monday. — DC

'Protected Agriculture Zone', carving out of five new districts, getting Centre's sanction for an unprecedented new 11 medical colleges in 11 districts, foreign tour of the Chief Minister to attract fresh industrial investments and launch of a police app to ensure women's security. All these achievements were reflected in the several national-level awards

received by the Tamil Nadu government in recent months.

The Chief Minister also released separate documents on district-wise achievements of the AIADMK government that was received by the State Information minister Kadambur Raju. A short film and CD on the highlights of the government's performance was also

released. A coffee-table book 'Kaala Peyzhai' was also released by the Chief Minister, Edappadi K Palaniswami, which was received by the Chief Secretary. Information department secretary Mahesan Kasirajan welcomed the gathering and Information director, P Sankar, proposed a hearty vote of thanks.



A newly-wed couple along with other protesters raise slogans against CAA at Washermenpet in Chennai on Monday. — DC

Anti-CAA agitation continues at Washermenpet

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB. 17

The anti-CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act) protest in Washermenpet continued for the fourth consecutive day on Monday.

Around 1,000 persons gathered at Lalgunda street at Washermenpet, raising slogans against CAA, National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the National Population Register (NPR).

The protesters said that they will continue the stir

until the State government passes a resolution against implementing CAA.

Police security was beefed up at the protest site. The protesters also demanded action against the police personnel who lathicharged agitators on February 14.

Marriage held at protest site: At Chennai's Shaheen Bagh, a couple decided to marry during the anti-CAA protests that have entered the fourth day in Lala Gunda area in Old Washermanpet in

Chennai on Monday. The couple, M. Shahensha and S. Sumaya were already engaged and decided to get married at the protest site.

Speaking at the protest, the groom reportedly said that he agrees to the wedding but disagrees with the CAA. The protesters have stood firm on their demand that the protests will continue until a resolution against the National Population Register and CAA is passed in the Tamil Nadu State Assembly.

PIL to restrain Islamic assn from Assembly siege

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB. 17

A Public Interest Litigation has been filed in the Madras high court to restrain the Federation of Tamil Nadu Islamic and Political Organisations and its allied associations from organising the Tamil Nadu State Legislative Assembly siege agitation.

The PIL filed by Varaaki is likely to come up for hearing soon.

According to Varaaki, recently the Union government had enacted the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019.

The Act came into force on December 12, 2019 after the President of India gave assent to the Bill and the same was published in the Gazette. After the enactment of the Act, various political parties and organisations were organising agitations through out the country protesting against the Act.

The agitations by and large have disturbed the routine activities of the general public causing mental agony and playing havoc on their day to day personal life, he added.

He said till date, more than 120 illegal demonstrations have been conducted without permission from the police department. The organisations which were spearheading the agitations have filed several petitions, challenging the constitutional validity of the Act. The Supreme court, which heard the petitions refused to grant stay and observed that the matter will be heard by a Constitutional Bench. The bench also took serious note of rioting and destruction of property during protests against the CAA across the country. It further observed that "the violence must stop".

Foresters use thermal drone to track tiger

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC OOTY, FEB. 17

Nilgiris forest division administration has commissioned a "thermal drone" to track the movement of an elusive tiger that escaped from a snare in a farmland in Uyilatti village at Kotagiri near here on Saturday.

This is in the wake of the villagers there panicked over the suspected tiger movement in and around the village limits. The villagers also claimed to have spotted another tiger with cub in the jungle fringes along the village limits.

As the camera trap set



Thermal drone flying at forest to find elusive tiger at a farmland in Uyilatti village at Kotagiri. — DC

up by the foresters at waton points in Uyilatti village failed to yield any dividends, the fate of the elusive tiger was still unknown. Hence, the foresters made arrangements to operate thermal drone to try their luck to trace and track the move-

ment of the tiger in the village limits. Stating that a private drone operator from Coimbatore was invited for the purpose, Mr. Saravanakumar, the assistant conservator of forests at Nilgiris forest division said, the thermal drone was operated on Monday evening over a stretch of one-km. The thermal drone operations will continue on Tuesday also, he added.

"Thermal drone is a technological intervention

that hovers over the selected points to collect information on the movement of tigers in the area. The thermal drone collect signals from the carnivore moving around or from its hideout, as body temperature received from the carnivore is converted into images. By processing the images received from the thermal camera attached to the drone, the location of the tiger can be judged," he said. The aerial surveillance using the drone is expected to give information on the movement of carnivores in the select area to chalk out the next plan of action if needed, he added.



Women take self defense classes at a college in Chennai on Monday. — DC

SHORT TAKES

ASSAM GOVT MOVES RGI FOR NPR EXERCISE

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, FEB. 17

Ignoring the ongoing controversies on National Population Register, the BJP-led alliance government in Assam has moved to Registrar General of India (RGI) expressing its willingness to be the part of nationwide exercise of preparing the NPR in the state.

The Central government's exercise to update the National Population Register — which has become controversial because of its links to a nationwide National Register of Citizens — will officially begin on April 1.

In a letter to RGI, the General Administration Department of Assam has stated that the NPR would help the government in formulating the policies of various government schemes effectively.

Pointing out that RGI had excluded Assam from carrying out NPR exercise in view of the recent exercise of updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC), sources said that the state government was insisting on NPR exercise as state was to go for general census in 2021.

Stating that the NPR exercise would compile various data of economic and social condition of the people in the state, sources in the GAD said that it was necessary as it would help the government in planning welfare schemes of the government.

SHARJEEL SENT TO ONE DAY POLICE CUSTODY

New Delhi, Feb. 17: A Delhi court on Monday sent Sharjeel Imam, arrested on sedition charges, to one day custody of Delhi Police in a case related to violent protests against Citizenship Amendment Act at New Friend's colony on December 15.

This is different from the sedition case against Imam. Chief metropolitan magistrate Gurmohina Kaur sent Imam to the custody after the police said that another accused in the case disclosed that he was allegedly provoked by Sharjeel's speeches. Imam was arrested from Bihar's Jehanabad on January 28 for allegedly making inflammatory speeches at the Jamia Millia Islamia University here and in Aligarh.

Police had booked Imam, who came into limelight during the ongoing protest in Shaheen Bagh, on January 26 for allegedly delivering inflammatory speeches against the amended Citizenship Act and a possible National Register of Citizens.

MENSTRUATION CHECK: PRINCIPAL, RECTOR ARRESTED

Bhuj, Feb 17: Police on Monday arrested four persons, including the principal of the Gujarat college where authorities allegedly forced over 60 girls to remove their undergarments to check if they were menstruating a week ago, an official said.

The arrests were made after the police filed an FIR against them for the February 11 incident at Shree Sahajanand Girls Institute (SSGI) which caused public outrage. SSGI, a self-financed college having its own girls' hostel, is located in Bhuj town of Kutch district. The college is run by a trust of the Swaminarayan Temple and is affiliated to the Krantiguru Shyamji Krishna Verma Kutch University. Principal Rita Raninga, girls' hostel rector Ramilaben Hirani, college peon Naina Gorasiya and one Anita Chauhan were arrested by the police.

Taking serious view of the incident, linked to a hostel rule, on Saturday, the college suspended Raninga, Hirani and Gorasiya, said SSGI trustee Pravin Pindoria on Monday. We today arrested all the four accused named in the FIR, police inspector P H Langdhirka said. They were produced before a local court which remanded them in police custody for two days, police said. The accused were booked under Indian Penal Code sections 384 (extortion), 355 (assault with intent to dishonour a person) and 506 (criminal intimidation), they said. After the incident came to light, a seven-member team of the National Commission for Women (NCW) on Sunday met the girl inmates of the hostel. The incident took place on February 11 in the college-hostel



Smoke rises in the sky from the GST Bhavan after a fire broke out on its eighth floor, in Mazgaon area of Mumbai, on Monday, —PTI

India summons Turkish envoy; issues demarche

Move comes after Erdogan's remarks supporting Pakistan on Kashmir issue

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, FEB. 17

Lashing out for the second time in three days at Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's extremely controversial remarks supporting Islamabad on the Kashmir issue while on a visit to Pakistan recently, India summoned the Turkish envoy in New Delhi on Monday and issued a "strong demarche", saying the remarks are "one more example of a pattern of Turkey interfering in the internal affairs of other countries" which "India finds completely unacceptable".

New Delhi also said the President's "remarks reflect neither an understanding of history nor of the conduct of diplomacy" and that these "distort events of the past to advance a narrow minded view of the present". New Delhi also "rejected the repeated attempts by Turkey to justify the cross border terrorism practiced so blatantly by Pakistan", adding that "these developments have strong implications for our bilateral relationship".

President Erdogan along with Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad have been extremely critical of India in the past few months while support-

MEASAYS ERDOGAN'S remarks reflect neither an understanding of history nor of conduct of diplomacy and these distort events of the past to advance a narrow minded view of present

ing Pakistan, after India revoked Article 370 and divided the erstwhile J&K state into two union territories in August last year. In apparent response, India had also last year said it was "deeply concerned at the unilateral military offensive by Turkey in north-east Syria", asking "Turkey to exercise restraint and respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria", and adding that "Turkey's actions can undermine stability in the region and the fight against terrorism" which "has the potential for causing humanitarian and civilian distress".

In his extremely controversial recent remarks supporting the Pakistani position on Kashmir, President Erdogan had compared Kashmir to the battle of Gallipoli during World War-I that the Turks had fought back then. "We have never forgotten and will never forget the help, which the Pakistani people extended, by sharing their own bread during our War of Independence. And now, Kashmir is and will be the same for us. It was Canakkale (Gallipoli) yesterday and it is Kashmir today, [there is] no difference," President Erdogan was quoted by the Turkish media as having told a joint session of Pakistan's parliament during his official visit to the country.

He had further continued, "This approach (by India), which aggravates the current situation and revokes the freedom and vested rights of the Kashmiri people, does not benefit anyone... The Kashmir problem can be solved not by conflict or oppression, but on the basis of justice and equity." The reference to the

"sharing of bread" appears to be a misplaced attempt by the Turkish President to describe the support extended by Indian Independence movement leaders to Turkey back then as support by Pakistan which was not even in existence at that time.

In "response to a media query on comments made by the President of Turkey on India's internal matters during his recent visit to Pakistan", MEA Spokesperson Raveesh Kumar said, "India has made a strong demarche with the Turkish Government on the remarks made by President Erdogan on the Indian Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir during his recent visit to Islamabad. These remarks reflect neither an understanding of history nor of the conduct of diplomacy. They distort events of the past to advance a narrow minded view of the present. India made a strong demarche with the Turkish government."

The MEA added, "This recent episode is but one more example of a pattern of Turkey interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. India finds that completely unacceptable. We particularly reject the repeated attempts by Turkey to justify the cross border terrorism practiced so blatantly by Pakistan. The demarche was made by the MEA's Secretary (West) to the Ambassador of Turkey in New Delhi earlier today."

Just on Saturday, "in response to queries regarding references to Jammu & Kashmir by the Turkish President and the Turkey-Pakistan Joint Declaration", the MEA had said, "India rejects all

Slipper hurled at Kanhaiya in Bihar

NAYEAR AZAD | DC PATNA, FEB. 17

A youth was taken into custody on Monday after he made an attempt to throw a slipper at former JNUSU president Kanhaiya Kumar.

The youth was thrashed by workers and supporters of Kanhaiya Kumar before being taken into custody by the police. The incident occurred while he was addressing a public meeting in Bihar's Lakhisarai.

Calling Kanhaiya Kumar "traitor", the youth who hurled a slipper at him said that he has been upset with the ongoing agitation against the CAA, NPR and NRC. He also called himself a Godse supporter and said that "attacks against Kanhaiya Kumar will continue".

The youth identified as Chandan Kumar Gore was rushed to a local government hospital for treatment. Talking to reporters he said, "Kanhaiya Kumar has been trying to create an atmosphere of hatred through his speeches but

left ideology will not work in our country. Patriots like me are not worried about being beaten up". Kanhaiya has raised the political temperature in Bihar by leading a massive Jan Gan Man Yatra to protest against the CAA, NPR and NRC.

Organisers of the program told this newspaper that he has been facing continuous violent attacks during his state-wide tour. Activists accompanying him said that this was ninth attack in two weeks and slogans being raised by people who have been trying to disrupt his tour indicate that they belong to a particular ideology.

"I am not bothered by such attacks. Bihar today needs employment and not NPR. I would like to urge the state government to pass a resolution in the assembly to prevent the implementation of CAA, NPR and NRC". Kanhaiya told reporters in Lakhisarai. Earlier his convoy was attacked in Gaya, Arrah, Nawada, Katihar, Supaul, Begusarai, Sitamarhi and Bhagalpur.

POLITICAL MELEE

Govt, Oppn exchange 'political colour' and 'muscle men' jibes

New Jamia video shows rioters in library

New Delhi, Feb. 17: A major political row broke out on Monday over some videos clips showing purported thrashing of Jamia students in the university library by security personnel in December, with the BJP accusing the Congress of giving "political colour" to the incident and the Opposition party alleging that the government was "misusing" the police force as its "muscle men."

The controversy was triggered by a 'video vs video' war with the Jamia Coordination Committee (JCC) releasing a CCTV footage of alleged "police brutality" in old reading hall, only to be countered by a 'leaked' Delhi Police Crime Branch video

which purportedly showed some "rioters" hiding in the library on December 15. However, veracity of these videos could not be ascertained. "Congress party is continuously supporting anti-social elements and those who indulge in violence. It raises voice against the security forces and police personnel of the country," BJP spokesperson G.V.L. Narasimha Rao said at a press conference here.

A 48-second video released by the JCC purportedly showed some seven to eight paramilitary and police personnel entering the Old Reading Hall and beating up students with batons. The paramilitary and police personnel are also seen

covering their faces with handkerchiefs.

In a second video, running around 5.25 minutes, people are purportedly seen entering the university's library in a rush. Some have their face covered.

Rao asked why were students wearing masks and what were they studying with stones in their hands. "Which academic discipline requires students to wear masks and hold stones while studying?" he asked.

"The Congress party always choose to stand with those who are inimical to the country and rile up security forces," the BJP spokesperson added. Hitting out at the BJP, Congress spokesperson

SC tells Shaheen Bagh protesters not to block roads

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, FEB. 17

The Supreme Court on Monday said people have a right to protest but not block public places causing inconvenience to others, as it asked senior lawyers Sanjay Hagde and Sadhana Ramachandran to talk to the anti-CAA and anti-NRC protesters at Shaheen Bagh and persuade them to shift to an alternate place.

Telling the protestors at Shaheen Bagh not to block public roads, a bench of Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and K.M. Joseph asked solicitor-general Tushar Mehta to suggest alternate places where the protestors could shift to.

Finding the suggestion by the court soft sounding, Mr Mehta said it should not be seen as if the government was "kneeling" before them, and said the government doesn't wish to escalate the situation — a hint of forcible eviction of the protestors who are on the 65th day of their sit-in protest.

At the outset, the court made it clear it was not against the protest, which it said was a matter of right, but it shouldn't lead to blocking of public places and roads.

"The right to protest is recognised the world over in democracies, especially in India. It's a fundamental right subject only to public order and security of the State," said Justice Joseph.

Noting that the Shaheen Bagh sit-in protest was going on though a large number of petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 was pending before the court, Justice Kaul said: "We are not saying because it is pending in SC... people don't have the right to protest. The question is — where to protest? It should not be in a public place or on a road."

