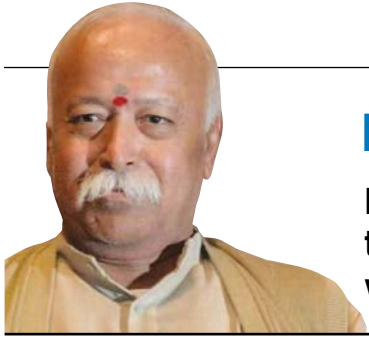


THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI TUESDAY 18 FEBRUARY 2020



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Bhagwat first RSS chief to visit Gandhi Smriti, where Godse killed Bapu



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CDS outlines new military commands, with separate J&K theatre command



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Shah Rukh Khan has finally his nod to star in Rajkumar Hirani's next production

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WINDOWS



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New Delhi: Chief minister of Delhi Mr Arvind Kejriwal along with all the other Cabinet minister took charge on Monday at the Delhi secretariat. The biggest priority of the government will be fulfilling the promises of the Guarantee Card and manifesto of Aam Aadmi Party. Besides Mr Kejriwal all six ministers took charge retaining their previous portfolios. Full report on Page 13

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New Delhi: The Jharkhand Vikas Morcha founded by Babul Marandi headed for a straight split on Monday with the former chief minister announcing the merger of the party with the BJP, shortly after which the two other JVM MLAs surfaced at the Congress' Delhi office saying they have joined the party. Full report on Page 2

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COUNTERPOINT



Take his blessings, first!

WEATHER

Max: 27°C
Min: 11°C
RH: 38%
Rainfall: 0%

Forecast: Cloudy

ASTROGUIDE

Vikari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Bahula Dasami till 2.36 pm
Star: Moola till 6.06 am (Wednesday)
Varjyam: 4.26 am to 6.06 am (Wednesday)
Durmuhurtam: 9.03 am to 9.49 am and then from 11.15 pm to 12.05 am (Wednesday)
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.12 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.56 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 2.52 AM
MOONSET TODAY 1.30 PM

4 Nirbhaya convicts set to hang now on March 3

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, FEB. 17

A Delhi court on Monday ordered that the four convicts in the Nirbhaya gangrape-murder case be hanged at 6 am on March 3 after it issued fresh death warrants, saying deferring the execution further would be "sacrilegious" to the rights of the victim for expeditious justice.

The court directed that the four convicts — Mukesh Kumar Singh (32), Pawan Gupta (25), Vinay Kumar Sharma (26) and Akshay Kumar (31) — be hanged by the neck at 6 am on March 3 until they are dead. It is for the third time that the death warrants were issued by the court against them. "It is hereby directed that the death warrants, as issued by this court vide order dated January 7, 2020 in respect of the condemned convicts namely Mukesh, Pawan, Akshay and Vinay shall now be carried into effect by causing the said convicts to be hanged by the neck until they are dead on March 3 at 6 am," said additional sessions judge Dharmender Rana.

The judge noted the death warrants were earlier issued on January 7 and the execution was later deferred twice — on January 17 and January 31. "Now deferring it any further would be sacrilegious to the rights of the victim for expeditious justice," he said.

Nirbhaya's mother Asha Devi expressed the hope that the four convicts would finally be hanged on March 3. She said: "We have struggled so much. But we have complete faith in the judiciary. Our real victory would be when the convicts are actually hanged."

Nirbhaya's father said the family has been receiving congratulatory messages stating their seven-year-old struggle for justice will finally come to an end. He said the court order goes to show that sooner or later criminals are Turn to Page 4

Cong leaders in a Twitter spat on Delhi results

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 17

A bitter spat broke out on Twitter between Congress leaders Milind Deora and Ajay Maken over the Delhi election results, in which the grand old party was routed. Officially, the Congress came out in support of its Delhi unit with chief spokesman Randeep Singh Surjewala asking leaders outside Delhi to introspect on their own "performances and responsibilities".

It all began with the Mumbai Congress leader praising Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal in a tweet. "Sharing a lesser known & welcome fact — the @ArvindKejriwal-led Delhi Government doubled its revenues to Rs 60,000 crore & maintained a revenue surplus over the last 5 years. Food for thought: Delhi is now one of India's most fiscally prudent governments," he said.

To this, Mr Maken, a for-

Madurai sees India's first corona death?

Chennai: A 42-year-old man who had returned from China recently died of suspected coronavirus at a private hospital at Madurai on Saturday. The deceased hailed from Kothaimangalam village in Pudukkottai district of Tamil Nadu.

Official sources on Monday said that the victim, Sakthikumar, who runs a small restaurant in China recently returned home due to jaundice and underwent treatment in his village. PAGE 4



Indians who were airlifted from Wuhan following the outbreak of the deadly novel coronavirus, stand in a queue to collect release certificates before leaving the ITBP quarantine facility at Chhawla, in New Delhi, on Monday. A total of 650 people were brought back from Wuhan in China on Feb. 1-2 in two Air India Boeing 747s. — PTI

Court fixes February 24 as the next date of hearing Shaheen: SC seeks lawyers' help; says protest, but don't blockade

PARMOD KUMAR
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 Ramchandran to talk to the anti-CAA and anti-NRC protesters at Shaheen Bagh and persuade them to shift to an alternate place.

Telling the protesters 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 protesters 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 protesters 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.

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.

— S.K. Kaul, SC judge

"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 recognised the world over in democracies, especially in India. It's a fundamental right subject only to public order and security

British MP critical of J&K policy denied entry, deported

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 17

India on Monday denied entry to British MP Debbie Abrahams after she landed at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport on the grounds that she didn't have a valid visa. The Labour MP has been a bitter critic of New Delhi's move last year to revoke Article 370 that granted a special status to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. Speaking on the developments, Indian gov-

ernment sources told this newspaper: "Ms Abrahams was not in possession of a valid Indian visa when she landed. It had been conveyed to her in advance well before she boarded a flight to India that her visa had been revoked. Despite that, she chose to board the flight. It was also a mistake of the concerned airline." Ms Abrahams was later deported to Dubai.

Ms Abrahams, who claimed she was treated "like a criminal" and spoken to "rudely", arrived at the airport on a Emirates flight from Dubai at 9 am, reports said.

Ms Abrahams has been a member of Parliament since 2011 and was said to have come on what was to have been a two-day personal trip to India.

When contacted, a British high commission spokesperson said: "We are in contact with the Indian authorities to understand why Deborah (Debbie) Abrahams, MP, was denied entry to India. We provided consular assistance to her whilst she was in New Delhi Airport."

The British MP was, meanwhile, quoted as saying: "Along with everyone else, I presented myself at the immigration desk with my documents, including my e-visa, had my photograph taken and then the official looked at his screen and started shaking his head. Then he told me my visa was rejected, took my passport and disappeared for about 10 minutes. When he came back, he was very rude and aggressive, shouting at me to 'come with me'."

"I told him not to speak to me like that and was then taken to a cordoned-off area marked as a Deportee Cell. He then ordered me to sit down, and I refused. I didn't know what they might do or where else they may take me, so I wanted people to see me," she said. Ms Abrahams was also Turn to Page 4



The Labour MP has been a bitter critic of New Delhi's move last year to revoke Article 370 that granted a special status to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir



A massive fire rages on a government building in Mazgaon, Mumbai, on Monday. No casualty was reported. — RAJESH JADHAV

Blaze engulfs Mumbai's GST Bhavan

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At least 30 fire-tenders were deployed to battle the blaze even as tongues of flames accompanied by thick clouds of smoke billowed out of the upper two floors. — Agencies

Moody's cuts India's growth projection to 5.4% for 2020

FC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, FEB. 17

Global rating agency Moody's 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.

In its update on the Global Macro Outlook, the agency, however, said that India's economy had decelerated rapidly over the past 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. Moody's added: "It is difficult to envision a quick turnaround of either." Turn to Page 9

Permanent commissions for all women officers in 3 months

Give women command: SC to Army

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, FEB. 17

The Supreme Court on Monday called for changing "attitudes and mindsets" as it directed the Centre to grant permanent commissions to all women officers in the Army's non-combat streams as it tore into the Centre's citing women officers' physiological features including their household responsibilities to oppose it.

The court gave the Union government three months' time to comply with its directions.

While thrashing the arguments about women being handicapped by physiological and other factors as put forward by the Centre for denying permanent commission to women officers who entered the force under the short service commission, a bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and Ajay Rastogi said it was an affront to their dignity as Army officers.

"To cast aspersions on their abilities on the ground of gender is an affront not only to their dignity as women but to the dignity of the members of the Indian Army — men and women — who serve as equal citizens in a common mission", said Justice Chandrachud, who was speaking for the bench.

