

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | SATURDAY 22 | FEBRUARY 2020

WEATHER



Max: 32°C
Min: 24°C
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Partly sunny; air quality will be unhealthy for sensitive groups

ASTROGUIDE

Vikari: Masi 10
Tithi: Chaturthasi
Star: Thiruvonam
Rahukalam:
9 am to 10.30 am
Yamagandam:
1.30 pm to 3 pm

PRAYERS

Fajar: 5.20 am
Zohar: 12.28 pm
Asar: 3.44 pm
Maghrib: 6.15 pm
Isha: 7.27 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.17 PM

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.29 AM

MOONRISE TODAY 5.35 AM

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COUNTER POINT



Let's include some Bollywood stars in Modi and Trump road show for huge crowds!

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No one needs to fear about CAA, NPR: Maha CM after meeting PM

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WORLD | 10 Trump ally Stone gets 40 month's jail, a scolding

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SPORT | 15 Chennaiyin enter ISL playoffs

TABLOID Taking down the challenges



Vol. 15 No. 326 Established 1938 | 32 PAGES | ₹ 3.00

IMPLEMENTATION OF NRC

Avoid too many details in 2020 census, urge EPS, OPS

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 21

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"Details regarding mother tongue, family head's father, mother, their place of birth, date of birth and details like that, mobile phone numbers, Aadhaar details, voter ID and driving licence details should be avoided in the 2020 census," the two leaders said,

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adding, that the Tamil Nadu Government has officially written to the Central government on the need to avoid these prickly details.

Both EPS and OPS, in a statement here on Friday assured that the AIADMK government will not allow any act or move that was against the minorities. "Our party and government will always be friends of Muslim society as always

it has been," the two leaders reiterated.

The two leaders also sought the cooperation of the Muslim community to ensure that this traditional bond between AIADMK and the minorities was not undermined due to false propaganda of some of the opposition parties. Both EPS and OPS also stated that no guidelines had been issued to States by the Centre to implement NRC, except Assam.

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Many want 'a non-Gandhi' leader

Threat of a split looms for Cong

ASHHAR KHAN | DC
NEW DELHI, FEB. 21

The possibility of a potential split threatens the Congress after speculation that Rahul Gandhi could return to lead the party. Adebate is currently raging within the party and leaders are now discussing ways to rid the Congress of its "dynasty tag".

A host of young Congress leaders are also convinced that if Rahul Gandhi leads it in the 2024 general election, it would only spell another electoral washout as he "is no match" for Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a one-to-one contest. Several leaders have come out and suggested measures for the Congress to find its rhythm back but "inaction at all levels" have left young leaders and party workers disheartened.

Earlier this week, former MP Sandeep Dikshit had

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said there were many in the Congress who are capable of leading the party — "at least six to eight" such people — and attacked senior leaders for saying "sometimes you want inaction because you don't want certain action to happen".

Many young leaders feel that Mr Gandhi is surrounded by "unelectable leaders who want him back because that's how they can be in power". Party leaders who have either lost the elections or are hankering for a Rajya Sabha nomination are floating the name of Mr Gandhi to keep themselves relevant, sources said.

India hitting US very hard on trade: Trump

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US President Donald Trump's daughter and his senior adviser Ivanka Trump — who had made a high-profile visit to Hyderabad for the Global Entrepreneurship Summit in November 2017 — will also be joining her father and First Lady Melania Trump during the visits to Ahmedabad, Agra and New Delhi next week, sources confirmed on Friday.

President Trump's son-in-law and Ivanka's husband Jared Kushner, who is also a senior adviser to the President, will also be part of the visit.

Meanwhile, President Trump sought to mount further pressure on India on the trade front, and was quoted in media reports as saying on Friday: "I'm going to India next week and we're talking trade. They've been hitting us very hard for many, many years." President Trump had just recently accused India of not treating the US well, something that New Delhi maintained was said in the context of balance of trade.

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In Ahmedabad, Trump will address the 'Namaste Trump' event jointly with Modi at the newly built Motera cricket stadium

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claimed would greet him in Ahmedabad during the visit. He had earlier mooted the figure of five to seven million. Officials in Gujarat had indicated that between one lakh

to two lakh people would welcome Mr Trump, who will be accompanied by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, at the newly-constructed Motera Stadium there and the roadshow from there to the stadium that will take place just before that.

"I hear they're going to have 10 million people. They say anywhere from six to 10 million people are going to be showing up along the route to one of the largest stadiums in the world, the largest cricket stadium in the world," Mr

Trump was quoted as saying in a media

reports from the US during a re-election campaign rally in Colorado Springs, Colorado. "Prime Minister Modi said we will have 10 million people to greet you. Here's my problem, we have a packed house. We have a lot of people, thousands of people who couldn't get in. It's going to look like peanuts from now on. I'll never be satisfied with the crowd if we have 10 million in India," the US President further said the US rally.

Sources said the visit of President Trump's immediate family members including wife Melania, daughter Ivanka and son-in-law Jared Kushner is an indication of how important the US President views this visit as these are his "closest advisers". Sources also drew parallels with Mr Trump's G-20 visit to Osaka last year when he had also taken his daughter Ivanka along.

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INDIAN WOMEN STUN AUSSIES

India completed an unlikely turnaround to open the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2020 in style with a pulsating win over defending champions Australia.