The court said it feared that the city would be in utter chaos if others too with genuine grievances take a leaf from the Shaheen Bagh protest and start blocking roads and other public places

COURT SENDS 3 STUDENTS TO CUSTODY

VITTAL SHASTRI AND M.K. ASHOKA | DC HUBBALLI, FEB. 17

In a day of dramatic developments, the Gokul Road police in Hubballi arrested three Kashmiri students of KLE Institute of Technology, Hubballi, who are facing sedition charges and produced them before the 3rd JMFC court on Monday. The court has remanded them to judicial custody till March 2.

Earlier on Sunday, the three engineering college students who had shouted pro-Pakistan slogans on the anniversary of the Pulwama massacre on February 14, were initially released under section 169 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC). But the police detained them again following protests from activists of Hindu organisations.

On Monday, a tense situation prevailed at the court premises as a mob tried to attack the three students identified as Ameer, Basit and Talib from Shopian district of Kashmir. They threw slippers at the police van which was carrying the youth demanding stern action against them.

Lawyers present at the Hubballi court too shouted slogans like "Bharat Mata Ki Jai" when the police produced the youth before the court. Activists of Bajrang Dal and other Hindu organisations surrounded Hubballi-Dharwad police commissioner R Dilip demanding immediate arrest of the trio. Right-wing activists accused the police of trying to protect the youth despite the fact that a non-bailable case was lodged against them.

'BEEF' OVER KERALA POLICE ACADEMY MENU

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB. 17

The decision of Kerala Police Academy to take off beef from the menu of the canteen has triggered a controversy. The authorities removed beef from the list of food items served at the canteen of the Kerala Police Academy about a week ago. With the decision inviting opposition from a section, the authorities decided that the food committees in respective camps may take a call on including beef in their menu.

The training session for over 4,000 police personnel began at various police camps in the state on Sunday including Police Academy Thrissur. Beef was taken off for the trainees and the staff engaged in training at these camps.

The authorities decided to serve chicken procured from the poultry farm run in police academy premises. Earlier, the menu for trainee police comprised fish, chicken, beef, omelette and fish fry. Beef was served twice in a week.

Meanwhile, ADGP training denied that there was ban on serving beef in any police camp. It may be recalled here that the "beef fry" tweet on the official twitter handle of Kerala Tourism on makar sankranti day had triggered a major controversy. There was a deliberate attempt from certain quarters to add communal colour to the tweet highlighting Kerala's popular delicacy "Beef Ularthiyathu". A section of Twitterati attacked the CPM led state government alleging that the tweet on "beef fry" was deliberately posted.

154 eminent people write to President

New Delhi, Feb. 17: As many as 154 prominent citizens, including former judges, bureaucrats, armed forces officers and academicians, on Monday said a "false and motivated" campaign is being launched against the CAA, NPR and NRC with a sinister design to harm the nation and sought action against trouble-makers.

11 former judges of different high courts, 24 retired IAS officers, 11 former Indian Foreign Service officers, 16 retired IPS and 18 former Lieutenant Generals, said "fear" is being spread across the length and breadth of India which appears to be "motivated and with a sinister design" to harm the nation. "They said the campaign is being carried out in a "coordinated manner" leading to violent protests in which public and private property has been destroyed. They said there has been a "false and nefarious narrative" about the recently enacted legislations like the CAA, NPR and NRC.

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The controversy was triggered by a 'video vs video' war with the Jamia Coordination Committee (JCC) releasing a CCTV footage of alleged "police brutality" in old reading hall, only to be countered by a 'leaked' Delhi Police Crime Branch video

which purportedly showed some "rioters" hiding in the library on December 15. However, veracity of these videos could not be ascertained. "Congress party is continuously supporting anti-social elements and those who indulge in violence. It raises voice against the security forces and police personnel of the country," BJP spokesperson G.V.L. Narasimha Rao said at a press conference here.

A 48-second video released by the JCC purportedly showed some seven to eight paramilitary and police personnel entering the Old Reading Hall and beating up students with batons. The paramilitary and police personnel are also seen covering their faces with handkerchiefs.

Jaiveer Shergill said the ruling party had been caught "red-handed."

"They are guilty of mis-using the police force as their muscle men. The BJP government is the accused and the culprit in the case of attack on innocent students. A court-monitored investigation is the need of the hour to probe this Jamia violence," he said. Congress leader Kapil Sibal also lashed out at the government for alleged "police brutality," saying when policemen hide the truth and there is no dialogue with the youth, when government becomes a sleuth. And data is full of 'jhoth' (lies). Slowly democracy will weaken at its roots," Sibal said in a tweet.

IN BRIEF

Virus preventable, says health official

Beijing: The novel coronavirus that has killed more than 1,700 people in China is "preventable and treatable", an official from the country's National Health Commission said on Monday. Guo Yanhong, a hospital administration supervisor at the commission, made the remarks at a daily press conference, in which she also said the percentage of infected patients in virus epicentre Wuhan who are critically ill had dropped to 18 per cent now from 38 per cent at the beginning of the outbreak.

Taiwan embraces cute mascots

Taipei: While China deploys stern communist slogans in its battle against a deadly new coronavirus, democratic Taiwan has embraced cuddly mascots and humour to ease public anxiety and educate on best practices. Images of cute animals have featured in daily social media updates from government agencies to tackle disinformation and prevent the spread of infections. The health ministry has deployed a cartoon "spokes-dog" — a Shiba Inu called Zongchai — that has proved a hit with hashtags of his name going viral and posts shared thousands of times. Recent contributions have included advice on hygiene and quarantine regulations as well as reminding people to use face masks judiciously given the ongoing shortages since the new virus exploded in China. "Leave face masks for those who need them, frequently wash your hands with soap, reduce touching eyes, nose and mouth with hands," read one update.

WHO experts join field inspections

Beijing: Top WHO experts, including from the US, have joined the fight against the novel coronavirus in China that has claimed 1,770 lives, as Beijing stepped up its efforts by deploying 30,000 more medical staff in the worst-affected Wuhan city to contain the spread of the epidemic. China's National Health Commission (NHC) said on Monday that 105 people died of the virus on Sunday while 2,048 new cases of infection have been confirmed, taking the total number of COVID-19 infected cases to 70,548, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported. Of the new deaths, 100 were reported from the central Hubei province, three in the central Henan province, and two in the southern Guangdong province. The efforts to combat coronavirus picked up pace with the global experts mobilised by the WHO joining hands with their Chinese counterparts. China has confirmed that the WHO team reportedly comprising 12 members includes experts from the US, a major demand from Washington.

RUSSIAN WHO FLED SENT BACK TO HOSPITAL

Saint Petersburg, Feb. 17: A court in Saint Petersburg on Monday ordered a woman to be forcibly returned to coronavirus quarantine in hospital after she broke out and went home. The city's Botkin hospital filed a highly unusual request for a court order to hospitalise 33-year-old Alla Ilyina after she posted on social media about breaking out of her isolation room, complaining of inedible food and a lack of necessities such as shampoo. The court ruled in favour of her "forced hospitalisation" which it said must be carried out immediately. Court bailiffs escorted her to an ambulance after the hearing, local television showed. Ilyina had visited the Chinese resort island of Hainan, returning by plane on February 1. A few days after returning she developed a slight temperature and sore throat. Doctors diagnosed her with "acute virus illness" that they suspected could be the new coronavirus. She was placed in 14-day quarantine on February 6 but fled a day later, according to the local health watchdog. She posted Instagram videos giving details of her escape method and detailing complaints over bland food and lack of fresh air. The hospital's chief doctor responded by filing legal action to return Ilyina. She has to stay in hospital until at least February 19 and must receive two negative test results before leaving. — AFP

With 105 new deaths, toll at 1,770

2,048 fresh cases confirmed, total number of those infected rises to 70,548

Beijing, Feb. 17: China reported 105 new deaths due to the new coronavirus on Monday, pushing the overall death toll to 1,770, as officials announced stringent measures such as closing non-essential public venues and traffic restrictions to control the epidemic in the worst-hit Hubei province. The National Health Commission said 2,048 new cases of the virus have been confirmed, taking the total number of COVID-19 infected cases to 70,548, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Of the new deaths, 100 were from Hubei Province, three in Henan, and two in Guangdong. Though 10,844 people had been discharged from hospitals after recovery, the commission said in its daily report said that 7,264 people were still suspected to be infected by the deadly virus.

By Sunday, 57 confirmed cases including one death had been reported from Hong Kong, 10 in Macao, and 20 in Taiwan, including one death.

Hubei, where 18 cities with over 50 million people are under lockdown since January 23, announced a slew of more stringent measures to control the epidemic, including enforcing province-wide traffic restrictions on all non-emergency vehicles and closing all non-essential public venues. A circular by the provincial government said the health screening campaign should be strengthened and no one should be missed. Also, companies should not resume production unless allowed by local authorities. Those that have resumed work, including public institutions, should follow strict prevention measures. The measures came as the situation remains "grave", the circular added. On Sunday, the commission announced a drop in new cases, suggesting that epidemic control measures were taking effect. — PTI

IN WUHAN, the epicentre of the epidemic, the proportion of severe cases among the confirmed cases fell from a peak of 32.4 per cent on January 28 to 21.6 per cent on February 15.

MI FENG, spokesperson of China's National Health Commission



This photo shows a man (R) who has recovered from the COVID-19 coronavirus infection donating plasma in Lianyungang of China's eastern Jiangsu province. — AFP

China asks recovered patients to donate plasma

Beijing, Feb. 17: Chinese health officials Monday urged patients who have recovered from the coronavirus to donate blood so that plasma can be extracted to treat others who are critically ill.

Drugmakers are racing to develop a vaccine and treatment for the epidemic. Plasma from patients who have recovered from a spell of pneumonia triggered by COVID-19 contains antibodies that can help reduce the virus load in critically ill patients, an official from China's National Health Commission told a press briefing Monday. "I would like to make a call to all cured patients to donate their plasma so that they can bring hope to critically ill patients," said Guo Yanhong, who heads

I WOULD like to make a call to all cured patients to donate their plasma so that they can bring hope to critically ill patients.

GUO YANHONG, head, medical administration department of China's National Health Commission

the NHC's medical administration department. Eleven patients at a hospital in Wuhan — the epicentre of the disease — received plasma infusions last week, said Sun Yanrong, of the Biological Center and Technology. "One patient (among them) has already been di-

charged, one is able to get off the bed and walk and the others are all recovering," she said.

The call comes days after China's state-owned medical products maker reported successful results from its trial at Wuhan First People's Hospital. China National Biotec Group Co. said in a post on its official WeChat account that severely ill patients receiving plasma infusions "improved within 24 hours". "Clinical studies have shown that infusing plasma (from recovered patients) is safe and effective," Sun said. Blood donors will undergo a test to ensure that they are not carrying the virus, said Wang Guiliang, chief physician at Peking University First Hospital. — AFP

Beijing likely to postpone annual Parliament session

Beijing, Feb. 17: China is considering a rare move to postpone its annual parliament session scheduled to be held in early March as the country grapples with the coronavirus outbreak that has claimed over 1,700 lives, official media reported on Monday. The 13th National People's Congress (NPC), the country's top legislature, is due to hold its annual session in Beijing on March 5, according to an official announcement in December last year. But amid the

spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), the NPC Standing Committee is to discuss postponing this year's NPC plenary session, the state-run China Daily said in a brief report. If the NPC, which is held every year along with the advisory body Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), is postponed, it will be regarded as an unprecedented move. The ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) considers two sessions as significant political event

to adopt its national agenda, including the annual budgets. Together the NPC and the CPPCC have over 5,000 delegates. China is discouraging large gathering to prevent the spread of the virus. The postponement is reportedly being contemplated as the coronavirus continued its virulent run, though officials say it is slowing down. China reported 105 new deaths due to the coronavirus on Monday, increasing the overall death toll to 1,770. — PTI



The public gathering to celebrate Emperor Naruhito's birthday has been cancelled amid fears over the coronavirus outbreak. — AFP

JAPAN CANCELS EMPEROR'S B'DAY

Tokyo, Feb. 17: Japan said Monday it would cancel a public gathering to celebrate the birthday of new Emperor Naruhito, as fears grow over the spread of the new coronavirus in the country. "His Majesty's appearance in the morning as well as the public signing of the greeting book will be cancelled." — AFP

99 more cases found on ship

Tokyo, Feb. 17: An additional 99 people have tested positive for coronavirus on a cruise ship off the Japan coast, Japanese media said Monday, citing new figures from the health ministry.

That would take the total number of positive cases on the Diamond Princess to 454. The health ministry declined to confirm the reports immediately.

It was also not clear whether the figures included 14 US citizens who tested positive for the virus but were allowed to board evacuation flights home. The Diamond Princess vessel moored in Yokohama near Tokyo has become the second-largest cluster of coronavirus cases outside the epicentre in China. Passengers have been largely confined to quarters since February 5 with only brief and occasional breaks to take air on deck — with face masks. — AFP

1,716 HEALTH WORKERS INFECTED

Chengdu (China), Feb. 17: For the first time since the beginning of the outbreak, China's National Health Commission reported that at least 1,716 health workers had been infected while treating patients. This has raised concerns about the capability of the government to protect the caregivers in direct contact with the afflicted.

Zeng Yixin, deputy director of China's health commission said that infected medical workers comprise 3.8 percent of all who have contracted the virus in China. He told the number would not rise as China was increasing efforts to ensure that supply of protective equipment would be adequate. — AFP

14 US evacuees test +ve for virus

Washington, Feb. 17: Fourteen people who had tested positive for the new coronavirus were among the more than 300 US citizens and family members evacuated by plane from a quarantined ship in Japan, the US State Department said Monday.

The passengers had already disembarked from the Diamond Princess and were preparing to return to the United States on chartered aircraft when US officials were informed 14 of them who had been tested days earlier were positive for COVID-19. "These individuals were moved to a specialised

containment area on the evacuation aircraft to isolate them in accordance with standard protocols," it said. "During the flights, these individuals will continue to be isolated from the other passengers." The first flight is due to land shortly at a US Air Force base in California, where all will undergo 14 days' quarantine. — AFP

SHIP OPERATOR RACES TO TRACK PASSENGERS

Phnom Penh, Feb. 17: A US cruise operator is working to track down hundreds of passengers who disembarked a luxury liner in Cambodia after one traveller was later diagnosed with the deadly coronavirus.

The Westerdam was at sea for two weeks during which it was barred from Japan, Guam, the Philippines, Taiwan and Thailand over fears it could be carrying the virus, which originated in China and has killed more than 1,700 people. Cambodia, a staunch ally of Beijing, allowed the ship to dock Thursday at its southern coastal town of Sihanoukville, with authorities carrying out temperature checks on passengers before they left the ship to catch flights home. But one traveller was stopped late Saturday on arriving in Malaysia after airport staff detected a fever. She was later diagnosed with the coronavirus. The 83-year-old American woman is under observation at a hospital while her husband, 85, is also being monitored. Some 137 passengers from the Westerdam who also took the Malaysia flight with the American have now left on commercial flights for other destinations. Cruise operator Holland America said late Sunday it was in "close coordination" with Malaysian officials alongside experts from the World Health Organisation and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. — AFP

NATURE'S FURY Weather agency issues 'danger to life' warning after flooding and high winds

Storm Dennis wreaks havoc in UK, France

London, Feb. 17: Britain on Monday began to clear up after Storm Dennis battered the country over the weekend, leading the government's weather agency to issue a rare "danger to life" warning amid widespread flooding and high winds. Hundreds of flood warnings remained in place, including five "severe" warnings around the River Teme in Worcestershire in western England, after more than a month's worth of rain fell in 48 hours in some parts of Britain.

A RECORD 594 warnings and alerts had been put in place, extending from Scotland's River Tweed to Cornwall in southwest England.

A record 594 warnings and alerts had been put in place on Sunday, extending from Scotland's River Tweed to Cornwall in southwest England, while major incidents were declared in South Wales and parts of western England due to flooding.