"Seventy years after the birth of a post-colonial independent state, there is still a need for change in attitudes and mindsets to recognise the commitment to the values of the Constitution", Justice Chandrachud said, citing the repeated submissions by the Centre.

The court described as "disturbing" the argument that "women, by the nature of their biological composition and social milieu, have a less important role to play than their men counterparts".

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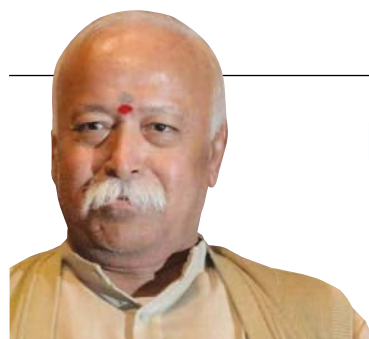
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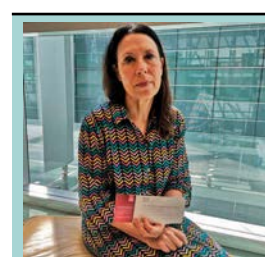
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Corona-wary China may axe House session

K.J.M. VARMA
 BEIJING, FEB. 17

In an unprecedented move, China is considering to postpone its annual Parliament session next month during which the ruling Communist Party showcases its political clout, as the country grapples with the coronavirus outbreak that has claimed over 1,700 lives. Moves are afoot to put off both the National People's Congress (NPC) and the

top advisory body Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), which together have over 5,000 members in their ranks. The Standing Committee of the NPC will meet in late February to deliberate a draft decision on postponing the NPC's annual session, among other items on the agenda, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

The NPC which lasts about two weeks was originally planned to open on March 5 in Beijing. Preparations for the session have been made. But after the outbreak of COVID-19, epidemic prevention and control has become the most important work. It is now a crucial moment to curb the spread and win the battle, so no effort should be spared, Zang Tiwei, a spokesperson for the top legislature's Legislative Affairs Commission said. The CPPCC National

Committee held a meeting on Monday in Beijing to deliberate the postponement of the annual session of China's top consultative body. If the session of the NPC, which is often regarded as rubber stamp Parliament for its routine approval of Communist Party proposals, it will be regarded as an unprecedented move. The postponement is being contemplated as the coronavirus continued its virulent run. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

6 killed after van rams into truck

Hisar: Six people were killed and as many were injured when their van rams into a stationary truck in Haryana's Hisar district on Monday, police said. The victims were returning after attending a marriage function, they said. Among those killed included the driver of the van, which hit a truck parked on a roadside between village Rakhi Garhi and Kheri Chaupta, on the Narnaund-Uchana road, about 30 km from here. The victims were identified as van driver Dinesh (34) of village Milkpur (Hisar), Sachin (19), Kuldeep (28), Om Prakash (49), Sohan Lal (65), all residents of Silewala village in Hanumangarh (Rajasthan) and Bhupender Singh (30), resident of Talwara village in Hanumangarh (Rajasthan). According to the police, a marriage party had come from Chooli Khurd village in Hisar to Milkpur. Most of the members of the marriage party had returned in the night but around 12 people were left. — PTI

Four of MP family killed in house fire

Rewa: A couple and their two minor children were killed in a fire that broke out at their house in Madhya Pradesh's Rewa city in the wee hours of Monday, police said. The mishap took place around 2.30 am when the family members were sleeping in their house located in Tarhati area, City Kotwali's sub-inspector Neeraj Trivedi said. Some neighbours came out of their residences after hearing a blast and saw the victims' house engulfed in flames. The neighbours then alerted the police who rushed to the spot. Fire brigade also arrived at the spot and later managed to douse the flames. When the police entered the house, all the four family members, identified as Raheesh Khatik (45), his wife Gudiya (40), their daughter Sejal (13) and son Sahil (11), were found dead, the official said. — PTI

2 students held with brown sugar

Malda (WB): Two college students have been arrested after drug worth ₹12 lakh were seized from them in West Bengal's Malda district, police said on Monday. They were arrested from Kani More area in Malda town on Sunday night, a police officer said. One of the arrested persons is a woman, he said, adding, 500 gm of brown sugar, two mobile phones and ₹2,000 in cash were seized from their possession, the Inspector in-charge of English Bazar police station, Amalendu Biswas, said. They were produced before a court on Monday and remanded to police custody for 11 days, he added. — PTI

BIRD RINGING STATION ON CARDS IN BIHAR

Patna: Bihar is set to have a bird ringing station, devoted to observation, monitoring and research on migratory birds — the fourth such facility in the country and the first to be set up with the support of a state government — a top official said on Monday. Principal secretary, environment and forests, Dipak Kumar Singh, said a Memorandum of Understanding was exchanged by representatives of the Bihar government and the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) at Gandhinagar in the presence of C.K. Mishra, secretary to the Union ministry for environment, forests and climate change. "The MoU was exchanged on the sidelines of CMS-COP 13, or the 13th Conservation of Migratory Species-Conference of Parties, held at the Gujarat capital where delegates from 130 countries are participating in discussions on preservation of migratory species," Mr Singh said. "So far, there were three bird ringing stations - at Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Orissa. The Bihar government will spend ₹5 crore for the new project. As per the MoU, the new bird ringing station will be manned by trained scientists and other skilled manpower from BNHS," the principal secretary stated. — PTI

SMOKE ON THE WATER



Fire-fighting personnel and locals attempt to douse a fire in houseboats at KoniKhan, Dal Lake, in Srinagar on Monday. Three houseboats were gutted in the fire. — PTI

Panel to meet to pick CVC, CIC today

Modi will chair meet to initiate process to select candidates

ANIMESH SINGH
NEW DELHI, FEB. 17

With the key government anti-graft agency Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) functioning without a proper head since the past eight months, and the post of chief information commissioner (CIC) who heads the Central Information Commission, also lying vacant since more than a month now, the Prime Minister on February 18 will hold a meeting to initiate the process of finalising the candidates for the top two posts.

According to highly-placed sources, Narendra

Modi will chair the meeting of the selection panel for picking the candidates for the posts of chief vigilance and chief information commissioners, Tuesday.

The shortlisted candidates, whose list is likely to be pruned further Tuesday (February 18), were around 100-odd in number after being whittled by the search committee.

The Prime Minister heads the selection committee for choosing the chiefs of both the CVC and CIC. The selection panel also comprises the Union home minister and the Leader of Opposition in

■ THE POST OF CHIEF vigilance commissioner has been lying vacant since June 9, 2019, after K.V. Chowdary left on the completion of his tenure.

Since then, vigilance commissioner Sharad Kumar has been functioning as interim CVC.

The deadlines for sending applications for the post of CVC had been extended thrice between May and June 2019.

Meanwhile in the CIC, apart from the post of chief information commissioner, four other posts of information commissioners too are currently vacant. Out of the sanctioned strength of 11, the CIC is functioning only with six information commissioners.

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Irate mob tries to attack J&K youth at K'taka court

3 students in custody till Mar. 2

VITTAL SHASTRI & M.K. ASHOKA
HUBBALLI/BENGALURU, 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 in 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 on 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 youths demanding stern action against them.

■ THE 3RD JMFC COURT has remanded the three Kashmiri college students, who allegedly shouted pro-Pakistan statements, in judicial custody till March 2.

Lawyers present at the Hubballi court also shouted slogans such as '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 the 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.

Meanwhile, Union minister and Hubballi-Dharwad Lok Sabha MP Pralhad Joshi said in a press release that the police had caused a lot of confusion in the sedition case without clarifying their action on the arrest of the youth. He demanded that the youth should not be spared for raising slogans in favour of Pakistan.

The sedition case lodged against the youth is a serious one.

Issues 'strong demarch' condemning Erodogan's pro-Pak remarks

New Delhi slams Turkey's 'interference'

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
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 Turkish 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

■ NEW DELHI SAID THAT Mr Erdogan'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'".

Minister Mahathir Mohamad have been extremely critical of India in the past few months while supporting Pakistan, after India revoked Article 370 and divided the erstwhile Jammu & Kashmir 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.

W. Bengal: Internet services to be suspended for exams

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, FEB. 17

In a rare but bold step to prevent question paper leak and cheating by students during the Madhyamik (secondary) examination in West Bengal, the state panel of secondary education Monday announced that internet services would remain suspended for two hours in 42 blocks of the state during examination hours.

Internet services will stand suspended between 12 pm and 2 pm, said West Bengal Board of

Secondary Education president Prof Kalyan-moy Ganguli in the city. He added that the step would be in force in those areas where question papers got leaked through WhatsApp last year barely minutes before the Madhyamik exam started.

The possibility of cheating by students using hidden devices has also been taken into account while identifying the 42 blocks across the state, said sources. This is the first time such a decision has been taken by the panel.