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FLYING START

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FRESH ROW

Giriraj: India paying price for not sending Muslims to Pak

NAYEAR AZAD | DC
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Union minister Giriraj Singh on Friday stoked a fresh controversy with his statement that the country is paying the price for not sending all Muslims to Pakistan and bringing Hindus at the time of independence. He gave the statement while leading a campaign in support of CAA, NPR and NRC in Bihar's Purnea which has a sizeable Muslim population. "Our forefathers made a mistake by not sending our Muslim brothers to Pakistan and bringing Hindus at the time of independence. The whole country is paying the price today for the mistake they committed", Union minister Giriraj Singh said.

With Assembly elections in the state slated to be held in November this year, political temperature has been high since the Citizenship (Amendment) Act came into force. The



state has been witnessing massive anti-CAA protests in several districts including Patna, Begusarai and Gaya.

While CPI leader and former JNUSU President Kanhaiya Kumar has been leading anti-CAA campaign through his statewide 'Jan Gan Man Yatra' BJP's firebrand leader and Union Minister Giriraj Singh is trying to reach out to the masses in support of the Citizenship Act. Targeting the Opposition RJD-Congress combine during the occasion he said that "all these political forces including the tukde tukde gang want to convert India into Pakistan".

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IN BRIEF

Rare tumour in Tanzanian's jaw removed

Chennai: SIMS (SRM Institutes for Medical Science) Hospital ended a 38-year-old Tanzanian patient's pain of 14 years caused by more than 1 kg weighing Ameloblastoma in the lower jaw. Lack of early medical intervention and diagnostic facility in his country, made it difficult for him to chew and eat his food. With a defective and continuously increasing lump in the jawbone, the Tanzanian patient was referred to SIMS, Vadapalani, Chennai by his Government for a holistic treatment. Dr. K. Sridhar, head-craniofacial, aesthetic and plastic surgery, SIMS, said, "We diagnosed the lump to be an Ameloblastoma that required complex surgical correction, given its unusual size. It required a reconstruction of the entire mandible including both sides of the jaw. A complex virtual planning in computer was required to have a final result for a natural appearance." "The preparation with key advanced 3-Dimensional CT techniques of medical image processing and printing and fabricated virtual model significantly improves the quality and efficiency of the surgery, with less time-consumed at the operation theatre and the patient satisfaction with both the recovery of oral function and appearance," the doctor concluded.

US teacher gets cartilage repaired

Chennai: Apollo Hospitals performed a One-step Minced Cartilage Procedure on a 69 year-old American Lady who was affected with Grade 3 Osteoarthritis (Knee Joint). Dr. Madhan Thiruvengada, senior consultant orthopedic surgeon, Apollo Hospitals and team did the minimally invasive all autologous cartilage repair surgery. Ms. Sarah Hassler, who is a teacher, felt growing knee pain that disturbed her daily work routine. Dr. Madhan Thiruvengada, diagnosed her with Grade 3 Osteoarthritis defect. Osteoarthritis of the knee is the most common problem worldwide leading to disability. Sarah underwent the new "One-step Minced Cartilage Procedure" which preserves the patient's natural joint for many years. Dr. Madhan Thiruvengada said, "The One-step Minced Cartilage Procedure transplants a portion of a healthy cartilage particulated from the same knee of the patient through a key-hole incision along with a bioactive material to the damaged portion of the cartilage, thereby reducing recovery time. The entire procedure is autologous, there is no usage of chemical agents during the procedure, making it a completely safe procedure for the patient."

Miyawaki makes a mark

Mini forest getting ready in Kotturpuram



Green initiative at Kotturpuram.

T.SUDHEESH | DC CHENNAI, FEB. 21

Chennai, for the last few years, has seen a lot of initiatives from various quarters including the state government, non-governmental organisations and corporate companies for improving its green cover through the Miyawaki model pioneered by Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki. The city dwellers woke up to the necessity of greenery just because the city came under 'very poor' air quality with Air

Quality Index (AQI) of over 301.

The Chennai corporation administration, which is pushing this urban forest method to improve green cover, has been quite successful in galvanizing people to take up green initiatives. Recently, the corporation administration introduced the method in Kotturpuram and Royala Nagar in Ramapuram.

According to corporation commissioner G. Prakash, an urban forest will be created using the Miyawaki method by

planting native saplings. The Japanese method turned popular among people as it ensures the plant growth 10 times faster and 30 times denser compared to other techniques. It will help in planting dozens of native species in the same area, and becomes maintenance-free after the first three years.

The method was actively pursued by the Chennai corporation after the government announced support for growing Miyawaki forests. Inspired by the efficacy of

the method, S.P. Velumani, minister for municipal administration, rural development and implementation of special programme, announced last year that Miyawaki forests would be grown in Chennai.

"Miyawaki, a Japanese-densely-foliated green landscape, is being employed to reduce environmental pollution and improve air pollution in Chennai. For the first time, trees were planted in the land situated in Kotturpuram, Chennai," said the minister.

NATIVE TREES GROWN IN LESSER SPACE

Hundreds of thousands of saplings have been planted across the city under this method that involves plantation of native tree species at proximity to each other, reducing the space between any two trees. As the saplings grow into tall canopy trees, they block the sunlight almost entirely, preventing weeds and shorter plants from growing. The resulting densely wooded forest makes it difficult for even humans and animals to enter. The greater variety of native trees in lesser space can be realised with this method, making it ideal for urban areas.