The storm also battered much of France, with some 20,000 people still without electricity on Monday after suffering power cuts in the northwest of the country and rail traffic disrupted. In south Wales, the government's weather agency issued a rare red warning, saying there was a risk of "significant impacts from flooding" that included a "danger to life from fast flowing water,

extensive flooding to property and road closures". Pictures circulated on social media showed the nearby River Taff bursting its banks, while rescue workers rushed to reach people trapped in their homes in Powys. Police said a man in his 60s died after entering River Tawe, north of Swansea, but later clarified that the death was not "linked to the adverse weather". Winds of over 90 miles per hour were recorded in Aberdaron, south Wales. — AFP



Members of emergency services check shops on a street in Tenbury Wells, England, on Monday, after the River Teme broke its banks amid Storm Dennis. — AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

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Trump's visit: Expect optics, not substance

US President Donald Trump is looking forward to his first official visit to India, when the optics will be very high indeed. It's likely that Mr Trump will be pleased as punch as there will be huge crowds waiting for him during a roadshow with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The two leaders share a particular chemistry that was apparent ever since they first met and bear-hugged. The theatrics of their friendship will be high as it was during Mr Modi's visit to Texas, when Mr Trump joined him at the "Howdy, Modi!" event. The question is: how useful will this visit by a fourth consecutive US President be in advancing US-India ties, that are already strong and may have grown during Mr Trump's four years at the White House.

A Trump promise on a trade deal with India has been in the air for some time. But it seems unlikely that an agreement will be signed during the February 24-25 visit as negotiations have run aground. Any deal to lessen India's surplus, that shrank to about \$16 billion from an earlier \$30 billion, won't be favourable. Losing more of the trade surplus with a big partner will only affect the smaller economy. The strategic part of their talks might prove more substantive, but once again it will be the US that will benefit more as it sells India more helicopters, and grants allow the acquisition of an integrated air defence weapon system. The missile shield will be more than a symbolic furtherance of ties as it means India would get even closer to being in the global American axis. As one of the world's biggest arms importers, India should be in an advantageous position to negotiate terms. Realistically, it doesn't work that way as quality comes in anything at a price.

It's a quirk of history that India's ties with the US have been warmer in the Republican years of the two George Bushes and now Mr Trump than it was during the Clinton and Obama years, particularly the latter, when the loss of US jobs was attributed to "Bangalored", or outsourcing to India. The Trump administration makes no bones about employing more restrictive visa practices for immigrants as well as IT workers. It must be a disappointment to a large part of India's highly qualified workforce that ties aren't warm enough to permit exceptions. This is one area in which Mr Modi can lean on chemistry to make it better for aspiring Indians.

Given the circumstances in which the visit will take place, it's clear that, having been absolved of charges in the Senate impeachment trial, Mr Trump will be the dominant personality at the summit. It's no secret that the abrogation of Article 370 and the passing of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act are big pinpricks, that will come up in the discussions. Reiterating the usual Indian line about these being "internal matters" may not cut much ice. India must do more to convince the US in order to ensure that bilateral relations remain cordial.

Jamia: Cops on backfoot

Unmistakable visual evidence has emerged of unwarranted police action on the students of Jamia Millia Islamia on December 15, a few days after the Citizenship (Amendment) Act was passed — widely seen as heralding the indefensible plan to filter out underprivileged Muslims via a National Register for Citizens. The video, released by the Jamia Coordination Committee, shows masked paramilitary personnel storming Jamia's Old Reading Hall and thrashing youngsters at study desks. A young man lost his eye. It was the flashpoint of the people's resistance against the CAA, which gathered steam after the government's moves over the National Population Register. As of today, 33 lives have been lost to the nationwide protests.

The path of dissent is never easy. But the law gives Indian citizens the freedom to assemble peacefully to voice opinions, the very lever that moves democracy and our system of governance. It doesn't give the police the right to shut it down with violence, as it did in Washermanpet, Tamil Nadu, without provocation, on Friday. Yet no FIR has been lodged for the Jamia library incident, forcing the university to move the Delhi high court. Instead, the Delhi police crime branch released its own video of a young man entering the library with stones in a purported bid to justify its crackdown by insinuating a possible intent of violence.

It hasn't convinced anyone of their lack of culpability. With the Opposition stepping up criticism, special commissioner of police (intelligence) Praveer Ranjan has been pushed to the backfoot, and he has now promised an investigation. Will there result, as a consequence, new police reforms freeing members of the force to act according to the law and own conscience, instead of government diktats? Will the Delhi police be shamed into taking action against its own? There is always hope!

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Subhani



It's too early for AAP to expand beyond Delhi



Sanjay Kumar

Having registered a stunning victory, Arvind Kejriwal along with six ministers took the oath for the third time as Delhi chief minister at Delhi's historic Ramlila Maidan on Sunday. This victory in itself was remarkable, with 62 of the Assembly's 70 seats, but what was even more remarkable was that the AAP was up against an army of very experienced BJP leaders who campaigned relentlessly against the AAP and Arvind Kejriwal, some of whom engaged in a very shrill and negative campaign. But the AAP sailed against all odds to victory. The message by Mr Kejriwal in his public address after the oath made this victory far more remarkable. Mr Kejriwal said that irrespective of who voted for him or not, he considered everyone as "part of his family" and promised to work for all the people of Delhi. He added he "forgives his opponents for their remarks against him", and wanted take everyone along with him. He also sought the "blessings" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

There was also a clear signal that he wanted to expand the AAP beyond Delhi. In his speech, he urged people to "call your villages and tell them that their son has become the chief minister, and there is no need to worry". After all, he had taken the oath as Delhi's CM, so why should he ask people to call their family members in villages? This was a clear indication he would try to reach out to people beyond the geographical boundaries of Delhi.

However, for the AAP, expanding the party beyond Delhi is this

handing out by the Kejriwal government contributed to this massive mandate, but this election remained largely focused on the development work done by the AAP government in the past five years. The CSDS governance study conducted in early December 2019 captured the mood of the people of Delhi regarding the AAP government's work in the fields of education and health — and indicated widespread approval of the AAP's work. Though Delhi witnessed an acerbic campaign waged by the BJP on the basis of emotive and national issues, the voter sentiment that the CSDS survey had captured in early December did not change much. This was because voters saw the election mainly as a question of Delhi's governance. In this sense, the victory of the AAP was clearly a vote for performance on the ground. The water, electricity, education and healthcare record of the government was clearly its USP. The CSDS survey indicated that three of every five of those who traditionally backed the BJP said they favoured an AAP victory due to the government's performance record. This mattered a lot for the "pro-incumbency" sentiment in favour of the AAP.

By asking the people of Delhi to convey to friends and relatives in their villages that their "son" had become the chief minister, Mr Kejriwal was trying to send out the message that the people of Delhi had rejected BJP leaders' equating Arvind Kejriwal as a "terrorist". The Delhi elections

remained focused around the face of Mr Kejriwal. During his campaign, he went to the extent of saying "vote for me only if you consider me as your son, don't vote for me if you consider me as a terrorist". The AAP benefited from the fact that it had Mr Kejriwal's "face" at the head of its campaign. The BJP, on the other hand, had no such credible, visible face. It once again depended on the charisma and charm of its top national leaders — mainly Prime Minister Modi. In a state poll, this clearly worked in favour of the AAP as almost two-fifths of those satisfied with the Modi government's performance voted for the AAP. Mr Modi remains very popular with Delhi's voters; yet they chose Mr Kejriwal over Mr Modi mainly because they were conscious that this was a question of who would head the state government.

The BJP's last-minute efforts to polarise voters and win back the support of those who voted for it in the Lok Sabha polls six months ago didn't cut much ice. While possibly it did contribute to the BJP's rise in voteshare compared to the last Assembly election, it was not sufficient to reduce the wide gap that had developed between the BJP and AAP. At the end of the day, governance and service delivery appeared to trump the politics of emotive appeals and divisiveness.

Mr Kejriwal in his address did say that the elections were over, and whether you had voted for the AAP or not, you are a part of my family — clearly trying to send out a positive message of his commitment to work for all the people of Delhi as he begins his third innings in government.

A CSDS survey indicated that three of every five of those who traditionally backed the BJP said they favoured an AAP victory due to the government's performance record

The writer is a professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. He is also a psephologist and a political commentator and analyst. The views expressed here are personal.

LETTERS

PULWAMA ANNIVERSARY

On February 14, the nation paid homage to the martyrs of the Pulwama terror attack on its first anniversary. However, the dreadful and spine-chilling incident that took the lives of 40 CRPF jawans reveals the painful fact of how colossal our intelligence lapse was. While the JeM suicide bomber began his groundwork a year ago, his activities raised an alarm among intelligence units in the valley. Despite adequate intelligence that suggested a strike, a convoy of 78 vehicles carrying more than 2,500 CRPF personnel was rolled out from Jammu to Srinagar, which officials had later described as 'foolhardy' to transport troops in bulk in a semi-war zone. While it must be thanked that a memorial to the slain CRPF personnel was inaugurated at the Lethpora camp in J&K, one equally wonders how the 80-kg RDX trespassed the international borders to the most armed zone on earth.

R. Sivakumar, Chennai

ILL-TREATMENT OF STUDENTS

Apropos the shocking news report *Dalit students, victims of caste slur in Kovai school*. There are stringent laws prohibiting extraction of any kind of manual work especially cleansing work from students including sweeping of school premises. In spite of it the news of students being ordered to clean school toilets by the headmistress of the school in Kovai is outrageous and highly condemnable. Worse is that the headmistress has chosen only the Dalit students for the task with caste bias. The very inhuman attitude to segregate students on caste basis itself is cruel. The concerned head of the school has crossed all limits of civilised behaviour in hitting the girl students and for having used caste slur for having refused to cleanse the toilets.

Kallal ML. Raghavan, Chennai

CRIMINALS IN POLITICS

Our multi-party parliamentary system of democracy has more ingredients of making it to function more negatively rather than positively. When politics is considered as the "last resort of scoundrels" (G.B. Shah), the entry of criminals into its nucleus surprises none at all. The meaningful directions of the Supreme Court, *Publicise tainted netas, SC tells political parties* (Feb .14) will become meaningless as long as the people vote for them, with or without knowledge of such criminal activities, as they simply have in mind only the beloved top leader of party of their choice. Searching for a good devil from Hell to represent the people in governance is indeed a difficult task in the present scenario of electoral politics.

Victor Frank A., Chennai

Shahbaz Khan

A paradigm shift is needed on discourse in public life

Jawaharlal Nehru and Edwina Mountbatten's relationship has been a subject of interest, both during their lifetimes and after. At the time, however, no solid proof existed to substantiate the rumours regarding their liaison — or so it was thought, for Mohammad Ali Jinnah is said to have received certain letters exchanged between them that confirmed the public's suspicions; a wonderful opportunity for Jinnah to use these against his political foes.

These days, when exposing details of politicians' private lives is hardly seen as novel, it may come as a shock that Jinnah declined to use those letters and returned them. "Caesar's wife should be above suspicion," he said. "The shame is ours, not theirs." Such was the dignity and grace of the politician who liberated us; such was his level of esteem and respect even for his rivals.

Contrarily, our politicians today would cross entire oceans to procure any evidence to blackmail and defame their political foes; discard-

ing any such self-presented opportunity is beyond imagination. While undoubtedly impassioned in their rhetoric, it is usually to denigrate their opponents and point fingers, often accompanied with a perverse joy in watching the misfortunes of their intended targets.

No one is without sin, yet those who criticise their rivals are often the same people who would have committed far worse deeds. Our esteemed politicians wistfully may not be such devout followers of the truth or even their religion, as opposed to how blind they are in advocating their parties and its respective stance, always prepared with a loaded gun to fire away at all times whether right or iniquitous.

As a result, public discourse is divisive and devoid of substance. What we see is a propensity for disorderly conduct, impertinence and negativity, with hostility towards any idea that contradicts our own views. However, what we need is to set aside inflammatory rhetoric targeting individuals to make room for sincere dialogue focused on actual issues.

Unfortunately, no one is open-minded, willing to listen, make compromises or concede that the other might be right. Instead, we resort to brazen personal attacks when contradicted, perpetuating an endless circus of egos with circumscribed thinking and clouded vision, and leaving no room for arguing on merit, let alone taking concrete steps towards development on any front.

Personal attacks are of no interest to the state, except, of course, paving way for those seeking power for personal gain — a vision of public service despondently cynical to the core. This trend has proved disastrous, for it not only diverts attention from the bigger picture but also strips us of any prospect of progress.

Speech has a significant impact on a state and its society, determining its success or failure. An effort to confine speech limits intellectual freedom and concomitantly results in a botched, stultified economic system. The present government was initially very fond of free speech, but the tide quite turned

after it came to power, perhaps due to the anxiety that speech which does not favour them might reveal truths endeavoured to be kept suppressed.

Nevertheless, there is a thin line between what is considered free speech and unmannerly, abusive speech — and ample tutelage is needed to understand the difference. Criticism and disagreement are no doubt crucial as legitimate concerns should pass untrammelled, but the manner in which we do so must be within an atmosphere of unconditional respect and tolerance.

In the midst of confusion and self-interest, we have forgotten these basic principles. It was hoped that the prevailing atmosphere would eventually change. However, despite many promises of change, things have become worse; the word "change" becoming the most abused word of the decade, now virtually synonymous with empty promises and duplicity. If this persists, the public's confidence will plummet — beyond repair.

This has already led to a break-

down of civil discourse that has shredded our social fabric by inciting impressionable spectators to adopt the same mannerisms. Young minds who aspire to be leaders of tomorrow witness the very same stream of gruesome verbal (even physical) brawls on television. What values this inculcates in them is a no-brainer. Yet history offers us many lessons from leaders who should instead serve as inspirations for us today, leaders such as Jinnah.

If we are hell-bent on pointing fingers, let us start with the man in the mirror. Let's remind ourselves of basic courtesies like politeness, respect and forbearance — not only for our own sake but for the next generation. We cannot hope for this nation to prosper if the majority of its politicians, if not all, are devoid of such virtues. Sometimes, the answer may be as simple as learning to listen than to speak, to hold back than to fume, and to appreciate than to humiliate.

By arrangement with Dawn

Not 'just words': How to counter hate speech



Insiyah Vahanvaty

The Cambridge Dictionary defines hate speech as "public speech that expresses hate or encourages violence towards a person or group based on something such as race, religion, sex or sexual orientation". In its mildest form, hate speech seeks to cause discomfort and unease; while its ugliest form seeks to incite violence by instigating others and allowing them the space to turn rhetoric into action.

Individuals who indulge in hate speech often counter objections to their words by raising the provision of free speech, which, by definition, allows them "the right to express one's opinions without censorship, restraint or legal penalty". The argument then, that hate speech cannot be penalised is therefore a common one. In certain liberal democracies, such as the United States of America, this

argument does hold up legally. Hate speech is not a punishable offence, and is protected under the First Amendment. The Indian Penal Code, however, treats hateful messaging differently. While the Indian Constitution provides every individual freedom of expression, Article 19 stipulates that is subject to "reasonable restrictions" for preserving inter alia "public order, decency or morality".

In addition, Section 153A of the Indian Penal Code says, inter alia:

"Whoever (a) by words, either spoken or written, or by signs or by visible representations or otherwise, promotes or attempts to promote, on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, caste or community or any other ground whatsoever, disharmony or feelings of enmity, hatred or ill-will between different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities, or (b) commits any act which is prejudicial to the maintenance of harmony between different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities, and which disturbs or is likely to disturb the public tranquillity, ... shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both."