The exam will get underway from Tuesday at 2,839 centres. The total number of candidates this year is 1,015,888, which is, however, short of 33,000 from the last year's figure. It also includes 576,009 female candidates which account for 56.70 per cent.

The state government had ordered the administration to suspend internet services in Malda, Nadia, East Burdwan, Murshidabad, North Dimapur and North 24 Parganas during the Higher Secondary Examination last year.

Ventures where no Sarsangchalak tread before

Bhagwat pays visit to Gandhi Smriti

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 17

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) supreme Mohan Bhagwat became the first "Sarsangchalak (head of the Sangh parivar)" to visit the Gandhi Smriti, the place where Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated by Nathuram Godse, regarding whom there are claims and counterclaims that he had left the RSS before he committed the act.

The Gandhi Smriti was the venue for the book release function of 'Gandhi ko Samajhnae ka Yahi Samay (This is the time to understand Gand-

for more than half an hour, Mr Bhagwat also mentioned how Mahatma led many movements and also atoned for "agitation gone wrong", which were perceived by many as reference to some of the violent protests against the Modi government's Citizenship Amendment Act.

"He atoned for agitation gone wrong... if something went wrong in an agitation... Is there anyone these days to atone for law and order situation getting hit... it seems only those who die or who are caught and have to appear in a court have to atone," said the RSS chief.

Constitutional expert and former secretary-general, Lok Sabha, Subhash Kashyap, who was also present on the dais, said Gandhi's life was not about the successes that he achieved but the values he believed in.

He, however, lamented the political class for wanting power, success and prosperity at any cost.

Mr Kashyap also questioned the proposed redevelopment of the central vista, saying for the "new New Delhi, poor man's money will be used to widen the already widened rift between a juggi and Parliament."

CANCELLED TRAINS RESTORED

In partial modification to the Notice published on 16.02.2020 regarding construction of 4th Line on H.Nizamuddin-Palwal section and Non-Interlocking work at Faridabad station, following trains earlier announced to remain cancelled will be restored from the dates shown against each :-

Train No. & Train Name	Date of Restoration (from originating station)
12171 Lokmanya Tilak Terminal - Haridwar Superfast Express	24.02.2020
12172 Haridwar - Lokmanya Tilak Terminal Superfast Express	25.02.2020

Note:- For any kind of information passengers are requested to contact Railway Enquiry No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website www.enquiry.indianrail.gov.in.

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The undersigned being the Authorised Officer of Can Fin Homes Ltd. under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002 (54 of 2002) and in exercise of the powers under section 13 (2) read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice dated 02.12.2019 calling upon the borrower **Mr. Pavan Kumar** to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being Rs. 8,93,970/- and interest from 02.12.2019 to till date of final payment within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

The borrowers having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described here in below in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the Security Interest Enforcement Rules, 2002 on this 14th Day of February, 2020 of the year.

The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of CFHL for an amount of Rs. 8,93,970/- and interest thereon.

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North East : Flat No-376, South East : Flat No-374,
North West : Open, South West : Open

Date: 17.02.2020 Authorised Officer,
Place: Greater Noida Can Fin Homes Ltd.

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Pledge to work for nation, Sheikh tells Muslims

New Delhi: Sheikh Abdullah today called upon the Muslims of India to take an oath to "live or die" for the land of their birth and work for its progress and security.

Addressing a mammoth Id congregation at the Idgah, the Sheikh said: "we must understand one thing clearly that there is no other place in the world for the five crore Muslims living in the country."

"You have to live here, work here and overcome your difficulties here. You cannot think of going to Pakistan, Saudi Arabia or any other Muslim country. You belong to India. You have to work for the country as advised by the Quran and preached by Mohammed," he said.

"We are forgetting everything which our prophet told us and we are getting away from the holy Quran in which it is comprehensively laid down how a true Muslim should serve his community, society and mankind."

Sheikh Abdullah said the general situation in Muslim countries was far from satisfactory. Muslims in every corner of the world were facing difficulties.

"We have to overcome these difficulties and not give an impression of helplessness. Helplessness and frustration were taboos for a Muslim."

He urged Indian Muslims to share the joys and sorrows of their brethren among Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and other communities.

The president of the Kashmir Plebiscite Front, Mirza Afzal Beg, said here today that Sheikh Abdullah's advice to Indian Muslims to place their trust in the majority community and learn Hindi did not apply to Muslims in Kashmir.

Mirza Afzal Beg was addressing a huge gathering of Muslims who had assembled for Id-Ul-Zuha prayers at Idgah in Srinagar.

Mr Mirza Afzal Beg reiterated his stand that the Kashmir "problem" was the "source of trouble" between India and Pakistan. Without the right of self-determination being conceded to the people, the problem, he claimed, could not be solved.

Changing trajectories: More women needed in science, tech, engineering, maths in India



Gagandeep Kang

focus

In India, women have shown that they can and do contribute to science and technology (S&T). Take, for example, the Chandrayaan-2 mission to the moon, led by Isro scientists Muthayya Vanitha, project director, and Ritu Karidhal, mission director. To quote the headlines, the two 'shattered the glass ceiling and aimed for the moon'. Like them, other women have led important developments in Indian science.

Women make up less than 30 per cent of the world's researchers. In India, the numbers are even lower — 15 per cent — according to a report by the National Task Force on Women in Science. The world has benefited enormously from known contributions by women in the field of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) — from the pioneering work of Marie Curie in multiple fields related to radioactivity to the contributions of Internet pioneer, Radia Perlman, the "mother of the Internet". There are also hidden contributions where the work that women did was attributed to their male colleagues or supervisors.

In India, women have shown that they can and do contribute to science and technology (S&T). Take, for example, the Chandrayaan-2 mission to the moon, led by Isro scientists Muthayya Vanitha, project director, and Ritu Karidhal, mission director. To quote the headlines, the two "shattered the glass ceiling and aimed for the moon". Like them, other women have led and contributed to important developments in Indian science.

The good news is that women's enrolment in higher education institutions has witnessed a remarkable increase — from 13 lakhs in 1990 to 27 lakhs in 2000, and then to 142 lakh women in higher education institutions in 2017. Yet women's representation in S&T and the rate of growth is deeply sub-optimal for a country with as many aspirations as India.

Science, technology, research and development are essential for inclusive and sustained economic growth, and not enabling 50 per cent of the population to contribute is a mistake. Studies show that addressing this issue will increase Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and bring deeper, broader and more representative approaches to science and development. We could not only change our trajectory for scientific and technological



Isro scientists Muthayya Vanitha, project director, and Ritu Karidhal, mission director of the Chandrayaan-2 mission

development, we would also change society by addressing the targets set under the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 — ensuring gender equality.

As of April 1, 2015, only 13.9 per cent of all personnel engaged in research and development (R&D) in the country were women. According to the latest Research and Development Statistics at a Glance 2017-18 brought out by the department of science and technology (DST), Government of India, women's participation in extramural R&D projects supported by various Central S&T agencies was 29 per cent in 2014-15.

Women in India are already at a disadvantage due to the lower enrolment rate of girls at the primary school level. Girls are more likely to drop out of education systems early, especially in resource-poor families, due to deeply ingrained gender biases. Alarming in 2019-20, we ranked 112th of 153 countries in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Index.

Today, we stand at a crucial juncture in relation to promoting women in science. Several programmes already exist that aim to do just this. In 2014, the DST restructured all women-

specific programmes under one umbrella called Knowledge Involvement in Research Advancement through Nurturing (KIRAN), to bring gender parity in STEM. Under this scheme, women scientists are encouraged to pursue research in frontier areas of science and engineering, on problems of societal relevance and to take up STEM-based internship followed by self-employment. Added to this, DST's women's technology parks (WTPs) act as a single window hub for convergence of diversified technologies, leading to socio-economic development of women through capacity building and adoption of location-specific technologies.

To begin empowering younger students, the department launched Vigyan Jyoti in 2019 to reach out to girls in select districts at primary education institutes, to support an interest in science through mentorships and interactions. Initiatives like these, led by government bodies like DST and other programmes run by the Department of Biotechnology and private organisations can go a long way in addressing the gender disparities in STEM.

India Health Fund, a collaboration by Tata Trusts and

Global Fund, is addressing the need for creating an enabling environment where women in STEM can transition their research into solutions. The initiative provides technical and financial support to innovators in India in developing key solutions in tuberculosis (TB) and vector-borne disease elimination.

As part of their overarching goal to facilitate more and more research and development in public healthcare systems and technologies, the Fund is committed to empowering women innovators and enabling them to bring their technologies from lab to the market. For instance, IHF supported the exceptional work of Dr Maroudam Verrasamy, founder of CisGen Biotech Discoveries, which developed diagnostic kits that use a combination of native and recombinant antigens to detect bovine TB. Besides this, IHF also supported Dr. Nerges Mistry and Kalpana Sriraman of the Foundation of Research in Community Health (FMR) in developing bio-medical solutions for addressing infectious diseases, such as TB.