MAKING THE RIGHT THUVAKKAM

Thuvakkam, an NGO, has been implementing the method at various government schools across Chennai. They have set up at least 13 forests including over 5,000-odd trees across the city since 2018. All the forests are being properly maintained with the assistance of corporation authorities.

Krishna Kumar Suresh, the founder of Thuvakkam, says the main challenge for developing this model is to find out suitability of plants to the soil in the planned area. "We have been doing it now after conducting soil test to know what kind of plant would be suited to the sand in the particular site. So we can maintain the survival rate of plants 80 to 90 percent. The main significance of the method is that result can be seen within six months. While saplings planted normally take at least 20-30 years to fully grow, Miyawaki reduces that time to just five or six years. Since multiple plant species are grown in the same space, they grow faster. The maintenance is not a challenge as the people are aware of the method. Chennaiites are so eager to go after Miyawaki now," he says.

"The saplings planted here (Second Street in Rayala Nagar (Ward 155) in Ramapuram (Zone 11-Valasaravakkam) were donated by Trees Foundation. They are currently being watered twice a day.

Rayala Nagar paves way for urban forest

DC CORRESPONDENT, CHENNAI, FEB. 21

The Rayala Nagar Residents Welfare Association in Ramapuram with the assistance of Chennai corporation last week, under Miyawaki method, planted as many as 762 tree saplings of 45 different species. Planted on 10,000 sq ft land, the saplings have started growing with proper care and maintenance by residents and corporation officials.

Kishor, president of the association, said that the saplings were planted in the Open Space Reservation (OSR) land taken over

by the civic body. "The idea on this method came to our mind after Trees Foundation, an eco-conservation organization in the town, approached us for a tree planting drive. We discussed the matter with residents. They interested. Subsequently, we spoke to corporation authorities who gave us all support to make it reality," he said.

"The saplings planted here (Second Street in Rayala Nagar (Ward 155) in Ramapuram (Zone 11-Valasaravakkam) were donated by Trees Foundation. They are currently being watered twice a day.



Residents of Rayala Nagar take care of saplings planted under Miyawaki method at Ramapuram.

CIVIC BODY BACKS RESIDENTS

Sasikala, the zonal officer, says wet wastes from residents would be used as fertilizer for the plants. "We supported the residents as part of corpora-

tion's efforts in creating more urban forests in the area. The residents have been given task to take care of plants. So far it is going well," she said. She

also requested corporate firms, educational institutions and non-governmental organisations to help create more such urban forests in the city.

Processions: Permission is norm, rejection exception



Sanjay Pinto



JUSTICE FOR ALL

With protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act intensifying, every fortnight, a template post on the Chennai city police Facebook page is put up. It is the invocation of Section 41(2) of the City Police Act, 1888, which empowers the Commissioner of Police to "by order in writing, prohibit any assembly, meeting or procession if he considers such prohibition to be necessary for the preservation of the public peace or public safety."

However, this power is not unbridled to take on the form of a complete ban. Under Section 41(3)(a), a person intending to take out a procession, can apply to the commissioner for permission, even if a prohibitory order is in force, "not less than five days prior to the date, on which the assembly or meeting is to be convened or the procession is to be formed."

With guaranteed fundamental rights to freedom of expression and the freedom to assemble peacefully and without arms under Articles 19(1)(a) and 19(1)(b) respectively of the Constitution of India at play, as observed by the Supreme Court in Babulal Parate Vs State of

Maharashtra (1961), it is imperative that a careful distinction is made between reasonable regulation and arbitrary exclusion. Courts have, in the past, cautioned the authorities that broad prophylactic rules impinging upon free expression and assembly are suspect. Precision of the regulation must be the touchstone.

Courts have held that the scope of reasonable restrictions, spelt out in Article 19(2) are wider if they relate to Article 19(1)(a) and should have a nexus with the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency, morality, contempt of court, defamation or incitement to offences. As far as Article 19(1)(b) is concerned, they should have nexus only with 2 things, namely, the interests of the sovereignty and

integrity of India or public order. I have always believed that a bigger threat to public order lies in stifling dissent leading to pent up anger. Either engage with protestors or let them vent their grievances, provided the method is peaceful. There lies the rub and the challenge for the police who may be damned if they permit a rally and damned if they don't!

A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in Himat Lal K Shah Vs Commissioner of Police, Ahmedabad (1972) had put the issue in perspective. "Public meetings in open spaces and public streets form part of the tradition of our national life. The state and the local authority have a virtual monopoly of every open space at which an outdoor meeting can be held. If, therefore, the state or municipality can constitutionally close both its streets and its parks entirely to public meetings, the practical result would be that it would be impossible to hold any open air meetings in any large city. The real problem is that of reconciling the city's function of providing for the exigencies of traffic in its streets and for the recreation of the public in its parks with its other obligations, of providing adequate places for public discussion in order to safeguard the guaranteed right of public assembly."

The apex court in Himat Lal went on to point out that "the basic assumption in a democratic polity is that government shall be based on

the consent of the governed. But this consent shall be free and grounded on adequate information and discussion. Public streets are the 'natural' places for expression of opinion and dissemination of ideas." However, the population and traffic constraints today are far greater than what existed 48 years ago when this judgment was pronounced.