However, what we are seeing lately is that despite these laws and safeguards, there have been many recent instances of hateful messaging, many of which have been made by political aspirants who seek to indulge in divisive politics. The peril of hate speech is that they are not "just words," as argued by those who seek to legitimise discourse that fuels animosity between communities who have religious differences. When a minister raised the slogan "Desh ke gaddaro ko goli maaro s**** ko," in an election rally in New Delhi on January 27, it was followed very literally by a teenaged youth less than a week later, who opened fire on a group of protesters at Jamia Millia Islamia, injuring one student. The fact that the politician was allowed to raise the slogan in the first place leads one to wonder if there was no threat perceived by the authorities appointed to police hateful messaging in permitting political aspirants to encourage fel-

A democracy needs to tread the thin line between freedom and oppression. Freedoms enjoyed by one cannot be translated into oppression suffered by another. This principle cements the line between free speech and hate speech.

low citizens to shoot at those they consider "traitors".

That the close and dangerous link between hate speech and violence is well understood and documented is made evident by the fact that not only the Constitution and the Indian Penal Code have made provisions to keep it under check, but also so has the Code of Criminal Procedure. In recent times, however, the courts have provided contradictory views regarding the violation that hate speech is. In 2013, the Supreme Court issued a notice to the Central government directing them to frame guidelines that would ensure the control of hate speech delivered by politicians. This notice was also issued to the Election Commission of India. However, in 2014, when a PIL was filed asking the Supreme Court to direct the Election Commission to curb hateful

speeches made by politicians, it was dismissed on the grounds that the fundamental right of people to express themselves cannot be curbed.

In contrast, the social media has taken up a slightly more responsive role in the censoring of hate speech. Despite an enormous room for improvement, there are policies in place. Hate propaganda reported by users on Facebook is reviewed, and if found to be inflammatory, taken down within 24 hours. Twitter takes down hateful content and issues warnings to accounts that violate their "Hateful Conduct Policy", suspending accounts that are repeat offenders. Following the horrifying lynchings that took place in India a couple of years ago, wherein innocents were killed on suspicion of being child kidnappers, WhatsApp placed a restriction on the number of times a piece of content can be forwarded. Although there is still a long way to go, there does appear to be an attempt to reduce the visibility of hateful content on these platforms.

As an ordinary citizen, you may recognise your limitations in controlling hate speech itself, but you might seize the opportunity of counter speech as a direct response to hate speech. This is a powerful tool which can be used in a multitude of ways.

If it's on the social media, you might choose to engage with the speaker and battle his/her hateful messaging by putting forward a contrary message. The #Iamhere campaign, a counter narrative to hateful messaging, which was started in Sweden, spread quickly to other parts of the world because of its simplicity of function. Admins of the group routinely post articles that contain hate propaganda onto their page, encouraging members to counter speak with the hashtag #Jagärhär (which means "I am here"). This drives up the counter posts, effectively drowning out the hateful content. A few weeks ago, at New Delhi's Shaheen Bagh protest site, a young man fired into the air in an attempt to register his dissent towards the protesters. The next day, a group of young citizens decided to counter speak by launching a campaign called GoliNahiPhool (Flowers, not Bullets) and showered the protesting women with flower petals in a demonstration of peace and solidarity.

Another method young Indian counter-speakers have embraced is through the creation of art — whether music, poetry, paintings or street art. From Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Vande Mataram* to Faiz Ahmad Faiz's beautiful yet defiant poem *Hum Dekhenge*, strong resistance art has been known to possess

the power to move people and to unite them — the ultimate goal of any counter speech.

Lastly, you might choose to reclaim words that are used as slurs against communities, minorities or any other group. An example of this is the way the *Slutwalk* campaign, a global campaign calling for the end of rape culture and slut shaming chose to reclaim the offensive word and rebrand it, rejecting the idea that women should experience shame over their sexualities, sexual preferences and choice of clothing.

A democracy always needs to tread the thin line between freedom and oppression. The freedoms enjoyed by one cannot be translated into oppression suffered by another. This is the very principle that cements the line between freedom of speech and hate speech. In times of turmoil, then, it falls upon us, ordinary men and women, to self-police and counter speak when faced with an objectionable idea or piece of content. Because when it is the best of times, and the worst of times, it is always the ordinary citizen who takes up the torch and leads the way.

Insiyah Vahanvaty is a writer and editor. She also runs GoondaRaj, a social justice initiative and podcast that aims at countering hate and mob violence.

Trump gloats about beating Dems, but is he scared of Crazy Bernie Sanders?



Freddy Gray

Democrats almost all agree that Donald Trump is ruining America and must be removed from the White House in November. The trouble is, nobody is sure who can or should do that. Democratic or Democrat-leaning voters talk nervously about the various candidates using their first names, as if trying to pick a love match in an episode of *Blind Date*. Should it be Bernie? Or Pete? Or Amy? Or Liz? Or Joe?

New Hampshire isn't meant to be like that. "Live free or die" is the state's motto. New Hampshireers are famously independent: they know their minds, at least that's what everyone says. But in the Democratic primary this week, they all seemed indecisive. Outside one polling booth, a woman admitted she had decided to vote for Amy Klobuchar using the "eeny, meeny, miny, moe" method.

The results of Tuesday's primary reflected this ambivalence. Bernie Sanders won, but not by much. Peter Paul Montgomery Buttigieg, to give him his extraordinary full name, came close second. Klobuchar, whose luck was clearly in, surprised almost everyone by coming third. The

two big losers were two former hot favourites: ex-vice president Joe Biden and senator Elizabeth Warren. The early polls got it badly wrong, again.

In the New Hampshire primary four years ago, Bernie destroyed Hillary Clinton with 60 per cent of the vote. This year, in an admittedly more crowded field, he only won by just over 1 per cent. He trails Buttigieg in the overall Democratic delegate count — thanks to the quirks of the primary system and the shambles of the Iowa caucuses last week.

Still, Bernie won, and he and his team were understandably keen to emphasise their achievement. He's blown away the threat Warren was meant to pose for him on his left: she only got 9 per cent.

"This victory here is the beginning of the end for Donald Trump," said Bernie in his winner's speech. His fans roared. "Bernie beats Trump!" they chanted.

Over in Trumpworld, Brad Parscale, the Trump 2020 campaign manager, fired out a delightfully ungracious statement: "No matter which Democrat emerges from this dumpster fire of a primary process, we know the contrast will be President Trump's record of accomplishment and optimistic view of the future versus Democrats and their socialist, job-killing agenda."

Sanders' campaign, while undoubtedly powerful, lacks its old vim. He has masses of volunteers, young people still love him, and cool rock stars play at his rallies. But the Bernie of 2020 has lost some of the populist edge he had.

Who says democracy isn't beautiful? Trump chipped in, too. "A lot of Democrat dropouts tonight, very low political IQ," he tweeted, as news broke that the minnows Andrew Yang and Michael Bennet had pulled out of the race. "Bootedgedge (Buttigieg) is doing pretty well tonight," he added later. "Giving Crazy Bernie a run for his money. Very interesting!"

What's arguably more interesting is that Trump seems to think that part of his role as President is to give a running commentary on the state of the Opposition. But listen carefully to the Trumpian gloating and you detect a note of anxiety about Crazy Bernie.

Sanders has always had high "likability" ratings because he seems to be a man of firm principles, even if those principles are too left-wing for many Americans. In a recently leaked tape of Trump in conversation with donors at a private dinner, he conceded that, in 2016, he worried Hillary Clinton was going to pick Sanders as her running mate. Trump understands that Bernie is "a big trade guy". He appreciates that the key to his electoral success has been his

appeal to workers who are angry about globalisation.

Trump would surely rather face married gay man Buttigieg, or "Wall Street Pete" as Bernie fans call him. Buttigieg is a bit like Emmanuel Macron. His technocratic centrism somehow wins votes, but it jars with the times. Worse, his vocabulary seems to have been generated by some marketing jargon algorithm. Trump could have a lot of fun at his expense, without resorting to naked homophobia.

Klobuchar, who likes swearing and talking about her father's alcoholism, is now emerging as the elite's alternative. But her success feels freakish, since she has benefited not just from random votes but from the spectacular implosion of Biden.

For a long time, pollsters have said that Biden could beat Sanders and then Trump because, despite his long career in Washington, he connects with blue-collar voters. That now seems fantasy. In fact, in three presidential runs, spanning 32 years, Biden has never finished above fourth in any caucus or primary. He's still supposed to do well in South Carolina on February 29 because of his much-touted appeal among black voters, but that might also be somewhat mythical — an advantage that evaporates as the vote approaches. It was sad to see Biden pretending to engage with people at his event in the gym of a Greek Orthodox Cathedral on Monday night. After he spoke, his volunteers turned up very loud music while he gladdened his way through the

small crowd. Perhaps it was a trick to make sure nobody could record Biden saying something inappropriate, as is his wont.

Even Sanders' campaign, while undoubtedly powerful, lacks its old vim. He has masses of volunteers, young people still love him, and cool rock stars play at his rallies. But the Bernie of 2020 has lost some of the populist edge he had four years ago. He also looks tired: watching him speak to volunteers behind a supermarket in Hudson, rural New Hampshire, I thought he might pass out. Bernie, 78, has only recently recovered from a heart attack, and running for President of the United States is about the most exhausting task any human being can undertake. Can he really last?

His politics still has a retro appeal, and his campaign is having some success in targeting black voters and Hispanics. But Sanders may find that the lower-middle-class voters he attracted last time have now gravitated towards the man in the White House. On Tuesday night, the Sanders fans sang: "We are unstoppable!"

But Trump supporters feel the same way. The night before, Trump packed out the SNHU arena in Manchester with a crowd of 17,000 — a conspicuous display of support intended to alarm the Democrats. As they left the event, his fans all hailed their hero. "It was wonderful. He always is," said one attendee. "Four more years!" Unlike Democratic voters, these people know what they want.

By arrangement with the Spectator

In the future, viruses may well be hailed as saviours, not scourges



Zarrar Khuhro

Viruses get a bad rap. Admittedly, much of that is deserved, what with the novel coronavirus (or COVID-19 if you prefer) which has much of China in a lockdown and the rest of the world in a panic. Highly infectious and showing no real signs of subsiding, this latest viral variant, according to the US Centres for Disease Control, will "probably be with us beyond this year". On a larger scale, it's not as bad as it is being made out to be as its fellow viruses (I'm thinking of smallpox) have in the not-so-distant past devastated entire civilisations.

But amidst all the panic and apocalyptic fear-mongering, we forget the debt that we owe viruses. After all, without these strange, mysterious entities (they can't exactly be classified as life forms) you and I would not be you and I, or at least not in any currently recognisable form. Because viruses, along with making us sick and occasionally killing us, have helped us evolve.

Over 65 million years ago a tiny shrew-like creature — an egg layer according to scientists — was infected by a particularly sneaky retrovirus that didn't just make its way into the host's genome but managed to get into its sperm or egg cells, ensuring that the mutation it caused would be passed on to every subsequent generation. Countless generations later, this infection led to the development of the placenta in this creature and others similarly infected, thus allowing for the development of a fetus inside the mother's body.

Without this ancient chance encounter humans may well have been egg layers. This sort of viral "tough love" has been a constant feature of our evolution, forcing us to adapt or die. According to scholar David Enard, "When you have a pandemic or an epidemic at some point in evolution, the population that is targeted by the virus either adapts, or goes extinct."

Indeed, we may have to thank our little viral friends for the existence of life as we know it; while traditional scientific thought has it that viruses appeared fairly late in the evolutionary timeline, after the development of cells, the discovery in 2014 of a giant frozen virus in Siberia, dubbed the Pithovirus, is causing a rethink.

But the origin of viruses, and, indeed, viruses themselves, remain a mystery. Along with the Pithovirus, other giant viruses have also been discovered such as the

Megavirus which contains 1,120 genes (the HIV virus only has nine) leading us to believe that these may be an entirely new "domain" of life. Essentially, the viral "chicken-egg" may have come before the cellular "egg".

We know that viruses are gene stealers, acquiring and transplanting genetic material from and to a variety of hosts. Fair enough, but what should we think when we find a virus that has no recognisable genes whatsoever? Say hello to the Yaravirus, which contains genes that no scientist has ever seen before! Which begs the question: exactly where did these genes come from? Did they somehow mutate beyond recognition in the virus itself or are they the legacy of a hitherto undiscovered form of life?

While the eventual answer may be far more mundane, the fact remains that what we do not know about viruses dwarfs what we do know. And some answers may well be found in outer space, as the growing field of astrobiology includes those who believe that viruses may, in fact, have come from outer space. In fact, one controversial claim is that influenza itself was seeded by dust from comets passing near the earth, some perhaps even eons ago.

Others are scouring the heavens and heavenly bodies for extraterrestrial viruses which could, if discovered, provide proof of life on other planets.

Meanwhile, back on earth we are busy harnessing the strange abilities of viruses for our own ends. Given that these sneaky little packages of genetic material are very good at unlocking cells to deliver their payload, scientists are aiming to create treatments for diseases like Huntington's, which is caused by an error in the genetic code, by using redesigned viruses to deliver a "corrective" dose exactly where it is required.

In practice, this is even cooler than it sounds: a young girl called Emma, who suffered from leukemia, was treated by having her blood cells "infected" by a specially modified virus of the same family as the HIV virus (yes, that's right) and then re-injected into her bloodstream. Her cancer went into remission. Less spectacular, yet no less promising, is the research being done on Bacteriophage viruses, which infect and destroy specific bacteria, and the day perhaps isn't far that viruses, long reviled as scourges, may well be hailed as saviours.

By arrangement with Dawn

Creation is nothing but a manifestation of God



Sadguru Rameshji

*Sab jag ishwar roop hai, bhalo buru nahi koyi
Jaki jaisi bhavana, taiso hi phal hoyi*

The formless divine being has taken all possible forms in this universe. Hence, there is nothing that is good/bad, right/wrong — because for anything to be good/bad or right/wrong, they have to be different from each other, which in reality is not so, as everything is sourced from one origin only.

To establish in this state of oneness, we can start perceiving and attributing everything as manifestation of the supreme divinity. For example, when we are sitting on a sofa/chair, we must feel that we are sitting on the lap of the divine being. Similarly, when

we are lying down on our bed, we can feel that we are prostrating at his feet. Imagine for that 7-8 hours that we sleep, we are at God's feet. Slowly, make this your habit with everything around you and eventually, you won't even have to make efforts to imagine this — as it would be your default view towards everything in this world.

The second aspect of the couplet is that whatever feelings/emotions we emanate towards others, similar emotions come back to us. This is because since everything is that one alone, it becomes a reflection for everything else which it has manifested and hence whatever emotions we emanate, they reflect back on us. If we emanate love for others we will get back love and if we emanate hatred towards others, then others will hate us.

Lord Krishna has also stated the same thing in the Bhagavad Gita that: "With whatever feeling one worships me, I worship him back with the same feeling."

Sometimes the experience has been



such that we have loved somebody but the other person has not reciprocated with the same kind of love. In fact, we would have experienced the opposite of it and received hatred against love.

Such things happen because knowingly or unknowingly in the past (including the past birth) we would have emanated hatred against that person and the other person is exhausting its own hatred now, even though we have started loving the person now, in the present.

The emotions of love which are now being emanated will not go waste and the same will be returned to us in the future, in all probability, when we need it most. So, it is extremely advisable that we emanate only good feelings/emotions towards others (irrespective of what the other's feelings are for us).

Emanating good and positive emotions towards others is a profitable proposition for us as they are freely available within us and we neither have to earn them nor buy them from outside nor are required to pay any

thing for emanating them.

Profit 1: We will not get upset when others hate us as we would know that what we are getting is what we gave in the past.

Profit 2: We will not be adding any more negative/bad emotions to the already existing ones and would not get caught in the cobweb of negative emotions.