While the steady increase in the numbers of women in science is heartening, the effects of the continued underrepre-

sentation of half the population can have far-reaching adverse effects. In healthcare, for example, we are now learning women's health has taken a backseat, with the lessening of research aimed specifically at understanding the varied differences in female physiology. Studies have shown, for example, that the risk of heart disease in women is often underestimated due to different clinical representations or symptoms and a lower representation in clinical trials.

Education is a critical tool in empowering women. We need to ensure that girls across the country have not only access to basic education but also to financial and societal support for them to pursue an education in STEM and in this way empower more women, like Muthayya Vanitha and Ritu Karidhal, to make an impact in the country's scientific progress.

The writer is a top scientist who focuses on viral infections in children, and is executive director of Translational Health Science and Technology Institute, Faridabad. She was the first Indian woman scientist to be elected as a fellow of the Royal Society.

Prema Gopalan: A silent crusader in rural India



Moin Qazi

meanwhile

More than 26 years ago, in 1993, the Latur district in the Maharashtra region of Maharashtra was jolted by an earthquake that left a trail of mass destruction. It was India's most devastating earthquake of the 20th century that left nearly 10,000 dead. It ravaged and obliterated vast swathes of villages and uprooted multitudes of people.

Today, several thousand women among those severely affected by the tragedy are recognised as transformational leaders. How these semi-literate and impoverished women converted adversity into opportunity is a saga of grit and tenacity. The glue that bonded them and provided the necessary impetus was a passionate and indefatigable social entrepreneur, Prema Gopalan. Schooled and trained in disaster management, she began rehabilitation work among these women and in 1998 formally launched Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) (self-education for empowerment) with a larger and long-term mission of self-empowerment and self-learning.

The crisis and the resulting social mobilisation for reconstructing villages transformed trauma into hope and nudged people to create a larger community-centred model for enhancing resilience. The initial success revealed to Prema the gold mine she had struck of rural women with the tenacity to handle local development and governance. She fanned their spark of perseverance into a flame that shines across the region's development canvas.

Building on their capacities, Prema steered them through a broad-based development strategy of economic and social empowerment. It helped her conceptualise the broad vision for SSP which lay in promoting processes which are socially inclusive, sustainable and gender equitable. SSP's core

focus areas are: skill building and entrepreneurship; climate resilient farming; women's leadership; clean energy; health, water and sanitation. SSP's work now straddles 2,000 villages in 25 districts across seven states. It has empowered about 2 lakh women entrepreneurs, farmers and community leaders and positively impacted more than 5 million people in under-served communities.

Prema's work has won appreciation and support from the highest forums. She is a recipient of the Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award (2018) from the Schwab Foundation. SSP has received a large number of awards including the Equator Prize, 2017 from the UNDP and UNFCCC Momentum for Change Award, 2016 for Communities and Climate Change.

BUILDING FEMALE LEADERSHIP

SSP started out as a not-for-profit, helping bridge the gap between the community and the government following the tremor. It organised the women to monitor the relief work of the government. In the process it enhanced leadership skills, strengthened community involvement and generated new opportunities. It adapted its model to the unique cultural context of the area for building an indigenous and community-specific movement. SSP's ability to work with people rather than for them gives it an added advantage.

Rural women are the human face of poverty and development. They toil on their farms but lack access to land titles and are, therefore, not recognised as farmers. This, in turn, denies them access to finance, state entitlements, training, technology and markets. SSP is driving a number of initiatives that address major challenges like food security and climate change through organic agriculture and social entrepreneurship.

SSP's Women's Initiative to Learn and Lead (WILL) is creating a new definition for bottom-up redevelopment that repositions grassroots women as changemakers who address community challenges through innovation and partnership with key stakeholders. Its training and mentorship ecosystem provides women business skills, financial literacy, marketing



Prema Gopalan

support and links to large companies through a last mile distribution network, and start-up capital.

Since 2009, its rural B-school has spawned a mass level movement of grassroots women entrepreneurs running varied small businesses and production units. They are actively involved in community decision-making and local governance, and have increased the access of women to social entitlements, economic resources, health and basic services. These women entrepreneurs embrace community leadership by propagating clean and green practices in the context of climate change. Currently, an active network of 1,250 women entrepreneurs is working across eight districts in India. They are the most trusted allies in the battle against climate change which is having devastating impacts and threatens to roll back the gains we've made on poverty, health and more.

The SSP model comprises four ventures: A resilience fund for women-led businesses; a fraternity of 5,000 self-help groups networked through federations; a rural school of entrepreneurship and leadership for women which provides business, financial and marketing skills; and a market aggregator that provides warehousing, branding, marketing and distri-

bution services to last-mile businesswomen. The consortium nurtures the value chains and entrepreneurial ecosystems that women need to succeed in remote and opaque markets.

ONE-ACRE FARM MODEL

SSP's Climate Resilience Farming model repositions women as farmers and promotes food, nutrition and income and water security. One of the most revolutionary contributions of SSP is in bringing about this shift to sustainable farming and protection of water and natural resources through climate-resilient and nutrition-sensitive farming. The role of women as farm managers has traditionally been obscured by the image of men as primary decision-makers on farms. Prema wants to fix this lack of equilibrium. These women are becoming active decision-makers on core issues like growing crops, conserving natural resources and increasing biodiversity.

The number of households who have become climate-resilient is already statistically significant, but for a wider transformation, many more need to be encouraged to shift to this eco-friendly means of livelihood. Being able to achieve this transition is certainly a critical piece of the empowerment puzzle.

SSP has also pioneered the region's "one-acre farming". Instead of the traditional approach of focusing on water guzzling kharif crops like rice and onion, these women have placed the nutritional needs of their families first. The women are reviving the traditional knowledge and skills of local ecology-based farming. Multiple crops are grown to cope with the caprices of climate and boost soil fertility, nutritional security, farm biodiversity and income viability. Women use local seeds and sustainable inputs such as bio-pesticides, hydroponics, organic fertilisers and low-cost water conservation techniques like drip irrigation, sprinklers, recharging of bore wells, farm ponds and tree plantation to boost scarce groundwater and improve soil health.

Women have been able to convince their spouses to lend them a patch of their land so that they could use it for growing organic food crops — vegetables, fruits and local grains and pulses — staving off hunger for their families. They are pairing crops that are best for each other.

Thus, most farmers are now practicing diversified organic farming. This represents a small revolution, as women are growing crops by themselves and are using only organic inputs. Economic migration has reduced, especially amongst women. There has been a reduction in hunger, increased food security and improved health outcomes.

SSP has also created a dedicated tribe of "seed guardians" and "seed mothers". Empowering women farmers to manage their own seed enterprises is enabling them to become decision-makers in the community. They are thus conserving the indigenous seed heritage and protecting its food sovereignty. Seeds are at the heart of agriculture, but they are also a significant cost for farmers. Organic seeds are hard to come by in a market flooded with genetically modified and hybrid seeds. Conserving organic seeds that are suited to the soil and as a climate adaptation measure is a priority for smallholders.

PRIMARY HEALTHCARE

SSP has also built a support system of village-level networks of entrepreneurs known as *sakhis* (friends). An

innovative intervention in rural healthcare. These Arogya Sakhis are community members who receive basic training and live and work in the communities they serve. They are equipped with health devices, such as glucometers, blood pressure machines. Along with a mobile tablet, they visit rural women door-to-door to conduct basic medical tests.

These women conduct a series of preventive tests using mobile health devices, capture the data by using a tablet and upload the results on the cloud server developed by our technology partner. The data is then shared with a doctor, who analyses it and provides a report and prescriptions over the cloud. The *sakhis* then guide the patients on the treatment and precautions to be taken. Wherever needed, they are referred to hospitals for further treatment.

SSP's approach remains continually relevant because it keeps reinventing itself. It helps in reinvigorating the internal environment as well. There are lessons, both optimistic and cautionary, to be learned from SSP's experiences. Beneficiary-centric perspective is the antidote for the widespread failure of top down development programmes. At the same time, creating programmes that work is important, but just as critical is scaling up those programmes. We need to work towards practical solutions rather than merely changing the mindsets of people.

Women serve critical roles in providing familial and societal stability, and their empowerment is crucial to the modern development agenda. Giving women the tools they need to succeed is a requisite to ensuring the ultimate prosperity of their communities. Despite the prevailing social patriarchy and cultural obstacles, women are changing perceptions and creating businesses that have a real impact on their communities and beyond. In rewriting the rules of the economy and society, they are challenging the status quo. Prema Gopalan's pioneering work with women can serve as an enlightening model for more meaningful and relevant policy discourses.