Just like the dictum that bail is the norm and jail the exception, the Madras high court in Durai Sankar Vs Director General of Police (2014) with due reference to Supreme Court decisions, had held that "the grant of permission for convening an assembly or meeting and promoting a procession, is the rule and the refusal of permission is the exception." The principle of natural justice must be followed while refusing permission with the applicant being given a hearing, as mandated by sub section (4) of the statute. Disobedience of the order or contravention of any of the conditions imposed could, under sub section (6), entail in a month's imprisonment and/or a fine, possibly read with penal provisions and added punishment. There are clear exemptions laid down in sub section (8). The order would not apply to any "assembly or meeting of a purely religious character held in a recognised place of worship, any assembly or meeting gathered together purely for the purpose of taking part in sports, any procession on the occasion of

any wedding, funeral or similar domestic occurrence, or of any religious ceremony, or to any public meeting held under any statutory or other express legal authority."

To target the police for their stance during these circumstances would be barking up the wrong tree. The men in khakhi take orders from the political establishment. Which is why we have seen the absence of an even handed approach in some cases. A rally in support of the CAA reportedly leads to no cases booked but those who opposed it have been slapped with criminal charges.

The words of the Supreme Court in the landmark S.Rangarajan Vs P. Jagjivan Ram (1989) case are instructive. "Restrictions must be justified on the anvil of necessity and not the quick sand of convenience or expediency. Open criticism of Government policies and operations is not a ground for restricting expression. We must practice tolerance of the views of others."

Inconvenience to the common man during a protest may be inevitable. But the protestors must make an earnest attempt to minimise it. And stay alert for possible infiltrators. There is an old college hostel saying: "5 minutes depends on which side of the bathroom door you are!"

(The writer is an advocate at the Madras high court, columnist & author)

DONATE ORGANS



Workers creating sculptures to create awareness on organ donation as part of 'My hospital my pride' project at Kilpauk Medical College and Hospital.

Verizon India, IIT-M to train rural students

Chennai, Feb 21: IT major Verizon India has inked a pact with Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, to provide opportunities in the field of engineering to students living in rural areas.

According to the programme "ILab-1School", IIT-Madras is connecting top graduate laboratories to high schools of rural Tamil Nadu, a press release said. The initiative is fully funded by Verizon India as part of its commitment to empower rural communities. The "ILab-1School", in its second year, has covered over 800 students of 20 schools from Tiruvallur, Kancheepuram and Vellore districts.

"ILab-1School programme stands apart for its potential to transform science education in India in the long run," Verizon India MD Kalyani Sekar said. "We are confident that the programme makes quality science and technology education accessible for

hundreds of children," she said. Under the initiative, mentor groups from IIT-Madras Research Labs comprising students of MS, MTEch and Ph.D and faculty from science and engineering department would adopt rural government higher secondary schools.

"A total of 20 research lab of IIT Madras has been connected to 20 rural schools since June 2018 with over 150 graduate students from the institute having trained over 800 students in the ninth grade," IIT Madras project lead and associate professor, department of applied mechanics, Pijush Ghosh said. "We would like the higher education community to take up such models and implement them in schools in their regions so that together we can contribute towards the betterment and future of children in rural India," he said. —PTI

Technology has changed learning, teaching methodology: Rijiju

Chennai, Feb 21: Technology has changed education in a great way in recent years with learning and teaching methodology also under-going changes, Union minister of state for youth affairs and sports Kiren Rijiju said on Friday.

Delivering the second convocation address of the Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development at nearby Sriperumbudur, he also underlined the role of youths and parents in the nation's development. —PTI



Devotees offering prayers at Gangadeeswarar temple in Purasawalkam on the occasion of Maha Shivaratri.

Milling crowds wait patiently at Vengeeswarar temple

B. VIJAYALAKSHMI | DC CHENNAI, FEB. 21

Patience and devotion marked Maha Shivaratri celebrations at Vengeeswarar temple, Vadapalani, on Friday night. Thousands of devotees had been flocking to the temple since morning to seek His blessings. While a group of women was reciting Thevaram

and Thiruvasagam, a few men and women were glued to their books chanting slokas. Some devotees, including children were wearing rudraksha mala. Young and old didn't mind standing in serpentine queues to get darshan of deities. Two men were found holding huge garlands in their hands. Meanwhile, announce-

ments were made at regular intervals through public address system requesting devotees to take care of their valuables especially cell-phones. The streets leading to the temple were jam-packed. And the number of devotees stepping into the temple rose as Maha Shivaratri celebrations touched its crescendo at midnight.

IN BRIEF

Coops exams to be held in Chennai only

Chennai: Written exams for recruitment for vacant posts of 'assistants' and 'junior assistants' in Apex cooperative societies and cooperative banks in Tamil Nadu, scheduled for March 1, will be held only in Chennai this year, an official release said on Friday. The written exams for the above posts were to be held in six centres including Chennai, Tiruchy, Salem, Coimbatore, Madurai and Tirunelveli, as per the earlier schedule. But for administrative reasons, the exams will be held only in Chennai, the release added. Candidates will also be informed of this change accordingly through email and SMS messages, said the Registrar of Cooperatives, K Govindaraj.

Fishing boat owners' assn head killed

Chennai: A local DMK worker was hacked to death by six-member gang here on Friday. According to Kasimedu police, the dead has been identified as Kuppan, in Kasimedu who is president of Fishing Boat Owners Association. The incident took place at 7.30pm while he was going for work. The gang chased him down and hacked with country sword. The gang escaped from the spot after the incident. Though the local people rushed him to nearby hospital, his life could not be saved. The gang suspected to be ganja mafia. An investigation has been launched into the incident, said the police.