Profit 3: When the other person's negative feelings get exhausted, the good feelings that we have deposited over time, will come back to us — hopefully, with due interest!

So, irrespective of what others feel for us, we should continue to feel good for them, as we are here to make profits and not losses. Emanating good and positive emotions for others is an investment for the future. This investment is guaranteed to give high returns provided we have faith and patience.

Sadguru Rameshji is a modern age spiritual guru and the force behind Poorna Ananda, a Hyderabad-based centre for spiritual evolution and joyful living. He can be contacted at www.poornaananda.org

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	41,055.69	-0.49
Nifty 50	12,045.80	-0.56
S&P 500*	3,380.16	0.18
Dollar (₹)	71.33	-0.11
Pound Sterling (₹)	92.92	0.00
Euro (₹)	77.45	-0.07
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	40,809	170 -0.41
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	57.32	0.001
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.387	0.018
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.588	0.001

* As of 9:30 pm IST

RBI gets ₹1.94L cr bids for maiden LTRO auction

The RBI kicked off the maiden long-term reverse repo operation (LTRO) by conducting a three-year issue worth Rs 25,000 crore, for which it received bids of more than Rs 1.94 lakh crore. Deploying an out-of-the-box tool to ensure permanent and deeper liquidity in the system, which hovers over Rs 2.5 lakh crore now, the RBI had on Feb. 6 announced Rs 1 lakh crore of long-term reverse repo operations.

Godrej buys 27-acre rail land in Delhi



Godrej Properties said it has acquired nearly 27 acre land parcel in the national capital for Rs 1,359 crore to develop a luxury housing project. The land parcel, at Ashok Vihar, belonged to the Rail Land Development Authority. The payment for this land will be made in instalments over several years as stipulated in the tender documents. The company will develop a luxury housing project on this 26.58 acre land parcel.

Mistry moves SC; says deserved more relief

Less than a month after the Supreme Court stayed an order reinstating him as Tata Sons chairman, Cyrus Mistry has moved the apex court seeking removal of many anomalies in the NCLAT order, saying his family deserved more relief from the tribunal. Mistry has filed a cross appeal in the court. In the petition, Mistry has described the group's relationship with Tatas as "a quasi-partnership relationship."

Virus fallout: Beijing autoshow postponed

Organisers of China's biggest car show announced the event was the latest to be postponed due to the outbreak of the deadly coronavirus. The Beijing autoshow, which is held every two years, attracted 820,000 people in 2018 from 14 different countries and regions. This year's event was due to take place between April 21 and 30. Organisers said the event would be cancelled to "do a good job of epidemic prevention."

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Sebi circular to prevent Karvy-like incidents soon

ASHWIN J PUNNEN
MUMBAI, FEB. 17

Securities and Exchange Board of India chairman Ajay Tyagi on Monday said the markets watchdog will soon come out with a circular to prevent Karvy-like incidents in which the broking firm had allegedly misused clients' securities, and asserted that whatever action required will be taken.

"We will just wait and see," he said, referring to the dues to be paid by Karvy Broking Services Ltd (KSBL).

As of February 14, Tyagi said the total dues of KSBL stood at

Rs 1,189 crore. "Securities held by banks are Rs 511 crore, and the banks have no funds. The total shortfall in securities is Rs 183 crore and funds is Rs 495 crore. So, the shortfall is Rs 678 crore," he noted.

In November, the regulator barred KSBL from taking new brokerage clients after it was found that the brokerage firm had allegedly misused clients' securities to the tune of more than Rs 2,000 crore.

According to Tyagi, the NSE is in correspondence with Karvy and has also served it a notice.

"I have been told that Karvy has informed that they are in

the process of selling a stake in one of their companies where

agreed upon... They are claiming that

they will clear all outstanding amount by end of

March. The amount involved in

selling that subsidiary is good

enough to take care of the fund

requirements for clients and banks. We will

just wait and see," Tyagi said.

"First priority will be to return the funds and securities

of investors. Whatever else needs to be done will be done,"

he added. He said on Karvy's dispute

with lenders, the latter have recourse to

proceed in the court of law and that Sebi

really examine whether Karvy is

repaying banks. Tyagi was speaking

to the media after the Sebi board meeting. The

meeting cleared the norms for investment advisers, propos-

ing client level segregation. The new rule will replace the

old system in which the same client could either be on the

advisory side or the distribu-

tion side. The regulator also cleared the

norms for regulatory sandbox. It will

allow live testing of new financial products or

services in a controlled environment. The

exchanges and market infrastructure institutes have

already implemented innovative

sandbox. Sebi also said that there will

be enhanced eligibility criteria for

registration as investment adviser, including enhanced net

worth and qualification requirement.

Previously, corporate advisers, including individuals who

were conducting their business through corporate structures like LLPs, could distribute products and render advisory services to the same client; provided the two services were separated from each other.

Tyagi, whose term ends later this month, said the regulator is actively looking at recategorisation of mid-cap and small-cap stocks for the mutual funds.

To ensure uniformity, Sebi in 2017 issued a list defining large-cap, mid-cap and small-cap companies. The list is being prepared once in six months by Amfi in consultation with Sebi and stock exchanges.

■ Says economy slowed rapidly over 2 years

Moody's cuts 2020 growth to 5.4%

FC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, FEB. 17

Global rating agency Moody's Investors Service, on Monday, cut India's growth forecast to 5.4 per cent for 2020 from 6.6 per cent projected earlier on slower than expected economic recovery.

Moody's growth projections are based on calendar year and as per its estimates, India's GDP grew 5 per cent in 2019.

Moody's peer Fitch Ratings had last month cut the country's GDP growth forecast for 2019-20 fiscal year to 4.6 per cent and said growth would recover to 5.6 per cent in FY21.

In its update on Global Macro Outlook, Moody's said India's economy has decelerated rapidly over the last two years but it expects economic recovery to begin in the current quarter.

"We expect any recovery to be slower than we had previously expected. Accordingly, we have revised our growth forecasts to 5.4 per cent for 2020 and 5.8 per cent for 2021, down from our previous



projections of 6.6 per cent and 6.7 per cent, respectively," Moody's said.

With a weak economy and depressed credit growth reinforcing each other, Moody's said, "It is difficult to envision a quick turnaround of either, even if economic deceleration may have tapered."

On the fiscal front, it also said that the Union Budget 2020 did not contain a significant stimulus to address the demand slump. "As similar policies in other countries have shown, tax cuts are unlikely to translate into higher consumer and business spending when risk aver-

sion is high," it said.

Expecting an additional easing by the central bank, Moody's said, "If the recent rise in CPI inflation, mainly as a result of higher food prices, is seen to have second-round effects, this would make it more challenging for the central bank to cut interest rates further."

On global growth, Moody's said the coronavirus outbreak has diminished optimism about the prospects of an incipient stabilisation of global growth this year. It expects G-20 economies to grow 2.4 per cent in 2020, a softer rate than last year.

AGR dues mopup could cut FY20 fiscal deficit to 3.5%

■ Bharti, Tata make part payment, Voda Idea to pay

New Delhi, Feb. 17:

Finding no leeway, telecom companies have started the process of paying up the mammoth Rs 1.47 lakh crore adjusted gross revenue (AGR) and spectrum dues to the government on Monday, with analysts predicting that the huge revenue collection will contain the country's fiscal deficit to 3.5 per cent this fiscal against the Centre's estimate of 3.8 per cent of the GDP.

However, with doubts still persisting about the debt-laden telcos' ability to cough up the entire money by the Supreme Court-set deadline of March 16, the Reserve Bank of India said it is "very closely monitoring" the fallout of the crisis on banks.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the telecom department has been actively engaging with telecom companies over the issue of statutory dues and she would wait to hear its decision. "I will wait to hear from the department or on behalf of the government from the department, so that we know what is the position that the department wants to

take on the matter," she said.

Vodafone Idea, whose capacity and willingness to pay up was in doubt, however, said it would immediately pay Rs 2,500 crore to the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) and another Rs 1,000 crore before the end of the week. Vodafone owes about Rs 53,000 crore to the government in dues, interest and penalties.

Bharti Airtel said it paid Rs 10,000 crore to the telecom department towards statutory dues on Monday and will pay the balance after a self-assessment exercise. "The amount of Rs 10,000 crore has been paid on behalf of Bharti Airtel, Bharti Hexacom, and Telenor," the Sunil Mittal-led company said.

As much as Rs 9,500 crore has been paid on behalf of Bharti Airtel (including Telenor India which merged with the company), and another Rs 500 crore for Bharti Hexacom, it said. As per the government's assessment, Airtel owes nearly Rs 35,586 crore in statutory dues.

Tata Group firm TTSL said it paid Rs 2,197 crore to the government to set-



tle all its outstanding AGR dues. "Tata Teleservices Ltd and Tata Teleservices (Maharashtra) Ltd have made a payment of Rs 2,197 crore to the Department of Telecommunications towards license fee and spectrum usage charges," it said.

The government last week ordered mobile carriers to immediately pay the entire dues after the Supreme Court threatened the companies and officials with contempt proceedings for failing to implement its earlier ruling.

In a note SBI Research said the fiscal arithmetic will change significantly after March 16, the date by which telecom companies have to pay their AGR

dues. Of the total Rs 1.47 lakh crore payable by the telcos to the DoT, Rs 92,600 crore is the unpaid licence fee and the rest Rs 55,504 crore is the charges for spectrum usage. "If we assume that the government is able to collect Rs 1.20 lakh crore through AGR dues, the fiscal deficit for FY20 will reduce to 3.5 per cent of GDP," the note said. "However, this will put a question on the amount that the government can raise next year from the telecom sector out of Rs 1.33 lakh crore budgeted, which in turn can impair the fiscal arithmetic of FY21," SBI Research pointed out.

In an interview, RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said the central bank is "very closely monitoring" the issue but so far no red flags have been raised.

"With regard to the impact on the banking sector, we are very closely monitoring it. It all depends on how the companies concerned are able to make the payments and when they are able to make the payments. We are monitoring it," he said.

—Agencies

Govt may stop sops for services exports

FC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, FEB. 17

The government is mulling discontinuation of export incentives under a particular scheme to the services sector. The government move came after a review which showed that the incentive scheme has not helped India increase shipments positively.

"So, I am proposing that from the earliest opportunity, we should discontinue this Service Exports from India Scheme (SEIS) in its current form. It has not helped us to increase our exports positively. The industry has to get out of the mindset of subsidies as they are detrimental to India's long-term interests,"

commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal told the media at an event here. Generally, the foreign trade policy provides tax incentives under the SEIS scheme to several services industries. Depending on the nature of services, the government gives duty credit scrips, or certificates. The scheme offers reward at 5 per cent or 7 per cent of net foreign exchange earned.

Citing an example, the minister, however, said, "We now give subsidies on services exports. I have gone through the list in great details, barely 2,200 companies take that subsidy. Some of them are such large names, making thousands of crores of rupees of profit."

JSW buys GMR Energy's thermal plant in Kamalanga for ₹5,320 cr

New Delhi, Feb. 17: Billionaire Sajjan Jindal-led JSW Energy on Monday said it will buy GMR Energy Ltd's 1,050 MW thermal power plant in Odisha for Rs 5,321 crore.

JSW Energy signed a share purchase agreement to acquire 100 per cent of GMR Kamalanga Energy Ltd, which owns and operates a 1,050 MW (3x350 MW) thermal power plant in Odisha, for Rs 5,321 crore (subject to working capital and other adjustments), the company said in a statement.

"Post-acquisition, the total installed power generation capacity of the company will increase to 5,609 MW," it said.

The buyout will expand JSW Energy's presence in the eastern region of the country and further diversify its fuel mix and offtake arrangements.

The transaction is subject to customary regulatory and other approvals for its completion.

Of the Rs 5,321-crore



enterprise value of GKEL, JSW Energy will pay the promoters Rs 755 crore in upfront cash and another Rs 615 crore on achieving different milestones. The balance Rs 3,951 crore is on account of GKEL's debt that JSW Energy is taking over.

GMR Kamalanga Energy Ltd (GKEL), a subsidiary of GMR Energy, owns and operates three units of 350 MW at Dhenkanal in Odisha.

JSW Energy, as part of its strategy for expansion and consolidation in the power sector, has been scouting for strategic assets.

"Consequent to the acqui-

sition, GKEL will be a 100 per cent subsidiary of JSW Energy," it said.

The deal is subject to the approval of the Competition Commission of India (CCI) and GKEL lenders. Also, Haryana, which buys power from Kamalanga, has to approve of the power purchase agreement.

GKEL had a revenue of Rs 2,195 crore in FY2019.

It sells 263 MW of electricity generated to Odisha for Rs 3.11 per unit and another 263 MW to Bihar at Rs 3.39 a unit. To Haryana, it sells 334 MW at Rs 2.89 per unit.

—PTI

JSW given immunity from BPSL misdeeds

New Delhi, Feb. 17:

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal on Monday gave JSW Steel Ltd immunity from all criminal investigations after its takeover of Bhushan Power & Steel Ltd, whose assets were sought to be attached by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) over alleged bungling by the former management.

A two-member NCLAT bench headed by Justice S J Mukhopadhyaya also declared attachment of assets of insolvent Bhushan Power & Steel (BPSL) by the ED as "illegal and without jurisdiction".

JSW Steel had moved the NCLAT seeking to extinguish all present and future liabilities on account of criminal investigations against BPSL, contending that an absence of any such protection would jeopardise the feasibility and viability of its resolution plan.

JSW Steel had made the highest bid of Rs 19,700 crore for BPSL.

While the government had in December amended the insolvency law to ring-fence a corporate debtor; after its takeover in a bankruptcy auction, from criminal proceedings arising from offences committed by the previous management, the ED argued that immunity is not retrospective in nature and does not cover companies whose resolution plan was approved prior to the law.

The bench rejected ED's contention that recent amendments in the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code by the government by inserting section 32A would not apply to JSW retrospectively and said the ordinance was clarificatory in nature and it was "ex facie evident" that it must be made applicable retroactively. "We hold that the assets of the corporate debtor (BPSL) of which JSW Steel Ltd is a 'Successful Resolution Applicant' is immune from attachment by the Directorate of Enforcement," the NCLAT said.

Oyo reports 5-fold rise in losses

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 17

Hospitality chain Oyo Hotels and Homes' consolidated losses shot up five times in FY19 to \$335 million in FY19, mainly due to its global expansion, including into China. But its global revenues too grew multi-fold in the fiscal.

Consolidated losses grew 538 per cent from \$52 million in FY18 to \$335 million in FY19. As a percentage of the consolidated revenues, the losses moved up from 25 per cent to 35 per cent in a year. According to Oyo, losses grew on the back of international expansion, especially because Chinese expansion happened at the fiscal end.

Since China and other international markets were in development and investment mode, they contributed to 75 per cent, or \$252 million, of the losses for FY19.

However, the net loss percentage came down in the Indian market from 24 per cent to 14 per cent of the revenue, though it went up in absolute terms. In FY19, net loss in the Indian market stood at \$84.56 million against \$ 50.64 million.

With the market expansion, the consolidated revenues too grew four-fold from \$211 million to \$951 million in FY19. Indian revenues grew 186 per cent from \$211 million to \$604 million in one year.

While, India contributed to nearly 63.5 per cent of the consolidated revenue, nearly 36.5 per cent, or \$348 million, was contributed by Oyo's operations outside India, specially China.

PSU stocks getting mauled on bourses

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, FEB. 17

Stocks of public sector undertakings (PSUs) are seeing huge value destruction in 2020, with market participants shorting these stocks in the futures and options segment, holding a view that the government may further bring down its stake in these companies.