The writer is a well known development professional

THE ASIAN AGE

18 FEBRUARY 2020

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 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 Donald Trump's four years at the White House

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!

THE ASIAN AGE

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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 Ramliya 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 at this

conjunction would be a tall order. The sweeping victory in Delhi does not give any indication of the rising popularity of the AAP or Arvind Kejriwal in other states. Even in Delhi, this victory should only be seen as voters wanting Mr Kejriwal to be Delhi's chief minister. There is no indication if voters would express the same political choice if there was a Lok Sabha election soon. Prime Minister Narendra Modi still remains a very popular leader with the people of Delhi when it comes to heading the government at the Centre. The verdict of four elections — the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha polls and the 2015 and 2020 Assembly elections — are clear evidence of the voters of Delhi expressing a split verdict. While in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP managed to win all seven Lok Sabha seats and cornered a huge chunk of votes, the same voters voted for the AAP in the 2015 and 2020 Assembly elections in a big way. During the 2015 Assembly elections, the AAP won 67 seats and polled 54 per cent votes while in 2020 it won 62 seats and polled 53.5 per cent votes. The CSDS survey also indicated that one-third of those who voted for the BJP in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls switched their vote to the AAP in 2020.

Mr Kejriwal, in his Ramliya address, seemed somewhat on the defensive over the charge that he had only won because of the freebies. He said: "I am accused of distributing freebies. But all good things in the world like a mother's love and a father's blessings are free. Delhi loves Kejriwal. I love Delhi. This love is for free". It is true that the freebies

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.

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

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

RELOOK AT CAA?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi ruling out a relook at the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), the hollowing out of Articles 370 and 35A in J&K and the bar on triple talaq must come as a setback to his detractors. There has been intense pressure from all quarters for a rethink on these issues. The Prime Minister put the lid firmly on the controversy by remarking that the decisions were taken in the national interest and India waited on these for years.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

SHAMEFUL STIGMA

THE WAY in which Gujarat's Shree Sahajanand Girls Institute's (SSGI) principal forced 68 young women students to remove their underwear in order prove they weren't menstruating shocked the nation. More shocking is that SSGI is run by the Swaminarayan sect, a Hindu religious group, which in the 21st century still follows medieval rules. Discrimination against women on account of menstruation is widespread in India. On the other hand, where Indian women are fighting to remove the stigma around menstruation, even in 2018, the Supreme Court in a landmark order threw open the doors of the Sabarimala shrine to women of all ages, saying that keeping women out of the temple in Kerala was discriminatory. It's a pity that a developing country like India unable to accept that vaginal bleeding is a prestage and preparation for pregnancy and a sign of readiness for pregnancy.

Bidyut K. Chatterjee
Faridabad

OF EQUALITY IN ARMY

DISMISSING THE Centre's objections, in a landmark verdict, the Supreme Court on Monday directed the government to grant permanent commissions to all women officers in the Indian Army irrespective of their tenure of service within three months. The significant judgment has brought true equality in the Army, putting an end to gender bias in the armed forces.

S.S. Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: letters.asianage@gmail.com. Else, send to Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110002

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.

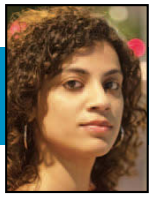
This has already led to a break-

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 preju-

dicial 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 teenager 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".

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, this 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.

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 foetus 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" 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.

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Creation is nothing but a manifestation of God



Sadguru Rameshji

*Sab jag ishwar roop hai, bhalo buronahi 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



IN BRIEF

Signal set to go mainstream

Hyderabad: Just days after popular messaging app, Whatsapp, hit the vaunted two billion users mark, it faces a new challenge from Signal. The app, which is recommended by American whistleblower Edward Snowden, seems to rolling out new features that is aimed at general public and not just the privacy enthusiasts. Signal has increasingly become a fully featured, mainstream communications platform. With its new coding muscle, it has rolled out features at a breakneck speed: In just the last three months, Signal has added support for iPad, ephemeral images and video designed to disappear after a single viewing, downloadable customizable "stickers," and emoji reactions. More significantly, it announced plans to roll out a new system for group messaging, and an experimental method for storing encrypted contacts in the cloud.

Iranian hackers plant backdoors

New Delhi: In 2019, quite a few of the enterprise VPN servers, such as those sold by Pulse Secure, Palo Alto Networks, Fortinet, and Citrix, disclosed major security bugs. Now, Zdnet, citing Israeli cyber-security firm ClearSky, reports that these bugs were exploited by state-backed hackers from Iran to infiltrate companies. The report comes to dispel the notion that Iranian hackers are not sophisticated, and less talented than their Russian, Chinese, or North Korean counterparts. ClearSky says that "Iranian APT groups have developed good technical offensive capabilities and are able to exploit 1-day vulnerabilities in relatively short periods of time."



2FA a must for Google Nest users

New Delhi: Users of Google Nest products will soon be forced into using two-factor authentication (2FA) to access their devices. Google said that all Nest users who have not enrolled in the 2FA option, or migrated to a Google account, will be required to "take an extra step by verifying their identity via email". "When a new login into your account is initiated, you'll receive an email from account@nest.com with a six-digit verification code," the company said. "That code will be used to make sure it's you trying to login. Without it, you won't be able to access your account. This will greatly reduce the likelihood of an unauthorised person gaining access to your Nest account."



Win10 update is deleting files

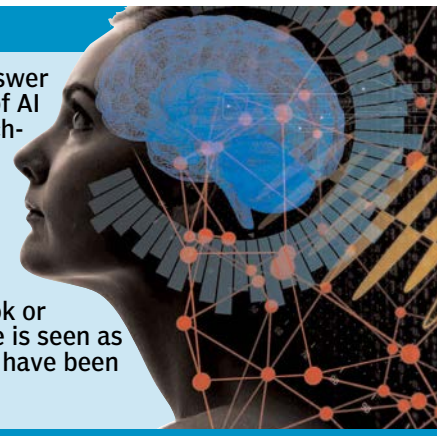
New Delhi: Like every other Windows 10 update, Microsoft seems to have failed its users once again. Unlike other fails, this fails has severe consequences as the latest update, KB4532693, is deleting files on some people's PCs, according to reports. The update appears to deleting any files saved on the desktop as well. According to a report on TechRadar, some people have been able to restore their files, but it seems that many people have found they are unable to restore the files that were deleted. Recently, Microsoft pulled the KB4524244 update as users reported it was causing issues. The update was causing issues with HP devices.

Big Brother fears guide EU's AI rule

European Commission will set the stage for rules on the subject in the growing sector

AI: FRIEND OR A FOE?

- The commission, the EU's powerful regulator, is eager to answer the worries of European citizens about the rising importance of AI in their lives, amid reports from China of facial-recognition technology used to crack down on dissent.
- But instead of an outright ban or moratorium, which would require member state backing, Margrethe Vestager told reporters in Brussels she would recommend that authorities and companies use caution.
- Big tech firms familiar to everyday users — such as Facebook or Tencent — are mainly from the US or China. Europe meanwhile is seen as a leader on regulation, notably with rules on data privacy that have been widely replicated elsewhere.



probably be in business services and network infrastructure, and not mass market sites or social media. "If you want to have a say about things that we consider risky then you should be able to do it yourself," she said. Europe wants to be "sovereign" on AI and protect "the integrity of our grids, of our infrastructure of our research," she said. But this was not against anyone, she insisted, amid talk of a high tech cold war between the US and China with Europe caught in the middle. "It's about us, what we would like to be able to do." Other proposals on Wednesday will include a push to make data centres more energy-efficient and be carbon neutral by 2030. The EU will also offer a voluntary labelling scheme for companies that abide by EU rules and values on AI. "We don't want to regulate anything that starts with A and ends with an I. That doesn't make any sense," Vestager said. "But where there is risk, it will be for real." — AFP

Vestager, who will spearhead the policy. During a wave of anti-Beijing protests, she said, "People could get a message on the phone: 'We know you're there, maybe you should go home'. Not really supportive of the freedom to assemble, or to express yourself." But instead of an outright ban or moratorium, which would require member state backing, Vestager told reporters in Brussels she would recommend that authorities and companies use caution.

"What we will say in the paper in a very lawyered up language is, let's pause and figure out if there are any... circumstances where facial recognition remotely should be authorised," she told reporters. "Because if we do not pause, then it will... just be everywhere," she warned comparing it to the sudden rise of CCTV security in city centres. Describing the spread of cameras, she said: "First you put up one, but then it has a blind angle and then you put up the other one..."