Bangladesh boy's spine tumour removed

Chennai: A 12-year-old boy from Bangladesh, diagnosed with a giant nerve sheath tumour covering the entire lower part of the neck, was removed successfully in a 12-hour marathon single-stage surgery by a medical team at Gleneagles Global Health City, Chennai. The boy's condition was very critical as the tumour was extending into the left side of the neck and chest cavity. A team of doctors decided to remove this large tumour in a single stage surgery. Dr Nigel Symms, senior consultant neurosurgeon, Gleneagles Global Health City, said, "The advantage of single-stage surgery is less amount of blood loss, less chances of infection, avoiding a second surgery and a shorter hospital stay. These kinds of the tumours are benign schwannoma and are slow-growing; if not diagnosed early may cause serious neurological deficits and instability of the spine."



12-year-old boy from Bangladesh with team of doctors after a giant nerve sheath tumour covering the entire lower part of the neck, was removed successfully in a 12-hour marathon single-stage surgery by a medical team at Gleneagles Global Health City, Chennai. —DC

Restore Loop Road-Besant Nagar link stretch: HC 'Restore connecting road to ease traffic on Beach road'

J.STALIN | DC CHENNAI, FEB 21

The Madras high court has suggested that the state government may explore the possibility of restoring the existing connecting road from Loop Road to Besant Nagar, which was in a damaged condition, so as to ease the traffic congestion along Greenways road, Thiru Vi.Ka Bridge and Adyar, where nearly 36,000 vehicles were plying every day. A division bench comprising Justices Vineet Kothari and R.Suresh Kumar made the suggestion while passing further interim orders on a PIL filed by Fishermen Care. The matter relates to cleaning Marina Beach and shifting of fishermen. "It seems that the existing connecting road from Loop Road to Besant Nagar, which is said to have been destroyed in the floods of 1970's or so, still exists in a damaged condition and therefore, the Greater Chennai Corporation and State Authorities may explore the possibilities of again constructing a proper wide road connecting the said Loop Road to Besant Nagar area, which will not only create alternative road to reduce the burden of traffic on the Beach Road via D.G.S.Dinakaran Road to Adyar area including Thiru.Vi.Ka Bridge upto Airport, but also will

provide alternate suitable motorable road for traffic also", the bench added. The bench also suggested creating two overhead foot bridges with sufficient head height so as not to cause any obstruction in the free flow of traffic from the Sea-side of the Loop Road to the said fish market area to be located in the Two Acres of land for facilitating the passage of fishermen from the sea-side to the market area, without the need for them to cross the Loop Road itself, the bench added. The bench said Additional advocate general S.R.Rajagopal has undertaken to get the above two proposals examined and produce the Feasibility Report before this court on the next date of hearing. The bench said from a perusal of the enumeration report, it was seen that out of 356 vendors, some of the persons named in the list have not produced their relevant documents and therefore, their applications were not complete. The said process also shall be completed within three weeks from now and the revised complete list of the fish vendors of that area may be produced on the next date of hearing. Only the local residents duly identified by the Fisheries Department in the complete list to be furnished on the next date of hearing will be entitled for

allotment in the new market to be created in the one acre of land, the bench added. The bench said AAG submitted that a temporary fish market was proposed on the one acre of land out of the two acres of land allotted for the said purpose and tenders may be permitted to be issued on March 3, 2020 and the expected date of completion on the said site was stated to be June 30, 2020. Besides this, the AAG submitted on the remaining one acre of land, which has been flattened and cleaned, the Chennai Corporation and Police Department were taking steps for diverting the parking by the customers, who come to the Loop Road for purchase of fish and adequate measures were being taken to depute traffic police personnel to direct the customers and persons who come to the said fish market to park their vehicles in the said parking place only. He also submitted that some area out of the said space of one acre will also be provided to the fishermen as a temporary selling space in that area itself so that they can be encouraged to readily sell the fish to the customers parking their vehicles there, for the time being, till the aforesaid temporary structure, for which tenders were now to be issued, was completed by June 30, 2020. "The afore-

said proposal from the side of the Chennai Corporation and Police Department are taken on record and they are approved. The respective departments may go ahead with this plan and encourage the fishermen to carry on their fish selling business on the said allotted space now onwards", the bench added. The bench said the AAG also indicated that besides local fishermen, who were residing in the Loop Road area, other fishermen/traders also bring their fish which they catch in other areas also on the said Loop road and sell their fish here, whereas the said area was never intended to be allowed to be used as a fish market to others who were not the local residents in that area and who catch their fish in other area. "The State Administration can go ahead and restrict the other fishermen, who are not residing in the said Loop road area itself and who catch their fish elsewhere and bring the same for sale here. With the aforesaid directions, it is expected that both police and corporation personnel will ensure free flow of traffic on the Loop road area on all days on 24x7 basis especially throughout the congestion hours of morning and evening", the bench added and posted to March 18, further hearing of the case.