However, the negative sentiment towards government-owned companies has become more obvious in the last one month, with quarterly performance of some of the erstwhile blue

chips deteriorating further. Oil PSUs were also trending down because of crude oil prices falling to around \$56-57 a barrel.

On Monday shares of ONGC fell below Rs 100 for the first time and touched a low of 98.85 on the BSE before closing at Rs 99.95, a fall by 3.20 per cent. Another blue-chip, Coal India, fell to a new low of Rs 166.85 and finally closed 3.92 per cent down at Rs 167.85. The market cap of these two erstwhile energy giants are now just above Rs 1 lakh crore compared to May 16, 2014 when ONGC



scaled its highest-ever market capitalisation of Rs 3.56 lakh crore and Coal India enjoyed market capitalisation of Rs 2.51 lakh crore in August 2011.

Another erstwhile constituent of the Sensex, BHEL, dropped 3.87 per cent to Rs 34.80 and touched a new all-time low of 34.70.

The market cap of the PSU has now shrunk to Rs 12,117.58 crore.

MTNL, also a Sensex company in its heydays, fell 8.14 per cent to Rs 9.48 and its market capitalisation stood at Rs 597.24 crore as it reported a loss of 1,065.34 crore last week.

The Nifty CPSE Index fell 2.28 per cent, indicating huge negative sentiment in the market towards central public sector undertakings.

Kishore P Ostwal, chairman and managing director, CNI Research, said, "Despite hefty dividend announced by companies

like GAIL (Rs 6.40 per share) and Oil India (Rs 9 per share), stocks are being shorted by traders as they are also traded in the futures and options segment. Government should take all these stocks out of F&O segment. They are falling due to government's policies."

Public sector bank stocks also fell sharply with Nifty PSU Bank index down 2.96 per cent. The top losers included Bank of Baroda (-4.86 per cent), Punjab National Bank (-4.43 per cent) and Bank of India (-3.49 per cent).

SHORT TAKES

Edmund claims New York crown

New York: Britain's Kyle Edmund defeated Italy's Andreas Seppi in straight sets to clinch the ATP Tour's New York Open crown on Sunday. Edmund, whose only previous singles title came at the European Open at Antwerp in 2018, cruised to a 7-5, 6-1 victory at the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Uniondale, Long Island. The eighth-seeded 25-year-old right-hander wrapped up victory in 1hr 21min, converting the second of three match points. World number 62 Edmund overwhelmed Seppi with a vastly superior service game, peppering his Italian opponent with 11 aces to Seppi's four with no double faults. Edmund also put Seppi's erratic serve under pressure, carving out seven break points to take a grip on the match. — AFP

Sania returns to action in Dubai

Dubai: Indian tennis star Sania Mirza will return to action at the ongoing Dubai Open on Wednesday after recovering from a calf injury which had cut short her campaign at the Australia Open in January. Sania will Indian will pair up with her French partner Caroline Garcia and they face Russia's Alla Kudryavtseva and Slovenia's Katarina Srebotnik in the opening round of the women's doubles event on Wednesday. "Quitting off a grand slam tournament due to an injury is a sad experience. Especially, when you are back into the game after a long break. But thanks to my physio Dr. Faisal Hayat Khan (Burjeel Hospital for Advanced Surgery) for making me fit for the tournament," she said. Returning to the circuit after a two-year break, Sania's first Grand Slam outing after maternity leave had ended with an early exit after she retired mid-way into her women's doubles first-round match due to a right calf injury. In a dream comeback after the break, Sania and her Ukrainian partner Nadiia Kichenok had claimed the doubles title at the Hobart International. — PTI

Williams looks to restore fortunes

London: The once dominant Williams Formula One team will rely on its "fighting spirit" to make progress this season after a catastrophic 2019 campaign which yielded just a single point, team deputy Claire Williams said on Monday. Williams — daughter of founder Frank — was speaking as the team unveiled its car for the upcoming season, the FW43, which is an evolution of last term's car. Featuring a significantly revised livery of red, white and blue, Williams claims that "this year marks a fresh start for the team" following the worst campaign in their history. "We have spent time addressing our areas of weakness and have ensured that we have the right people, structures, procedures and resource in place to deliver competitive race cars. The fighting spirit is still very much alive," said Williams. — AFP

MONFILS PIPS FELIX TO WIN 2ND ATP TITLE

Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Gael Monfils won his second ATP title in as many weeks on Sunday in Rotterdam before insisting that he still has a Grand Slam victory in him despite being 33. French third seed Monfils capped off a fortnight of success with a 6-2, 6-4 defeat of Felix Auger-Aliassime, handing the Canadian teenager his fourth loss in four career finals. Monfils has now won his last 10 matches at the Dutch tournament after claiming the 2019 title over Stan Wawrinka. A week ago he lifted the title in Montpellier. Now with 10 career titles under his belt, the world number nine said he still dreams of winning a Masters 1000 title and even, perhaps, a Grand Slam. "Before the season, I wanted to stay in the top 10, maybe try to reach fifth or sixth in the world. I want to try and reach the final in a Masters 1000 and try to win one. The dream is also to win a Slam, that's what I play and train for. Maybe one day I can do that," said Monfils. Monfils has been a runner-up at the Masters level three times — at Paris in 2009 and 2010 and Monte Carlo in 2016. — AFP

KING JAMES RULES

Anthony pulls off a thriller for Team LeBron

Los Angeles, Feb. 17: Kawhi Leonard stole the show on the floor and Hall of Famer Magic Johnson took centre stage in an emotional pre-game ceremony on a night the NBA paid tribute to the late Kobe Bryant.

Chicago's favourite son Anthony Davis sank one of the two free throws to cap a thrilling fourth quarter and lift Team LeBron to a 157-155 win over Team Giannis in Sunday's 2020 NBA All-Star Game.

Leonard finished with 30 points and seven rebounds and was awarded the new Kobe Bryant MVP award. The trophy was named after the former Los Angeles Laker, who perished along with his daughter Gigi and seven others in a horrific helicopter crash three weeks ago.

"I want to thank Kobe for everything he has done for me, all the long talks and workouts. Thank you," said Leonard, who grew up in Riverside, California east of Los Angeles.

Giannis Antetokounmpo finished with 25 points and 11 rebounds to lead Team Giannis who kept the game close right up until the nail-biting finish.

"The guys were taking charges and running back playing defence," said Leonard of the highly competitive All-Star Game which contrasted sharply with Friday's benign Rising Stars game that deteriorated into a slam-dunking contest.

With the score 156-155, and new format dictating that the winner needed to be the first to get to 157



Giannis Antetokounmpo (centre) of Team Giannis looks to pass during the NBA All-Star game against Team LeBron in Chicago on Sunday. Team LeBron won 157-155. — AP

points, Davis went to the line for two shots after being fouled by Team Giannis' Kyle Lowry.

"I told my teammates I was going to go to miss the first one and put more pressure on myself to knock down the second one," said Davis, who grew up in Chicago.

That's exactly what he did to put a perfect ending on the night which began with another Laker icon Johnson making an emotional speech honouring Bryant in front of a crowd of 20,900 at the United Center in Chicago. "We'll never see another basketball player quite

like Kobe," said Johnson, who also paid tribute on Sunday to David Stern, the late NBA commissioner. James made his 16th all-star start breaking a tie with Bryant for the most all-time. Bryant holds the record for most all-star MVP awards with four. The league also hon-

oured Bryant by having Team Giannis wear his No. 24 and Team LeBron wear his basketball-playing daughter's No. 2.

Team LeBron earned \$400,000 in prize money which they donated to the Chicagoland youth charity Chicago Scholars. — AFP



Sergej Milinkovic-Savic (centre) of Lazio celebrates after scoring his side's second goal during the Italian league football match against Inter Milan at Rome's Olympic stadium on Sunday. Lazio won 2-1. — AP

Lazio trample Inter Milan

Milan, Feb. 17: Lazio coach Simone Inzaghi gave warning his side are ready to fight for their first Serie 'A' title since 2000 after moving into second in Serie 'A' on Sunday, just one point off leaders Juventus after a come-from-behind 2-1 win over Inter Milan.

Juventus reclaimed pole position thanks to Paulo Dybala and Juan Cuadrado's goals as the Turin giants rediscovered their winning form 2-0 at home against Brescia.

Inter Milan dropped from top spot to third — three points behind the eight-time reigning champions — after falling to just their second defeat of the season.

"We need to stay humble and focused but I'm sure we will succeed. We have nothing to lose. We know that Juventus and Inter are two great teams," said Inzaghi.

In a fiery clash in the Stadio Olimpico defender Ashley Young broke through just before the break with his first Serie 'A' goal for Inter Milan after his move from

CELTA STRIKE LATE TO PUT BRAKES ON REAL

Madrid, Feb. 17: Real Madrid's winning streak ended when they conceded a late goal to draw 2-2 at home to Celta Vigo and finish the weekend with their lead over Barcelona down to one point.

Real manager Zinedine Zidane was philosophical. "There's nothing to explain, it's just the way things are, it's football. I'm not worried about it, but I'm disappointed, as always when you drop two points at home," he said.

Barcelona beat third place Getafe on Saturday to open a 10-point gap on the chasing pack. Sevilla could have climbed to third on Sunday but were held, 2-2, at home by rock-bottom Espanyol.

Real had won five straight in La Liga to accelerate past Barcelona.

On Sunday they welcomed back Eden Hazard, who had been out since November. Coach Zinedine Zidane also recalled his other 100 million euro player Gareth Bale to complete an all-star attack with Karim Benzema. — AFP

Manchester United. The 34-year-old got his foot to tap-in off a rebound after Thomas Strakosha had cleared from former Lazio player Antonio Candreva. A Stefan de Vrij foul on Ciro Immobile allowed the Serie 'A' top scorer to slot in his 26th goal in 24

Juventus in October. Lazio extended their unbeaten run to 19 games as they target their second Scudetto, with a return to Champions League football on the cards for next season.

RONALDO RESTED

In Turin, Argentine forward Dybala curled in a perfect free kick six minutes before the break, shortly after Brescia's Florian Aye was sent off for two yellow cards in quick succession.

Colombian Cuadrado tapped in the second from close range after a Blaise Matuidi cross with 15 minutes to go, to get back winning after two away defeats.

We did what we had to do," Juventus coach Maurizio Sarri. Cristiano Ronaldo was rested, but veteran defender Giorgio Chiellini returned after a long injury layoff. The champions did not have it all their own way against Brescia, who stay second-from-bottom, seven points from safety after extending their winless run to nine games. — AFP

Marseille overhaul Lille 2-1

Paris, Feb. 17: Marseille hit back from a goal down to score twice in two minutes for a 2-1 win at Lille on Sunday which kept Andre Villas-Boas' side comfortably on course for the Champions League.

The victory gave second-placed Marseille an 11-point lead over Rennes in third spot in French Ligue 1 where champions Paris Saint-Germain still lead the way with a 10-point cushion.

Lille stay fourth but are 12 points behind Marseille in the race for the two automatic qualifying places for next season's Champions League.

"We didn't do much in the first half, but in the second we had a lot of intensity and showed aggressiveness," said Villas-Boas.

He added: "We talked at half-time about what we would do if we got a goal. We played a decent match."

Nigerian international Victor Osimhen gave Lille a 51st-minute lead pouncing onto Jonathan Bamba's pass to beat Marseille goalkeeper Steve Mandanda for his 13th goal of the season, the same number as PSG's Brazilian superstar Neymar.

But Marseille were level in the 67th minute when Reinildo turned a header from Valere Germain into his own goal before Argentine striker Dario Benedetto grabbed the winner two minutes later.

A below-par Marseille could even afford the luxury of a missed penalty just on the hour when Lille keeper Mike Maignan saved from Valentin Rongier.

Victory was the perfect way for Marseille to bounce back from Wednesday's French Cup exit at the hands of Lyon. Lyon's poor league form continued with a 1-1 home draw against Strasbourg at a blustery Groupama Stadium that leaves them languishing in mid-table.

Rudi Garcia's side are 11th on 34 points after a fourth match without a win, one in which the away side struck the post twice late on. — AFP

Scott wins, Tiger stumbles home

Los Angeles, Feb. 17: Adam Scott fired a one-under-par 70 on Sunday to win the Genesis Invitational, and this time the Australian victory at Riviera Country Club is official.

On a day when World No.1 Rory McIlroy fired a two-over-par 73 and tournament host Tiger Woods stumbled to a six-over 77 to finish last, Scott countered two bogeys and a double-bogey with five birdies to build an 11-under total of 273.

He finished two strokes in front of South Korea's Kang Sung and Americans Scott Brown and Matt Kuchar.

Kuchar, who started the day tied for the lead with Scott and McIlroy, carded a one-over-par 72 while Kang closed with a 69 and Brown fired a 68.

Scott hoisted the trophy at Riviera in 2005, but since the rain-soaked event was shortened to 36 holes he wasn't credited with a US PGA Tour victory.

But this "W" goes in the books as the 2013 Masters champion's 14th US tour title. That goes along with 14 international victories — most recently at the Australian PGA Championship in December, where Scott ended a near four-year title drought.

McIlroy's hopes of celebrating his return to world number one with a win were dashed when he surrendered four shots in the space of two holes with a triple-bogey at the par-four fifth, followed by a bogey at the sixth.

● **Adam Scott countered two bogeys and a double-bogey with five birdies and fired a one-under-par 70 to claim victory in the Genesis Invitational at Riviera Country Club.**

● **The tournament host, Tiger Woods, faltered to a six-over 77 to finish last.**

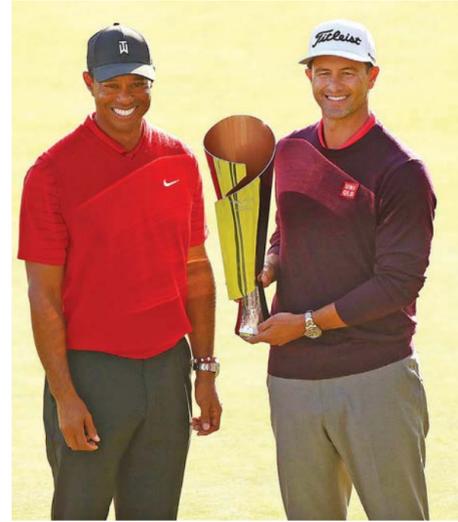
The Northern Ireland star headlined a group of five players sharing fifth place on eight-under 276, where he was joined by Japan's Hideki Matsuyama and Americans Bryson DeChambeau, Max Homa and Joel Dahmen.

Woods's day could hardly have gone worse. Already 15 off the pace to start the day, the 15-time major champion dropped five shots in his last six holes as he stumbled home with a six-over-par 77.

Overall Woods had seven bogeys and a double-bogey with one birdie and an eagle on the way to an 11-over par total of 295 — 68th and last of the 68 players to make the cut.

Woods went into the week gunning for a record-setting 83rd US PGA Tour title, having matched Sam Snead's record of 82 at the Zozo Championship in October.

But Woods came up empty for the 13th time on the course where he played his first PGA Tour event as a 16-year-old. — AFP



Adam Scott (right) poses with tournament host Tiger Woods and the trophy after winning the Genesis Invitational in Pacific Palisades, California, on Sunday. — AFP

Moussa walks off post racial chants

Madrid, Feb. 17: Porto's Mali international striker Moussa Marega walked off the pitch in disgust after being subjected to a torrent of monkey chants in a stormy Portuguese league game at Vitoria Guimaraes on Sunday.

The 28-year-old had scored a 60th-minute winner for Porto against his former club which sparked the home fans to aim even more vitriol at the France-born player which had started as early as the pre-match warm-up.

In the 71st minute, Marega signalled to the bench that he was walking off in protest even though teammates, Porto coach Sergio Conceicao and Vitoria players tried to get him to stay on the pitch.