All of a sudden you have cameras everywhere." Caution is also needed because the uses of facial recognition are wide-ranging — from unlocking smartphones to capturing criminals — and often inaccurate and in need of development. "FOR REAL" The former Danish finance minister, who is also in charge of enforcing EU competition rules, underlined that AI was a vast subject and that any regulation should be

mindful of not punishing smaller innovators, which would only benefit major players. Big tech firms familiar to everyday users — such as Facebook or Tencent — are mainly from the US or China. Europe meanwhile is seen as a leader on regulation, notably with rules on data privacy that have been widely replicated elsewhere. But with AI, Vestager said Europe wanted to be a player and not just a sheriff. And if Europe is to develop tech giants, it will

Google pulls the plug on its free Wi-Fi scheme

New Delhi, Feb. 17: Tech giant Google on Monday said it has decided to wind down its 'Station' programme globally through 2020, including in India, given that going online has become much easier and cheaper over the last five years. The US-based company said it is working with its partners to transition existing sites so they can remain useful resources for the community. Google had launched 'Station' in India in 2015 in partnership with Indian Railways and Railtel to bring fast, free public Wi-Fi to over 400 railway stations in the country by mid-2020. "But we crossed that number by June 2018 and implemented Station in thousands of other locations around the country in partnership with telecommunications companies, ISPs and local authorities. Over time, partners in other countries asked for Station too and we responded accordingly," Google Vice President (Payments and Next Billion Users) Caesar Sengupta said in a blogpost. He added that since then, getting online has become much simpler and cheaper and that mobile data plans have become more affordable and mobile connectivity is improving globally. Apart from India, Station is available in Nigeria, Thailand, Philippines, Mexico, Indonesia, Brazil and South Africa. Sengupta cited the example of India, where mobile data per GB is among the cheapest in the world. He cited reports that state mobile data prices have reduced

by 95 per cent in the last 5 years and Indian users consume close to 10 GB of data, each month on an average. "And similar to what the Indian government did, several governments and local entities have kicked off their own initiatives to provide easier, cost-effective access to the internet for everyone. In addition to this changed context, the challenge of varying technical requirements and infrastructure among our partners across countries has also made it difficult for Station to scale and be sustainable, especially for our partners," Sengupta noted. He added that the company sees greater need and bigger opportunities in making products and features tailored to work better for the next billion user markets. "Therefore, we've made the decision to gradually wind down the Station programme globally, through 2020. We are working with our partners to transition existing sites so they can remain useful resources for the community," he said. Under its Next Billion Users initiative, Google has built lite apps (YouTube Go, Google Go and more), offline features (such as YouTube and Maps Offline), as well as country-specific products like Tez (now Google Pay India) and platforms like Android Go to bring lower-cost devices to customers. "Our commitment to supporting the next billion users remains stronger than ever, from continuing our efforts to make the internet work for more people..." Sengupta said. — PTI

500 CHROME EXTENSIONS SECRETLY UPLOADED PRIVATE DATA FROM MILLIONS OF USERS

- More than 500 browser extensions downloaded millions of times from Google's Chrome Web Store surreptitiously uploaded private browsing data to attacker-controlled servers, according to researchers.
- The extensions were part of a long-running malvertising and ad-fraud scheme that was discovered by Independent researcher Jamila Kaya.
- She and researchers from Cisco-owned Duo Security eventually identified 71 Chrome Web Store extensions that had more than 1.7 million installations. After the researchers privately reported their findings to Google, the company identified more than 430 additional extensions. Google has since removed all known extensions.
- The extensions were mostly presented as tools that provided various promotion- and advertising-as-a service utilities. In fact, they engaged in ad fraud and malvertising by shuffling infected browsers through a maze of sketchy domains.
- Many of the redirections led to benign ads for products from Macy's, Dell, and Best Buy. What made the scheme malicious and fraudulent was (a) the large volume of ad content (as many as 30 redirects in some cases), (b) the deliberate concealment of most ads from end users, and (c) the use of the ad redirect streams to send infected browsers to malware and phishing sites.
- Following a long practice, Google didn't identify any of the extensions or domains it found in its own investigation. Computers that had one of the plugins received a popup notification that said it had been "automatically disabled." People who followed a link got a red warning that said: "This extension contains malware."

The researchers found evidence that the campaign has been operating since at least January 2019 and grew rapidly, particularly from March through June. It's possible the operators were active for a much longer period, possibly as early as 2017.

Microsoft sets up engineering hub in Noida

New Delhi, Feb. 17: Microsoft on Monday said it has set up a new development centre in Noida, its third such facility in India, that will serve as an engineering and innovation hub for the company. The announcement comes ahead of the visit of Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella slated for later this month. "The centre will build on Microsoft's commitment to tap India's world-class engineering talent to create solutions for global impact," Microsoft said in a statement. The company, however, did not disclose the investment being made for setting up the centre. The IDC-NCR will be home to the company's engineering teams across various tech groups, including Microsoft's AI and Research Group, Cloud and Enterprise Group, and Experience & Devices Group, along with Core Services Engineering and Operations, the statement said. The IDC-NCR will also house Mixer, Microsoft's live streaming gaming platform team, becoming the first centre to host the gaming team outside the company headquarters in Redmond, US. "We have built a strong engineering presence in India over the past two decades and we are excited to be expanding to Noida," Kurt DelBene, executive vice-president (corporate strategy, core services engineering and operations) and chairman of the IDC advisory board, said. Rajiv Kumar, managing director at Microsoft India Research and Development, said the centre creates opportunities for engineers to do meaningful work that will have impact across the world. "We are excited to tap into the engineering talent available in this part of the country to create a truly pioneering organisation that will build innovative solutions for global impact," he added. Microsoft India Development Centre is one of the company's largest research and development centres outside the Redmond headquarters. Set up in Hyderabad in 1998, IDC drives Microsoft's strategy of globally shared development to build products and services. — PTI

VOLDEMORTING EXPLAINED

In an era, where hashtags and keywords tend to dominate every online conversation, people have started a new trend called Voldermorting. A recent paper by researcher Emily van der Nagel puts a name to the phenomenon of hiding a word in plain sight. She calls it Voldermorting. Van der Nagel traces Voldermorting back to the Harry Potter books, where most characters are too afraid of Voldemort to say the word directly, instead replacing his name with euphemisms like You Know Who and He Who Must Not Be Named.



The internet practice of Voldermorting, van der Nagel says, comes via a comment left by a user named Eugene, who made the connection as part of a discussion about deliberately starving "trash celebrities" of attention by not referring to them by name.

On the internet there's no such thing as a tracing spell, but there's something almost as effective: search algorithms. Plugging a distinctive name into a search box lets you track mentions around the web. I could set up a Google Alert to email me every time a website mentions my name, or simply do a periodic Twitter search for myself or my favorite celebrity, so I can ride to my or their defense if someone says something negative.

Yet Voldermorting departs from the Harry Potter analogy in one crucial way. You Know Who and He Who Must Not Be Named are a small set of ominous phrases, while internet Voldermorting is often playful and cycles through infinite variations of newly coined words. That includes single words for social media sites (birdhell, birbsite, bird-world, faceborg) and elaborate phrases like those found in the Detrumphify browser extension (Manchurian Comover, Empty Popcorn Bag Rotting in the Sun). It's easy to see why internet-ers have resorted to this strategy. If you complain about an airline on social media, even if you don't directly @mention them, odds are fairly good you'll get a reply from a perkily beleaguered social media manager tasked with searching for mentions of the brand and proactively replying to complaints. Since Voldermorting is often a response to unwanted attention, it's also a way of marking out a particular name or concept as objectionable.

NEW PHONE APP TO HELP TACKLE LOCUST SWARM

London, Feb. 17: Researchers have developed a smartphone app to tackle crop pests, an advance that may help farmers whose lands are being decimated by the ongoing locust outbreak against which the UN has called for "rapid action". The app called MAE-STRO, described in the journal *Scientific Reports*, can recognise locusts and grasshopper pests via the smartphone's camera, and record their GPS location. According to the researchers, including those from the University of Lincoln in the UK, farmers can use the app to record the location and volume of locusts, and initiate targeted delivery of pesticides to prevent swarms from decimating crops in their path. They plan to develop a cloud server to which the app data can be uploaded so that the swarm's location can be identified in real time. With such a facility, the scientists hope to employ a targeted approach for the precise use of pesticides, reducing the magnitude of locust swarms. "Each year, approximately 18 million hectares of land are damaged by locusts and grasshoppers, impacting hugely on farmers and their productivity," said study co-author Bashir Al-Diri from the University of Lincoln. "The current locust outbreak is the biggest in 26 years in India, beginning late last year in Gujarat and Rajasthan, and also affecting Punjab recently. "Monitoring techniques currently rely on field surveys by people through digging insect eggs, but this information only helps farmers to make mid and long-term forecasting decisions and can delay effective management measures," Al-Diri said. The researchers gathered more than 3,500 images of locusts to train the app, which can also recognise a variety of terrain and plant growth, the study noted. "Our goal is to help farmers identify and record the spread of locusts on their land before they start to develop air borne swarms. We hope this new app will eventually put more knowledge and more power into the hands of the farmers,"

IN BRIEF

24 killed in church attack

Ouagadougou: Gunmen have killed 24 people and wounded 18 in an attack on a Protestant church in a village in northern Burkina Faso, officials said Monday. In a separate incident, five Burkinabe soldiers in the troubled region were killed by a roadside, security sources said. A group of "armed terrorists" raided the village of Pansi, in Yagha province, "and attacked the peaceful local population after having identified them and separated them from non-residents", Governor Colonel Salfo Kabore said in a statement. The assault occurred on Sunday during a weekly service at a Protestant church, security officials said. "The provisional toll is 24 killed, including the pastor... 18 wounded and individuals who were kidnapped," Kabore said. A resident of nearby Sebba said Pansi villagers had fled there for safety.