PIL to stop quarry operation in Nagapattinam district

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB 21

A Public Interest Litigation has been filed in the Madras high court to direct the authorities to stop the quarrying operation at Thiruchitrambalam which is adjacent to Kumaramangalam, where a Check Dam is being constructed on the Kollidam river. A division bench comprising Justices M. Sathyanarayanan and R.Hemalatha before whom the PIL filed by C.Mohan Kumar, former Union Organiser of the Kadalangudi Union of Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi, came up for hearing, posted to March 13, further hearing of the case, after Additional government pleader R. Vijayakumar took notice on behalf of the Nagapattinam District Collector, PWD and three others. Petitioner's counsel

P.Vijendran submitted that the Cauvery delta was the "Bowl of the Rice". It has been losing its nomenclature slowly due to various reasons including failure of monsoon. The government has permitted the private quarry operators. Totally 9 quarries were running between 26 km. Therefore, the ground water level was depleted further. Totally 7 water pumping stations has been functioning in the area. It gives drinking water to the 14 Panchayats in Seerkazhi Panchayat Union, 7 Village panchayat in the Kollidam Union, 19 Village Panchayat in Mayiladuthurai, he added. He said former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu had announced in the legislative assembly in the year 2014 that Rs 430 crore was allocated for the construction of Check Dam which was announced under Rule 110 of the

Tamil Nadu State Assembly Rules. However, it was not implemented. Therefore, he filed a petition, which was disposed of on July 29, 2019. Drinking water was supplied four hours per day while the combined drinking water project was implemented. But, now it was reduced to half an hour per day. This being the factual position, he came to understand that the government has decided to start sand quarry at Thiruchitrambalam which was adjacent to Kumaramangalam, where a check dam was being constructed. If the quarry was permitted to operate, the construction of check dam would be affected and in the result the ground water will be further depleted. Therefore, he sent representations to the authorities to stop quarry operation. But there was no response, he added. Saseendran said the government arranged for ambulances to bring the bodies of the victims to their hometowns. "A total of 19 persons lost their lives in the accident. The last rites of many (15) have been completed," he told PTI. Crime Branch Police ADGP Tomin Thachankary, a former Managing Director of KSRTC, visited the family of Gireesh, the driver of the ill-fated bus. "It's a very sad day. I had honoured both Gireesh and Baiju (conductor) for their selfless services in the past. They were an asset to KSRTC. This is a great loss to their family and to KSRTC," Thachankary told reporters. —PTI

Kerala bids adieu to TN bus mishap victims

Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala on Friday bid a tearful adieu to the victims of the ghastly road mishap involving state-run KSRTC bus and a container lorry in neighbouring Tamil Nadu. The bodies of all the 19 passengers killed in the mishap on Thursday had been brought to the state after post-mortem and 15 of them laid to rest, state Transport minister A. K. Saseendran said. Nineteen passengers were killed and 27 injured when a file-laden container lorry crossed into a wrong lane and rammed into the oncoming Ernakulam-bound Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) bus on the Salem-Kochi highway at Avinashi, 40 km from Coimbatore, around 4 am.

SUBWAY REVAMPED



Thousand Lights subway opened after renovation on Anna Salai on Friday. —DC

HC dismisses petition from Puducherry CM

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB 21

The Madras high court has dismissed a petition filed by the Chief Minister of Puducherry, which sought to declare as illegal and ultra vires, the action of the Administrator of Puducherry in differing with the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers and referring the same to the Union government and the consequential decision of the Union government to continue with DBT (Cash) scheme in lieu of distribution of free rice under the Puducherry Free Rice Scheme. Dismissing the petition filed by V.Narayanasamy, Chief Minister of Puducherry, Justice C.V. Karthikeyan said under the provisions of the



Justice C.V. Karthikeyan said under the provisions of the Union Territory Act, the decision of the President is binding on the Administrator and Ministers. The decision on behalf of the President will be taken by the Ministry of Home Affairs and such decision is for DBT and binding on Administrator as well as Ministers

Union Territory Act, the decision of the President is binding on the Administrator and Ministers. Under the law governing UT, the decision on behalf of the President will be taken by the Ministry of Home Affairs and such decision is for DBT and binding on the Administrator as well as Ministers, the judge added.

In his petition, Narayanasamy also sought a direction for continuation of the policy of the government of puducherry as per the Puducherry Free Supply of Rice, Edible Oil and other essential food grains every month to all ration card holders in kind.

Opium worth ₹2.33cr marked as cumin candy seized; 1 held

Chennai, Feb 21: Customs officials have seized 11.68 kg of opium worth ₹2.33 crore being sent as a consignment marked 'cumin candy' to Australia, from a warehouse here. Department officials acting on a tip recovered the contraband on Wednesday and arrested the consignor who had declared the parcel bound for Australia as 'Jeera Goli' (cumin candy). Officials also seized white crystalline powder suspected to be pseudo ephedrine from a parcel which was declared as sarees and garments. Each saree was wrapped in two cardboard sheets. As they were heavy, the officials on opening the sheets found white crystalline powder inside. A release said on Friday 4.78 kg of white crystalline powder suspected to be pseudo

ephedrine and valued at ₹7 lakh was recovered. The customs department said opium is a highly addictive narcotic drug obtained from poppy plant used in the manufacture of heroin. On the other hand, pseudo ephedrine is used in manufacturing amphetamines, a psychotropic substance which increases alertness and awareness, according to the release. —PTI

Each saree was wrapped in two cardboard sheets. As they were heavy, the officials on opening the sheets found white crystalline powder inside. A release said on Friday 4.78 kg of white crystalline powder suspected to be pseudo