As he walked off, an angry and upset Marega gave a thumbs-down signal with both gloved hands to the home fans.

He had already been given a yellow card for his goal celebration.

Marega played for Vitoria Guimaraes from 2016-2017 on loan from Porto, scoring 13 goals in 25 games.

Marega later wrote on Instagram after the game, which Porto won 2-1, that his tormentors were "idiots who come to the stadium just to make racist chants."

"And I also thank the referees for not protecting me and for giving me a yellow card because I am defending my skin colour."

"I hope I will never see you again on a football



The tormentors are idiots who come to the stadium just to make racist chants. And I also thank the referees for not protecting me and for giving me a yellow card because I am defending my skin colour.

— **MOUSSA MAREGA** after being subjected to a torrent of monkey chants in the Italian League

field. You are a disgrace," he added.

Conceicao blasted the home fans before posting a photo of his player on social media with the message: "We are all Moussa." "We are completely indignant at what happened. We know the passion that exists at Vitoria and I think that most fans do not recognise themselves in the attitude of other people who insulted Moussa," he added.

Vitoria Guimaraes or the Portuguese football federation were yet to comment on the incident. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

ICA office likely in Bengaluru

Mumbai: The Indian Cricketers Association (ICA) is likely to have its office in Bengaluru due to high rent for office space in Mumbai. The ICA, India's first-ever players' association formed as per recommendations of the Supreme Court-appointed Lodha panel, was on Sunday granted ₹2 crore by the BCCI to kickstart its operations. The players' body was seeking an initial grant of ₹5 crore but got ₹2 crore. The body had been desperately seeking funds ever since its office bearers were elected in October last year. "We are looking to take up space for an office in Bengaluru in the next 10-15 days, as Mumbai will be very expensive, and we won't be able to afford office space here," ICA president Ashok Malhotra said after a meeting on Monday. The ICA is looking at Bengaluru as an option for having its office also because its treasurer Krishnaswamy is based there. — PTI

Prove, pick T20 spot ABD told

Johannesburg: The retired AB de Villiers will be considered for a place in the South African T20 World Cup squad only if he shows good form and proves himself to be the "best man for the job", says the team's head coach Mark Boucher. Soon after taking charge as South Africa's head coach in December last year, Boucher said he may try to persuade a few recent retirees, including de Villiers, to return to the South Africa squad ahead of the T20 World Cup to be held in Australia in October-November. "He's (de Villiers) a discussion in the media and in the public but he is no discussion for me. I have had chats with him and we will probably know pretty soon what's going to happen with him," Boucher said, adding, "Like I said from day one when I took over, if we are going to a World Cup, I would like to have our best players there. If AB is in good form and he is raring to go and he makes himself available for the time we have asked him to be available; if he is the best man for the job, then he must go." — PTI

Aussies brace for frosty reception

Johannesburg: Australian coach Justin Langer and limited-overs captain Aaron Finch said on Monday they were looking forward to playing in front of South African crowds on their first tour since the sandpaper scandal of 2018. Former captain Steve Smith and batsman David Warner, who were both banned for a year for their role in ball-tampering during the third Test in Cape Town, are both in the team that will play three Twenty20 internationals and three one-day internationals against South Africa, starting with the first T20 game at the Wanderers Stadium on Friday. "We love coming to South Africa," said Langer at the team's arrival press conference. "We've got so many good memories for so long. It was obviously a very hard tour last time but the way our guys have moved on, it gave us a great opportunity to reassess where we're at in Australian cricket," he added. — AFP

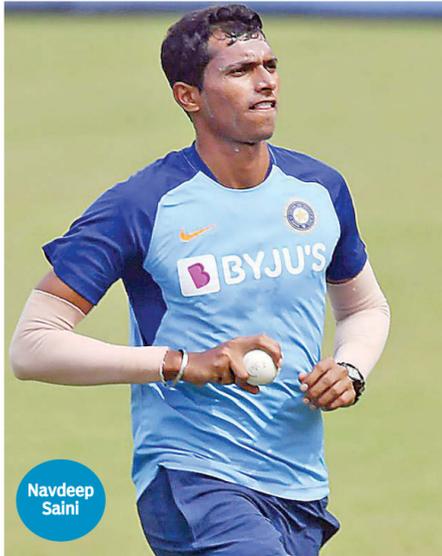
EMBRACE D/N TEST MATCHES, URGES WAUGH

Berlin: Australian legend Steve Waugh has exhorted the modern-day greats to embrace day-night Tests and lauded India for accepting the "challenge" of playing with the pink-ball during their tour Down Under later this year. Waugh said the experience of playing a day-night Test in Australia is unforgettable. "It is great. It is a great opportunity, a great spectacle. One will never forget playing a day-night Test in Australia. It's got a fantastic atmosphere. It is a new challenge and a chance for the greats of this generation to tick that box for them," Waugh said while speaking on the sidelines of the Laureus Awards ceremony. Waugh, who is a member of the Laureus Academy, said day-night Test contests are good for the game. "If you score a hundred or pick five wickets in a day-night Test, it goes down in the annals of history. It's how you look at it either it is a challenge or too hard. I'm sure India will see it as a challenge. It's good for world cricket and I am glad that India have agreed to play," he said. — PTI

SAINI'S SONG

Being in India team life-changing, says speedster

Wellington, Feb. 17: Fast bowler Navdeep Saini said representing India was a life-changing moment for him and he would look to continue his dream of playing at the highest level after getting a maiden Test call-up for the two-match series against New Zealand. The 27-year-old, who has claimed 18 wickets in the limited-over matches he has played so far, was included in India's Test squad for the upcoming two-match series against New Zealand. "I am happy with whatever level I have been able to reach. It's everyone's dream to reach this level. It was my dream as well, which has now been fulfilled. I want to carry this further," Saini told senior pacer Mohammed Shami in a video posted on BCCI.TV. "When I was selected for the Indian team, it was like a dream come true for me. I started playing at a local level, and then I moved on to Ranji. From there, to become a part of Indian national team, it was a life-changing moment for me," he said. Asked how he is helping



Navdeep Saini

the budding cricketers, Saini, who made his India debut during the T20I series against the West Indies last year, said: "I help all the budding cricketers in the academy. I have helped a few kids with cricket equipment, spikes, or financial aid. I have seen how important all of these things are for a young cricketer." The first Test against New Zealand begins here on February 21. — PTI

Shardul relies on positivity, passion

Mumbai, Feb. 17: Leaving the hammering in New Zealand behind, pacer Shardul Thakur on Monday exuded plenty of confidence, asserting that he will learn from his "mistakes" and passionately work towards helping India win the World T20. Shardul gave away plenty of runs in the recent One-day Internationals against the Black Caps and faced criticism for his wayward bowling. He now has his eyes set on the showpiece in Australia later this year. "Certainly I have my eyes on World Cup. The positivity that I bring into the game and the amount of confidence I have, the way I am passionate about the game will help the team to win the World Cup or at least do the job fairly," he told reporters here. Shardul, who has 21 wickets from 15 T20Is, said playing in the IPL that

starts in March end is important. "The IPL is important and the momentum we gain from the IPL will be crucial going forward. There is the Sri Lanka T20s coming up and we are going to Zimbabwe after IPL. Then we are playing Asia Cup going into T20 World Cup," he said. Shardul did not have the best of times in ODIs in New Zealand and he said he would take it as a learning experience. "I will study my mistakes and consider them as learning experiences. It was only my first trip to New Zealand and as compared to the other players, I have not played as many games. "Currently, I am just into that phase where I am gaining experience and going forward, I will try to produce greater contributions," he added. Shardul said he always looks to concede less runs. — PTI

Boult back, Patel too in Test team

Wellington, Feb. 17: Fit-again senior pacer Trent Boult has been named in the 13-member New Zealand squad for the first Test against India starting here on Friday. According to a media release issued by New Zealand Cricket, the 6 feet 8 inch giant pacer Kyle Jamieson, who made his ODI debut against India in the recent series, has also earned his call up in the Test squad, which will have slow left-arm orthodox Ajaz Patel as the only spinner. Boult's comeback is a big boost for the New Zealand side as he missed the entire limited overs leg due to a fractured right hand sustained during the Boxing Day Test against Australia at the MCG. "It's terrific to have Trent back with us and we're looking forward to the energy and experience he adds to the group alongside his obvious class with the ball in hand," head coach and chief selector Gary Stead said. Jamieson, on the other hand, has been included in a pre-series Test squad for the first time. He had replaced injured Lockie Ferguson midway in Australia in December last year. "Kyle will offer us a point of difference with the bounce he could extract on what is traditionally a good surface in Wellington," Stead said. Mumbai-born Patel was chosen over leg-spinner Ish Sodhi because of his consistency. "We're excited to welcome back Ajaz (Patel) who has done a great job for us overseas and has a proven domestic record in New Zealand conditions," the coach said. Batting allrounder Daryl Mitchell is also in the squad. — PTI

THE SQUAD
New Zealand: Kane Williamson (captain), Tom Blundell, Trent Boult, Colin de Grandhomme, Kyle Jamieson, Tom Latham, Daryl Mitchell, Henry Nicholls, Ajaz Patel, Tim Southee, Ross Taylor, Neil Wagner, BJ Watling.

Ish is all praise for attitude of Indians

Wellington, Feb. 17: New Zealand spinner Ish Sodhi is in awe of the "crazy" skills that Indian cricketers possess and what has added to the respect he has for Virat Kohli's side is its willingness to share the knowledge bank with anyone who cares to approach. The 27-year-old Ludhiana-born wrist spinner has been speaking to the likes of Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja and Yuzvendra Chahal, who he considers a friend. "You start off with respect and want to tap into their brains. These are all very helpful guys more than willing to share their experiences," Sodhi said. "Chahal is a great person to tap into. He is completely a different bowler, big hearted. It is great to rub shoulders with these guys and listen to their experiences," he added. Sodhi said he is enamoured by Ashwin's range of tricks and Jadeja's work ethic. "I was speaking to Jadeja the other day about how he goes on with his training. Talking to Ashwin about the carrom ball and the googly he bowls despite

being an off-spinner. It's crazy," Sodhi said. It's not just the bowlers that he talks to. Sodhi also tries to understand a big-hitter like Rishabh Pant's mindset when he goes after spinners. — PTI



Ish Sodhi celebrates a wicket in this file photo.

New selectors early next month: Lal

New Delhi, Feb. 17: The Board of Control for Cricket's Cricket Advisory Committee (CAC) member Madan Lal says two new selectors will be in office by the time the national team's tour of New Zealand winds up early next month. Former India cricketers Rudra Pratap Singh and

Sulkashana Naik are the other two members of the CAC, which has been tasked to find replacements for outgoing chairman of selectors MSK Prasad and his fellow panel member Gagan Khoda. "We have received a list of 44 applicants and we should have the two selectors appointed by the end

of New Zealand tour," Lal said, referring to the ongoing tour, which will end on March 5 after a two-Test series starting on Friday. The national selection panel also includes Devang Gandhi, Jatin Paranjpe and Sarandeep Singh, all of who have one more year left in their tenure.

"Out of the applications, how many applicants we will call for the interview is not yet decided," Lal added. The applicants include former India pacers Ajit Agarkar and Venkatesh Prasad among others. "There are big names in the list but it is not about that. It is about best picking the right man for the

job and that will be our focus. Also, there is no word yet from BCCI on whether to continue with zonal policy or not," Lal said. Laxman Sivarama-krishnan, Ameya Khurasia and Nayan Mongia are also among those who have applied for the two positions in the panel. — PTI



Captains of the competing teams at the Twenty20 Women's World Cup in Australia (from left) Thailand's Sornnarin Tippoch, Stafanie Taylor of West Indies, India's Harmanpreet Kaur, New Zealand's Sophie Devine, Australia's Meg Lanning, England's Heather Knight, Salma Khatun of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka's Chamari Atapattu, Pakistan's Bismah Maroof and South Africa's Dane van Niekerk pose with the World Cup trophy at Taronga Zoo in Sydney on Monday, ahead of the competition that begins on Friday. — AFP

Harman banks on youngsters Says team is buzzing ahead of women's T20 World Cup

Sydney, Feb. 17: The void left by legends such as Mithali Raj and Jhulan Goswami is not easy to fill, India captain Harmanpreet Kaur conceded on Monday but also asserted that her young side has grown substantially to be a top contender for this month's women's T20 World Cup. Mithali retired from T20 cricket last year while Goswami previously played in the format before the 2018 edition. The average age of India's squad in Australia is 22.8 with Harmanpreet being among the seasoned ones in the team. "We already miss the experience they share with us, but these young girls and showing their

talent and ability," said the 29-year-old, while speaking at the captains' media day at Taronga Zoo in Sydney. The ICC Women's T20 World Cup will open with a mouth-watering clash between India and defending champions and hosts Australia in Adelaide on February 21. "In the last two years... I've gone from being the youngest one to one of the oldest in the team," she said. "They (her teammates) never show us that they're young, they can always do what we expect of them. The team is looking in really good shape and showing what they can do with extra responsibility," she added.

We already miss the experience, but these young girls and showing their talent and ability. In the last two years... I've gone from being the youngest one to one of the oldest in the team

The team is looking in good shape and showing what they can do with extra responsibility.

— HARMANPREET KAUR
Indian women's team captain

She is still not over the disappointment of missing the ODI world title in 2017 and Harmanpreet said the T20 World Cup trophy would go a long

way in making up for that debacle. India women came tantalisingly close to winning the ICC ODI World Cup three years back, losing to hosts England by nine runs in the final. "Our team is growing day by day, everyone is looking so positive," Harmanpreet said. "It's going to be very big if we win. I was very surprised at all the reaction from 2017. My parents didn't tell me, they didn't want us to feel the pressure. If we win, it's going to be very big for us. We will try to give our best," she said. Harmanpreet is well aware of what a long run in an ICC tournament can do for her country.

"Over the last two years, we have already had a few games as part of the Women's T20 Challenge and this year we are looking forward to more," said the aggressive batter, who became the first Indian cricketer to join an overseas league by signing up with Women's Big Bash League side Sydney Thunder in 2016. "If we win the World Cup, there's no doubt things will change. That tournament would bring a lot of confidence to the girls," Harman said. "If we get a women's IPL that will be really good for us. If we win the World Cup, it's going to be very big for us as a team, so we will try to give our best," she added. — PTI

Du Plessis quits as SA's captain

Johannesburg, Feb. 17: Faf du Plessis announced on Monday that he was stepping down as South Africa's cricket captain with immediate effect. Du Plessis, 35, said he needed to take "a step back" from the captaincy in order to help the emergence of the next generation of leaders under Quinton de Kock. De Kock led the team in recent one-day and Twenty20 internationals against England while Du Plessis was being rested. It was announced last month that De Kock would be South Africa's long-term one-day captain but in Monday's statement, Du Plessis said he was also relinquishing the Test and T20 captaincy. In a statement issued by Cricket South Africa, Du Plessis said he wanted to concentrate on contributing to the team as a batsman and senior player. Du Plessis captained South Africa in 112 matches across all formats, including 36 Tests. He said his time away



Faf du Plessis

from cricket since the end of the Test series against England last month had given him "a lot of perspective".

Back in side
Meanwhile, Du Plessis and fast bowler Kagiso Rabada returned to the South African squad for a three-match Twenty20 series against Australia, starting on Friday. — AFP

The squad: Quinton de Kock (captain), Temba Bavuma, Faf du Plessis, Bjorn Fortuin, Heinrich Klaasen, David Miller, Lungi Ngidi, Anrich Nortje, Andile Phiso, Dwaine Pretorius, Kagiso Rabada, Tabraiz Shamsi, Jon-Jon Smuts, Dale Steyn, Pite van Biljon, Rassie van der Dussen.