Arrests reveal shocking plot

Berlin: Members of a German extreme right group arrested last week were believed to have been plotting "shocking" large-scale attacks on mosques similar to the ones carried out in New Zealand last year, the government said on Monday. Officials said that investigations into 12 men, detained in police raids across Germany on Friday, had indicated they planned major attacks, following media reports over the weekend the group aimed to launch several simultaneous mass-casualty assaults on Muslims during prayers. "It's shocking what has been revealed here, that there are cells here that appear to have become radicalised in such a short space of time," interior ministry spokesman Bjorn Gruenewald said.

Indian taxi driver saves elderly lady

New York: An alert Indian-origin taxi driver in California has saved an elderly woman from being scammed out of \$25,000, prompting police to declare that he deserved a 'great citizen award'. Raj Singh, the owner of Roseville Cab, picked up a 92-year-old woman who mentioned that she was headed to a bank to withdraw a large sum of money to settle an Internal Revenue Service debt, "reports said. Singh, who picked her up two weeks ago, said this sounded very suspicious to him so he told her it may be a scam. He took her to the Roseville Police Station and asked an officer to speak with her. The officer convinced her that it was a scam. Officers gave Singh a \$50 gift card to thank him for what he did.

22 DEAD IN CAMEROON MASSACRE

Libreville, Feb. 17: A massacre in an anglophone region of Cameroon left 22 villagers dead including 14 children, the UN said, with an opposition party blaming the killings on the army. Armed men carried out the bloodshed on Friday in the village of Ntumbo in the Northwest region, James Nunan, a local official of humanitarian coordination agency OCHA, said. "The victims included a pregnant woman and 14 children," Nunan said. Nine of the children were less than five years old. Eleven of the children were girls, said Nunan. Separatists in the region have been fighting the Central government for three years. The Movement for the Rebirth of Cameroon, one of the countries two main opposition parties, issued a statement saying: "The dictatorial regime (and) the supreme head of the security and defence forces are chiefly responsible for these crimes." A key figure in the separatist movement, lawyer Agbor Mballa, in a Facebook post also accused "state defence forces" of carrying out the killings. The three-year conflict between Anglophone forces seeking to break away from French-speaking Cameroon has claimed more than 3,000 lives and forced more than 700,000 people to flee their homes.

Poll may tighten Khamenei grip

Dubai, Feb. 17: Hardliners are set to tighten control of Iran this week in a parliamentary election stacked in their favour, as the leadership closes ranks in a deepening confrontation with Washington. Big gains by security hawks would confirm the political demise of the country's pragmatist politicians, weakened by Washington's decision to quit a 2015 nuclear deal and reimpose sanctions in a move that stifled rapprochement with the West. More hardliner seats in the February 21 vote may also hand them another prize — more leeway to campaign for the 2021 contest for president, a job with wide day-to-day control of government. Such wide command of the power apparatus would open an era in which the elite Revolutionary Guards, already omnipresent in the life of the nation, hold ever greater sway in political, social and economic affairs. Allies of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei have ensured hardliners dominate the field, removing moderates and leading conservatives and permitting voters a choice mostly between hardline and low-key conservative candidates loyal to him. "Literally, it is not a race anymore. Hardliners want the presidency. This is the end of moderation for at least a decade if not more," said an official on condition of anonymity. Like hardliners, conservatives back the ruling theocracy, but unlike them support more engagement with the outside world. Faced with little choice, many voters are likely to be focused on bread-and-butter issues, in an economy hurt by US President Donald Trump's "maximum pressure" policy towards Iran. With Iran facing growing isolation and threats of conflict over its nuclear standoff with the US, and growing discontent at home, the turnout is seen as a referendum on the establishment — a potential risk for the authorities. — Reuters

Their grief etched in stone



Relatives of the 11 Ukrainians, who died in a plane mistakenly shot down by Iran in January, during a ceremony unveiling a memorial stone at the site of the future monument, at the Boryspil International airport outside Kiev on Monday. — AFP

Stop backing Syria: Trump

Turkey also calls for Russia to stop backing atrocities by Damascus

Washington, Feb. 17: President Donald Trump has called for Russia to end its support for the Syrian regime's "atrocities" as he expressed US concern over violence in the Idlib region, the White House said on Sunday. Turkey's foreign minister also pressed his Russian counterpart over the attacks by Damascus on the last rebel-held bastion in the country. Backed by Russian air power, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad made fresh gains on Sunday as he intensified his assault on the holdout northwestern province of Idlib. In a call with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Trump "expressed concern over the violence in Idlib and... conveyed the United States' desire to see an end to Russia's support for the Assad regime's atrocities." Turkey has 12 observation posts in Idlib as part

of a 2018 deal reached between Ankara and Moscow to prevent a regime offensive, but Syrian regime forces have pressed ahead regardless. Four of the Turkish posts are believed to be encircled by Syrian forces, and Ankara has threatened to attack Damascus if they do not retreat by the end of February. "I stressed that the attacks in Idlib must stop and it was necessary to establish a lasting cease-

fire that would not be violated," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told journalists at the Munich Security Conference, after he met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. Rebel supporter Turkey and Damascus ally Russia have worked closely on Syria in recent years despite being on opposing sides of the nine-year conflict. A Turkish delegation will head to Moscow, after

Russian officials visited Ankara last weekend but failed to reach a concrete deal. War monitor the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights on Sunday said regime forces "were in control of all the villages and small towns around Aleppo for the first time since 2012." Regime forces have for weeks been making gains in northwestern Syria and chipping away at territory held by jihadists. — AFP

UAE switches to clean power

Abu Dhabi, Feb. 17: The United Arab Emirates said on Monday it has issued a licence for a reactor at its Barakah nuclear power plant, the first in the Arab world, hailing it as a "new chapter". The UAE has substantial energy reserves, but with a power-hungry population of 10 million it has made huge investments in developing alternative power sources including solar. "We mark a new chapter in our journey for the development of peaceful nuclear energy with the issuing of the operating license for the first Barakah plant," Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan tweeted. "As we prepare for the next 50 years to safeguard our needs, our biggest strength is national talent." The Barakah plant, located on the Gulf coast west of the capital Abu Dhabi, had been due to come online in late 2017 but faced a number of delays that officials attributed to safety and regulatory requirements. The national nuclear regulator has now given the green light to the first of four reactors at the plant, Hamad al-Kaabi, the UAE representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), told a press conference. Abu Dhabi authorities said in January that the plant would start operating within a few months. No new date was given on Monday but Kaabi indicated it would happen soon. "The full operation of Barakah plant in the near future will contribute to the UAE's efforts for development and sustainability," he said, adding that the operator would "undertake a period of commissioning to prepare for commercial operation". The plant is a regional first — Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter, has said it plans to build up to 16 nuclear reactors, but the project has yet to materialise. It is being built by a consortium led by the Korea Electric Power Corporation at a cost of some \$24.4 billion. When fully operational, the four reactors have the capacity to generate 5,600 megawatts of electricity, around 25 percent of the nation's needs. The remaining three reactors are almost ready for operation. The UAE also hopes the nuclear plant will elevate its status as a key regional player, building on its success in establishing itself as a centre for tourism, banking and services. "This is part of the UAE's drive to diversify its energy economy, reduce dependence on fossil fuels, and project its image as a regional leader in science and technology," one Gulf analyst said. — AFP