Min to take legal action against Bedi over govt schemes

Puducherry Feb 21 (PTI) Puducherry Minister Malladi Krishna Rao on Friday said he would take legal action against Lieutenant Governor Kiran Bedi for allegedly interrupting implementation of developmental schemes, a charge denied vehemently by her. Addressing reporters here, the minister of health and tourism accused Bedi of intimidating IAS officers, particularly Tamil IAS officers. Referring to the recent findings of the CBI that none of the six officers of the territorial administra-

tion had committed any wrong in the selection and admission of students to privately managed medical colleges in 2017, he said, "The six had suffered mental agony because of the allegations the Lieutenant Governor had made against them to the CBI through the Medical Council of India. "What is her answer to the harassment the officers had suffered because of her authoritative stance," he asked. Bedi had also sent allegedly adverse reports against 'honest' officers to the Union Home Ministry, he said without disclosing

their names. Rao said his departments were not able to implement any centrally sponsored schemes or schemes evolved by the territorial government because of the alleged intervention of Bedi. "I will never compromise and I have seen several Kiran Bedis in my career and I will file a case against her in the next one week to bring justice to the people and to ensure Bedi's intervention does not continue," Rao said. He said the private medical colleges have been earmarking seats under government quota every year

only through the negotiations the government was holding with the managements. "We will now pass a Bill in the forthcoming budget session of the assembly to specifically direct the medical colleges to earmark 50 per cent of the total seats in MBBS to government sponsored students and no medical college could play hide-and-seek game," he said. The Bill had been prepared and after a cabinet approval the Bill would be adopted in the House which is likely to have the budget session in the last week of

March or early April. He said Bedi has been approaching the government departments in the Central government asking them not to clear any grants for Puducherry. "Should this be the style of functioning of a Lieutenant Governor," he asked. He said Bedi was rejected by the people in the Assembly polls in 2016 in New Delhi and was later appointed to the gubernatorial post. "We are elected by the people and hence the attitude of overbearing on her part would end in a fiasco," he said adding that the ₹137.28-crore

Flood Wall and Soil Erosion Scheme for Yanam had also been stalled by the Lieutenant Governor without any justification. Reacting to the minister's allegations, Bedi dubbed them as false and said it was a clear case of spreading misinformation. On the charge that she was blocking implementation of various schemes ever since she assumed office in 2016 and that he would launch legal action against her, the former IPS officer said she was not blocking any financially sound and professionally vetted proposals. —PTI



Renovation work at RBI subway on Rajaji Salai in Chennai goes on at a tardy pace inconveniencing commuters. —DC

Tamil Nadu Protected Agricultural Zone Development Bill, 2020

Delta farmers demand clarification

TELLING QUESTIONS Won't Vedanta, ONGC, given nod already, be stopped? Will govt seek experts' opinion? Why some blocks in districts left out?

Oil exploration began 30 yrs ago

According to ONGC sources, oil exploration activities started in Cauvery basin even before 1990. An oil refinery was set up there. Contribution of Cauvery basin to oil production of the country was only 0.9 per cent. The ONGC's activities have been going on for the past 30 years, but recently its activities met with stiff resistance from people of Kathiramanallur near Kumbakonam. The ONGC struck oil and gas at places like Kuttalam near Mayiladuthurai and around Tiruvarur area.

The main issue which the people of the delta want the Bill to address is the proposed hydrocarbon projects which they want to be stopped at any cost.

The plan for proposed hydrocarbon projects is dividing Tamil Nadu into two zones and extract hydrocarbon in 274 places. Zone-I comprises areas from Villupuram to Pudukchery in which 116 wells will be dug. Zone-II is from Cuddalore to Vedaranyam in Nagapattinam district where 158 wells will be drilled.

Recap of brewing tension

The Vedanta group, and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd (ONGC) have been given permission to take up the projects. This led to various agitations in the delta like protest demonstrations, human chains, fast etc. In the recently issued central government order dated January 16 amendment has been done to Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) notification of 2006. This amendment has been issued in response to a request for exemption from public hearing by companies like Vedanta Ltd which along with ONGC has been given permission to extract hydrocarbon in Cauvery delta.

Sources say in March and April 2019, Vedanta has applied for getting environment clearance for carrying out exploratory activities on 4178 sq-km in union territory of Puduchery, Villupuram, Cuddalore and Nagapattinam districts in Tamil Nadu. The ONGC also applied for the same. The plan is to dig 274 exploratory wells by Vedanta and 40 wells by ONGC using dangerous techniques like seismic testing and hydraulic fracturing. The January 16 order, it is alleged, has been issued in response to this. As per the un-amended EIA notification 2006, any project to explore hydrocarbon was listed under category A which requires assessment of environment impacts, incorporation of environment safeguards and withstanding of the scrutiny of public for the project and EIA report. Current amendment exempts all oil and gas exploration activities, even if they are involved with techniques like seismic testing and hydraulic fracturing, from having to get environment impact assessment and public hearing. Hence all the fore.

Senior DMK leader Durai Murugan hospitalised

Chennai: Senior DMK leader, party Treasurer and opposition deputy leader in the Tamil Nadu Assembly, Mr. Durai Murugan, was admitted to a private hospital in the city on Friday afternoon. Mr. Durai Murugan, after lunch, suddenly felt uneasy and was rushed to the Sri Ramachandra hospital, where doctors are attending on him and conducting various tests.