SHORT TAKES

Gujrathi remains on top in Prague

Prague: Indian Grand Master Vidit Gujrathi opened up a one-point lead after posting an impressive win over world's top junior Alireza Firouzja in the fifth round of the Prague Chess Festival's Masters Category here. The 25-year old notched up his third win by outclassing his Iranian opponent in a 24-move Slav exchange late on Sunday. Firouzja, playing with black pieces, underestimated the power of the exchanged variants and went down without much of a fight. "I am happy with the way the games are going," Gujrathi said after moving to four points from five games. P. Harikrishna, the other Indian in the 10-player field, held higher-rated Russian Nikita Vitiugov in 59 moves, to take his tally to two points. Vitiugov and top seed Jan-Krzysztof Duda of Poland are in second spot with three points. — PTI

East Bengal beat Indian Arrows

Mumbai: East Bengal defeated Indian Arrows 3-1 in their I-League game at the iconic Cooperage Stadium here on Monday as the Bengal-based outfit took revenge of their earlier loss. While Jaime Colado (5th minute), Asheer Akhtar (62nd minute) and Lalrindika Ralte (67th minute) scored for East Bengal, Vikram Pratap Singh (54th minute) pulled one back for Arrows, the developmental side of All India Football Federation. With this game, I-League returned to the Cooperage after three years. In the previous match between the two sides, Arrows had got better of East Bengal 1-0. Both the teams started in an aggressive manner and East Bengal took the lead in the fifth minute, as striker Colado slotted home. — PTI

Shuttler Bhagat wins double gold

São Paulo, Brazil: Ace Indian shuttler Pramod Bhagat clinched two gold medals as Indian Para badminton players returned home with a rich haul of 10 medals from Brazil Para Badminton International Championships here. World No. 1 Bhagat picked up the gold medals in men's singles SL3 and men's doubles SL3-SL4 categories along with Manoj Sarkar and, thus accumulated the important ranking points towards the qualification to Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, where Para Badminton will make its debut. The other gold medalist for India was Suhas Lalnakere Yathiraj, who put up a brilliant performance to succeed in a nail-biting men's singles SL4 final. Yathiraj came back from a game down to shock France's top seed Lucas Mazur 9-21, 21-16, 21-19 in three games. In men's singles S56 final, Krishna Nagar too settled for the silver going down to local player Vitor Gonçalves Tavares 18-21, 19-21. — PTI

SRIKANTH, SAINA CHASE OLYMPIC BERTH IN SPAIN

Barcelona: Seasoned Indian shuttlers Saina Nehwal and Kidambi Srikanth will look to keep their Olympic hopes alive when they compete at the \$170,000 Barcelona Spain Masters starting here on Tuesday. The Indian duo has been inconsistent in 2019 and didn't enjoy a good start to the new year. While Saina has crossed the first round in only one of the three events in 2020, Srikanth has lost in the opening round in all three tournaments that he has played so far this year. Saina and Srikanth are currently ranked 18th and 15th respectively, while being placed 22nd and 26th in the 'Race to Tokyo' rankings, which takes into consideration only the points accumulated from the tournaments played in the last one year. According to the BWF Olympic qualification rules, only two players from each singles category can qualify. — PTI

Humpy rules again

Koneru claims her second title in last two months

St Louis (USA), Feb. 17: World rapid champion Koneru Humpy claimed her second title in the last two months by emerging triumphant at the Cairns Cup chess tournament following a draw against compatriot Dronavalli Harika in the ninth and final round here. Humpy, who was crowned world champion in the last week of December 2019, finished the tournament with 6 points. The icing on the cake is that Humpy would be gaining five ELO rating points (the basis for international rankings) and moving to No. 2 in the world list.

"I am very happy to have won such a strong tournament. It also reminds me that winning the world rapid title was no flash in the pan," Humpy said.

The 32-year-old Humpy needed only a draw in the last round to at least tie for the first place and be in contention for the top prize. She secured the draw late on Sunday without much difficulty by playing a solid line of Four knights opening against Harika.

Humpy received \$45,000

● Humpy, who was crowned world champion in the last week of December 2019, finished the tournament with 6 points. The icing on the cake is that Humpy would be gaining five ELO rating points and moving to No. 2 in the world list.



Dronavalli Harika (left) and Koneru Humpy prior to their ninth round action at the Cairns Cup Chess Tournament in St. Louis on Monday. — FIDE

for winning the title in what is considered one of the strongest tournaments ever. World champion Wenjun Ju finished second with 5.5 points after winning her final round game against Russia's Alexandra Kosteniuk (5 points). Kosteniuk ended fourth in the tournament. Harika finished tied fifth with 4.5 points. Humpy said the toughest

match in the event was against former world champion Kosteniuk in the seventh round. "The match against Alexandra Kosteniuk, which was a long battle in the seventh round was the toughest. It helped me keep my unbeaten record against her in five games," she said. She is now aiming to do well in the Grand Prix in Italy in May which is her

next big event. "The next big event is the Grand Prix in Italy this May and then I will be playing in the PSPB tournaments in India," she added. Humpy, who is leading the FIDE Women's Grand Prix Series right now, aims to qualify for the Candidates scheduled later this year. Humpy started with a win over 16-year old American Carissa Yip but

suffered a defeat in the second round to Mariya Muzychuk before bouncing back strongly. She played a solid game to hold world champion Wenjun Ju and got the better of players like Nana Dzagnidze and Alexandra Kosteniuk. A victory over Valentina Gunina in the penultimate round helped her pull ahead of the field. — PTI

Arsenal back into CL contention

London, Feb. 17: Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said he still only wants the best for former employers Manchester City, even though a European ban for the English champions could give the Gunners a route into next season's Champions League.

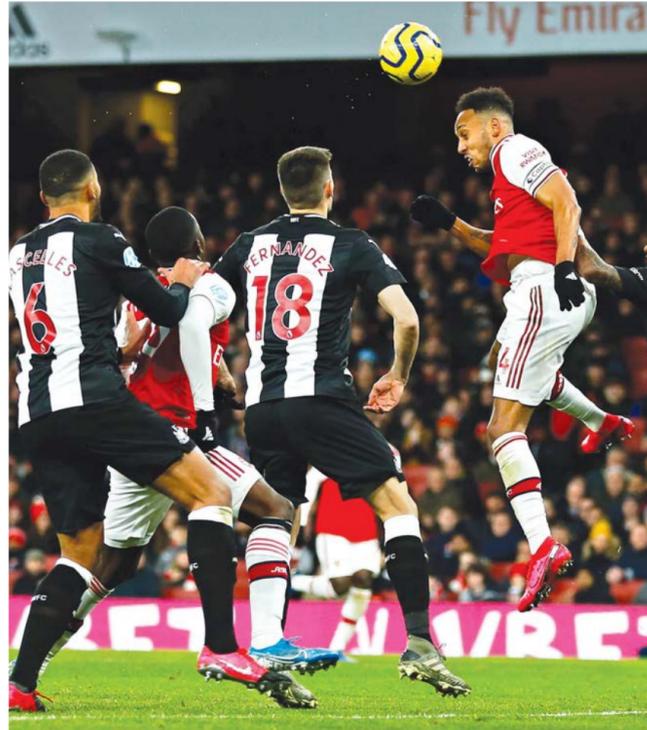
A 4-0 win over Newcastle on Sunday lifted Arsenal up to 10th in the Premier League, but just six points adrift of Tottenham in fifth. City's two-season ban handed down by UEFA on Friday means fifth will be enough to secure a Champions League place unless the champions succeed in overturning that sanction at the Court of Arbitration for Sport. Arteta, who left City to take his first senior managerial role at the Emirates in December, could now be the beneficiary of his former club's punishment.

"It's very difficult. I want the best for Manchester City, the best for Pep (Guardiola) and the players. The only thing I want for them is positive and good things," said the Spaniard. "I just want to do for Arsenal the best I can."

SON STRIKES LATE WINNER AT VILLA

Tottenham manager Jose Mourinho also believes City's two-season ban has opened the door for a host of teams to qualify for next season's competition.

Mourinho's men moved up to fifth in the Premier League — which could be enough to secure Champions League football should City's appeal against the ban fail — thanks to Son Heung-min's stoppage time winner to beat Aston Villa 3-2 on Sunday. Spurs are also now just one point behind Mourinho's old club Chelsea. — AFP



Arsenal's Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang (right) heads home the opening goal of the English Premier League match against Newcastle United at the Emirates Stadium in London on Sunday. — AFP

Stuttering Atletico seek old habits to upset Liverpool

Madrid, Feb. 17: Atletico Madrid might once have relished the challenge of resisting an opponent like Liverpool, but reaching the Champions League's quarter-finals will require a performance not yet seen from them this season.

Diego Simeone's side are no longer the same Atletico famed for their inch-perfect defence, relentless work ethic and a knack for grinding down even the most assured, attacking teams. Instead, they are 12 points adrift of leaders Real Madrid in La Liga and last week sat sixth, a reflection of a deflating few months during which their old identity has blurred and their esteemed coach been questioned.

Live on TV

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Atletico Madrid vs Liverpool from 1.30am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

Dortmund vs PSG from 1.30am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

When it was pointed out to Simeone on Friday that both of Valencia's goals in their 2-2 draw at Mestalla had come from set-pieces, he said: "We don't have the same characteristics now. Just like we attack differently, we also defend differently." Out of the title race before March and knocked out of the Copa del Rey before the last 16,

many in Spain believe Atletico's season is in tatters, with the assumption they will soon depart the Champions League too.

NEYMAR BACK FROM INJURY FOR DORTMUND CLASH

Neymar has been named in the Paris Saint-Germain squad for the last-16 first leg at Dortmund, despite missing the French club's last four games through injury. He has been struggling with a rib problem. PSG are yet to reach the Champions League semi-finals since being bought by their Qatari owners in 2011, with their run to the last four in 1994-95 still the closest they have come to lifting the European Cup. — AFP

'GUARDIOLA TO STICK WITH CITY DESPITE BAN'

London, Feb. 17: Pep Guardiola has told friends he is going to remain as manager of Manchester City even if the appeal against their two-year European football ban is rejected by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), according to media reports on Monday.

The 49-year-old Spaniard is said by *The Times* to have told both the City board and the players he will be staying despite the sanction and reported interest from Serie A champions Juventus.

Guardiola, who has been at City for four years, reportedly told the players of his intention at a meeting on Saturday. "Look, whatever league we are in, I will still be here," Guardiola told them according to Sky Sports News.

"Even if they put us in League Two, I will still be here. This is a time for sticking together."

He is likely to confirm this at the press conference on Wednesday following the re-arranged Premier League match with West Ham.

The match on February 9 was postponed due to Storm Ciara.

The Sun claims the former Barcelona and Bayern Munich manager has told friends he is going to at least see out his contract with the club which runs until 2021.

He is old friends with City executives Ferran Soriano and Txiki Begiristain and enjoys an amicable relationship with club chairman Khaldoon al Mubarak.

"He is not the kind of person whose first thought is to leave when things turn bad," sources close to Guardiola told *The Daily Telegraph*. — AFP



ASIAN WRESTLING | C'SHIP

Bajrang, Vinesh to lead home charge

New Delhi, Feb. 17: Bajrang Punia will look to defend his 65kg freestyle title while Vinesh Phogat will aim to upgrade the 53kg bronze she won in the last edition to gold when the Asian Wrestling Championship begins here on Tuesday.

The six-day event at the KD Jadhav Wrestling Stadium will act as a platform for the Indian wrestlers to test their skills against the best in Asia ahead of the Tokyo Olympics.

The championship has been classified as a ranking tournament for the Tokyo Olympics by the United World Wrestling — the global governing body of the sport.

Besides Punia and Vinesh, who had won a bronze medal each in the World Championships last year, the 30-member India squad will also feature Deepak Punia, Ravi Kumar Dahiya and Olympic medallist Shakshi Malik.

Anshu Malik, Ashu and Sonam Malik are the three youngsters who would look to make a mark in the tournament.

The tournament will be played in three categories — men's freeStyle, Greco-Roman and women's wrestling. The first two days will see Greco-Roman competition, followed by women's wrestling (next two days) and men's freestyle (last two days).

There was initially uncertainty over the participation of four Pakistani wrestlers and two officials due to political tension but they have been cleared by the govern-

It is a great opportunity for all of us. We will be playing in front of our home fans. Though to many it might seem as pressure, but I believe it will work as an advantage

— **BAJRANG PUNIA,** Indian wrestler

ment to take part in the championship.

The senior Asian Championship is returning to India after a gap of two years. India last hosted the championship in 2017. In the 2019 edition in Xi'an province of China, India had won 16 medals, including the lone gold from Punia in 65kg category.

World No. 2 and India's leading medal hope, Punia said, "It is a great opportunity for all of us. We will be playing in front of our home fans. Though to many it might seem as pressure, but I believe it will work as an advantage and I am hopeful that large numbers will be coming in to fill the stands and support us."

Apart from the Indians, there will be a number of top international wrestlers as well, like Kenichiro Fumita, gold medallist at 2019 World Wrestling Championships, and Nurislam Sanayev from Kazakhstan in freestyle.

In Greco-Roman, wrestlers like South Korea's Ryu Han Su (a two-time world champion) and Uzbekistan's Elmurat Tasmuradov (a five-time Asian Championship gold medallist) will be in action. — PTI



Winners of the fifth Kespa-HITS swimming meet.

Vinoth sparkles

Chennai: K. Vinoth Kumar's five-wicket haul helped DRBCC Hindu College beat Frankworell CC in the TNCA Thiruvallur DCA league.

Brief scores: IV Division: DRBCC Hindu College 198/7 in 30 overs (R. Manikandan 39, S. Dinesh Kumar 36*, P. Surya Kumar 36) bt Frankworell CC 142 in 27 overs (B. Karthik 73, E.S. Vishal Rao 25, K. Vinoth Kumar 5/51). CPCL RC 152 in 27.4 overs (K. Manikandan 41, S. Munusamy 26, J. Chinna Durai 25, T. S. Balaji 4/30, G.D. Dhanakoti 3/40) lost to Universal CC 153/7 in 26.1 Overs (R. Veeramani 33, M. Haridass 3/29).



Vinoth Kumar



Winners of Dr Indra Biswakumar memorial city-school table tennis tournament organised by SDAT Medimix Chandra TT coaching centre.

CORONAVIRUS | HAVOC

Tokyo marathon cancels amateur race

Tokyo, Feb. 17: Organisers said on Monday they are cancelling the amateur portion of the Tokyo marathon, affecting around 38,000 runners, on fears about the spread of the new coronavirus in Japan.

"We reached the conclusion that unfortunately it is difficult to organise the event... After several cases (of the virus) were confirmed in Tokyo," the Tokyo Marathon Foundation said.

The decision will not affect elite runners, including elite wheelchair participants, the organisers said. But they only account for around 200 of the tens of thousands of people who had registered for the

March 1 race. The cancellation comes after Japanese government officials warned the spread of the virus in the country entering "a new phase".

At least 65 cases have been diagnosed in Japan, excluding hundreds of infections aboard a cruise ship quarantined off the coast.

On Sunday, the health minister warned citizens to avoid large crowds and non-essential gatherings, sparking speculation that the marathon would be cancelled.

A public gathering for the birthday of Emperor Naruhito that was scheduled for February 23 has also been cancelled on virus fears. — AFP

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THE RESULTS

Arsenal (Aubameyang 54, Pepe 57, Ozil 90, Lacazette 90+5)	4
Newcastle	0
Aston Villa (Alderweireld 9-og, Engels 53)	2
Tottenham (Alderweireld 27, Son 45+2, 90+4)	3