Imran: Pak not haven for ultras

Islamabad, Feb. 17: There are no "safe havens" for terror groups in Pakistan "right now", Prime Minister Imran Khan said on Monday while admitting publicly that it was possibly not the case under previous regimes. Addressing an international conference marking 40 years of hosting Afghan refugees in the country, he said Pakistan seeks peace in Afghanistan and instability in the war-torn neighbouring country was not in its interest. Khan's assertion on terror safe havens came as the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global anti-money laundering watchdog, began a crucial meeting in Paris where Pakistan is trying to wriggle out of being blacklisted for not doing enough to combat terror financing. The US, India and Afghanistan have long accused Pakistan of providing safe havens to terror groups like the Taliban, the Haqqani network, the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed. "I can tell you there are no safe havens here," Khan said at the conference, also attended by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. "Whatever the situation might have been in the past, right now there is one thing we want: peace in Afghanistan." Meanwhile, Guterres also termed the improved security situation in Pakistan as "absolutely remarkable". Several vehicles parked in the vicinity were also damaged due to the impact of the blast, Dawn newspaper reported. The attack came the same day UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who is in Pakistan, termed the improved security situation in Pakistan as "absolutely remarkable". — PTI

8 KILLED IN BALOCHISTAN SUICIDE BLAST

Karachi, Feb. 17: A powerful suicide bombing at a religious rally in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province killed at least eight persons including three policemen and injured 23 on Monday, according to media reports. The bombing took place during the religious rally at the Quetta Press Club near Shahrah-i-Adalat road. Several vehicles parked in the vicinity were also damaged due to the impact of the blast, Dawn newspaper reported. The attack came the same day UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who is in Pakistan, termed the improved security situation in Pakistan as "absolutely remarkable". — PTI

Race to outrun a regime



Vehicles carrying internally-displaced persons drive through the Syrian town of Atme near the Turkish border towards the city of Afrin on Monday, as people flee advancing regime forces in Idlib and Aleppo provinces. — AFP

Ex-UK PM recounts her sticky tape moment

Dubai, Feb. 17: Former British Prime Minister Theresa May said on Monday that early on in her political career, she vowed never to think that being a woman held her back. "Don't think that you don't get something because you're a woman," she told an audience of mostly women at the Global Women's Forum Dubai. Still, there were times when being a woman head

of state was — well, sticky. May recounted one such moment. She was on a British Air Force flight, heading to a dinner and having to change into evening attire. There were no changing facilities on board but the staff told her not to worry. "They took me up into the cockpit, with two pilots there, and I'm thinking 'really,'" she said. "A chap comes along with sticky tape and a sheet, and he sticks it up

behind the pilots and says: 'There you go, you can change behind that,'" she said, to laughter and applause from the audience. May, who became the second female British prime minister in 2016, after Margaret Thatcher, was speaking on stage with the United Arab Emirates ambassador to the United Nations, Lana Nusseibeh. Nusseibeh shared her own "embarrassing" anecdote, saying that once

while trying to keep up with the UAE's foreign minister on the streets of New York, she got her heel stuck in a gutter and it broke off. She did her best to keep up. "Men, frankly, don't run in heels," Nusseibeh said. May also spoke about a type of boys-club culture that existed when she first entered the House of Commons as a member of Parliament in the late 1990s, with "a huge

emphasis on the men sort of drinking together and getting... together into groups." "Some of the women felt they had to join that, and I didn't." May said. "I wanted to do it the way I wanted to do it. So, I did it my way. I was myself and, hey, I was prime minister." May stepped down as Conservative leader last year, leaving behind a legacy. — PTI

TRUCE WITH THE TALIBS No let-up in attacks even as US, fundamentalists take first steps towards peace

Taliban await fresh order on deal with US

Kabul, Feb. 17: Taliban fighters attacked Afghan government forces overnight, and militant commanders said on Monday insurgency operations would go ahead until they receive fresh instructions based on a deal with the United States to reduce violence in the country. Last week, a senior US administration official said negotiations with Taliban representatives in Qatar had resulted in an

agreement in principle for a week-long reduction of violence, but the seven-day period had not commenced. The official said the agreement covered all Afghan forces, and would be closely monitored. "Our leadership hasn't conveyed any message about a ceasefire to us," a Taliban commander in Helmand, a southern province that has seen some of the fiercest fighting.

Commanders in Paktika and Nangarhar — two other provinces regarded as strongholds for the Taliban — also said they would continue their attacks as planned. A Taliban spokesman also issued a statement on Monday saying an Afghan military helicopter had been shot down in Nimroz province, but an official there said the helicopter made an emergency landing and had not been

attacked. Despite the violence on the ground, a senior Taliban leader in Doha confirmed a deal with the United States is set to be signed by the end of February in a "signing ceremony" in Doha. Mawlawi Abdul Salam

Hanafi, deputy chief of the Taliban's Doha office, was quoted as saying: "Soon after signing the peace accord, the United States will release 5,000 of our prisoners and we will free 1,000 of theirs." Successful implementation of the deal would move the United States closer to a further drawdown of troop levels in Afghanistan, meeting an objective for US President Donald Trump, who has

vowed to stop the "endless wars" as he seeks re-election in November. There remains a long way to go to a peace settlement and end to the nearly two-decade-old U.S. military presence that began shortly after the 9/11 attacks by al Qaeda. U.S. officials have been clear that the 13,000 U.S. troops will be cut to about 8,600 this year, with or without a withdrawal deal. — Reuters



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 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 at the Ministry of Science and Technology. "One patient (among them) has already been discharged, one is able to get off the bed and walk and the others are all recovering," she said.

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

China National Biotech 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 Guiqiang, chief physician at Peking University First Hospital. — AFP

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 Biotech 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 Guiqiang, 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 a 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. "In light of various situations, we have decided to cancel the visit by the general public to the palace for His Majesty's birthday," the imperial household agency said in a statement a day after the government issued a warning to people to avoid crowds and "non-essential gatherings". "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 per cent 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 and Cambodian 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

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 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 this 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. — PTI

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

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

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

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.



Captains of the competing teams at the Twenty20 Women's World Cup in Australia (from left) Thailand's Sornmarin 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 Phisokeyiso, 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 Suhlas 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 if their ranking is within the top-16 by April end. Among the Indians, world champion PV. Sindhu and B. Sai Praneeth and men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty have almost secured their berths for the Tokyo Games. With the Olympic qualification cut-off date ending in April, there are only seven tournaments, including the Barcelona Spain Masters, left in the calendar and the Indian duo will have to produce consistent performances to earn a ticket to Tokyo. — PTI

KONERULES AGAIN

Humpy 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

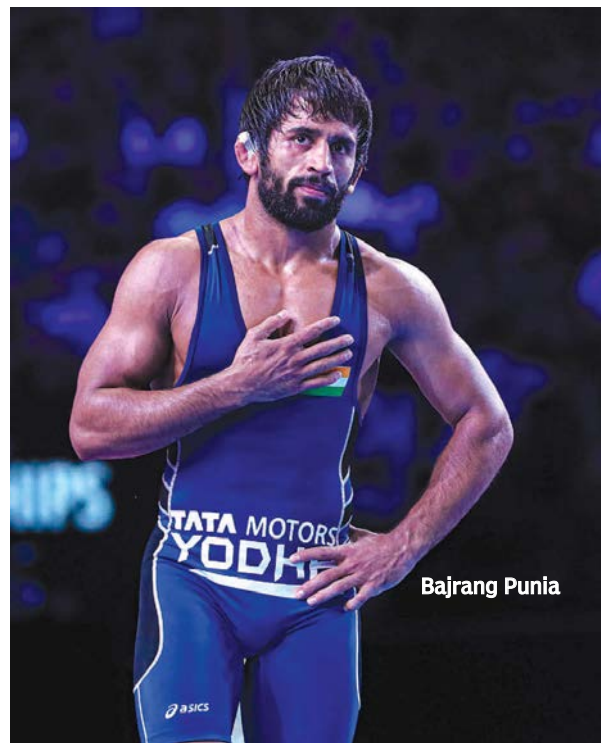
ASIAN WRESTLING | C'SHIP

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-

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



VIRUS EFFECT: NO CHINESE WRESTLERS AT ASIAN MEET

New Delhi, Feb. 17: Chinese wrestlers will not compete in the Asian Championships beginning here on Tuesday as they have not been granted visas by the government due to the novel coronavirus outbreak there, a top official of the national federation said on Monday. Wrestling Federation of India assistant secretary Vinod Tomar said that the government has denied visas to the 40-strong Chinese contingent. "We have got to know that the government has not granted visas to the Chinese contingent and so they are not taking part in the Championships," Tomar said. "The world is grappling with the issue of coronavirus and so health of the athletes is the primary concern now. It is understandable why the government has not given visas to them," he added. He, however, said that the WFI is yet to get a formal communication from the government. — PTI

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

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."



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

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

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

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 Metalla 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 DORTMUND CLASH INJURY FOR

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