Commission celebrates Mother Language Day

Chennai: International Mother Language Day was celebrated in the State Official Language (Legislative) Commission on Friday. Commission chairman justice P.Kalayarasan, retired Madras HC judge, who presided over the function, spoke on the significance of the day. B. Julia Shanthi, member secretary, welcomed the gathering. Commission members S. Poovalingam, A. Sankaran, S. Bhaskaran, Dr M. Muthuvelu, and N.Velu spoke on the occasion. Renganathan, deputy secretary, delivered the vote of thanks.

Party leaders, scholars extend wishes

Chennai: Leaders of various political parties and scholars on Friday emphasised the importance of one's 'Mother Tongue', the due respect that should be accorded to it and its role in one's education and cultural development and the need for youth to realise its value. In separate messages on the occasion of 'World Mother Tongue Day', leaders who greeted the people included Chief Minister, Edappadi K Palaniswami, Deputy Chief Minister, O. Panneerselvam, DMK President M.K. Stalin, TMC leader G K Vasan and eminent Tamil Scholar and former Vice Chancellor of the Tamil University, Thanjavur, Dr Avvai Natarajan, among others.

Mother birth anniv: People throng Aurobindo ashram

Puducherry: People from across the country thronged the Aurobindo Ashram here to pay tribute to the Mother (Mira Alfasa) at her memorial on the premises of the ashram on her 142 birth anniversary on Friday. Ashram sources said a mass meditation was also held at the memorials of the Mother and the spiritual stalwart Aurobindo in the morning and all those visiting the ashram were also let to visit the room where the Mother had carried out her spiritual experiments.

G. SRINIVASAN | DC THANJAVUR, FEB 21

While welcoming the adoption of 'Tamil Nadu protected agricultural zone development bill 2020' by Chief Minister Edappadi K.Palaniswami in the Assembly on Thursday, farmers of Cauvery delta districts demanded "clarity" on various issues and incorporate changes and make the bill truly protective of the Cauvery delta.

P. Maniarasan, coordinator of Cauvery Urimal Meetpu Kuzhu expressed apprehension that the proposed hydrocarbon projects may not be stopped by the bill as it said that it will not affect ongoing and approved projects. Though farmers have been opposing proposed coal-bed methane project (which was stopped by AIADMK government led by former chief minister J.Jayalalitha) and ONGC activities, their main opposition now is the proposed hydrocarbon projects approved by the Central government.

"Vedanta group and ONGC have been given permission by Central

government to extract hydrocarbons in Cauvery delta. If these were not to be stopped by the Bill, there is no point in bringing it and it will not serve the purpose for which it is brought ie protecting the delta as an agriculture zone," said Maniarasan.

The bill has been drafted in haste and it should have included Musiri, Lalgudi and Pullambadi blocks in Tiruchy district, Kulithalai in Karur district., Thirumanur in Ariyalur district and Chdiambaram in Cuddalore district, he felt.

"Chief Minister should seek expert opinions and incorporate changes in the Bill before sending it to Governor. The Bill should be sent to a select committee," he urged.

Meanwhile, farmers of Thanjavur district who attended the monthly grievances day meeting at the collectorate said that ban should be on the ongoing projects too and approved oil and gas projects, particularly proposed hydrocarbon extraction project, lest the exercise will become meaningless. Yet, they welcomed the Bill.

'Enact comprehensive law to protect region'

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB.21

Slamming that the Tamil Nadu Protected Agricultural Zone Development Act, 2020, would not protect the agricultural activities in the Cauvery delta region, Poovulagin Nanbargal, an NGO, has demanded the government to enact a comprehensive legislation to safeguard the region.

In a statement Poovulagin Nanbargal, on Friday stated that the Act is nothing but a mirage. People including farmers have been waging a battle against the hydrocarbon project in the delta region for more than a decade. Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami last week made an announcement in Thalavasaal that considering the demand of people the government would make Cauvery delta as protected special agriculture zone. Farmers, civil societies and activists had lauded the government move. However, their hope was dashed when

The Bill to prevent the setting up of hydrocarbon or similar projects in the Cauvery delta region — The Tamil Nadu Protected Agricultural Zone Development Act, 2020, was passed in the Assembly on Thursday

the Bill to prevent the setting up of hydrocarbon or similar projects in the Cauvery delta region — The Tamil Nadu Protected Agricultural Zone Development Act, 2020, was tabled in the Assembly on Thursday. The government stated that the existing projects are not covered as per section 4(2)1a of the Act. The delta region was seriously affected due to implementation of the hydrocarbon project. The Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP) had refused to withdraw all the existing hydrocarbon wells. In

addition to the old 700 wells the government allotted 489 new wells to Vedanta and ONGC last year. "If all these wells are allowed to operate in the region, protected special agriculture zone would be seriously affected", the NGO said.

The government has not withdrawn Petroleum, Chemicals and Petrochemical Investment Regions (PCPIR). This scheme covers 57,000 acres of land in 45 villages in Cuddalore and Nagapattinam districts. As a part of the project Haldia Petrochemicals Limited (HPL) may invest ₹50,000 crore for setting up a petroleum refinery-cum-petrochemical complex in Cuddalore district. The CPCL also proposed to increase its capacity from 1 million tonne to 10 million tonnes of oil exploration in Nagapattinam district. Functioning of these two oil refineries and gas pipe lines would pose a threat to the delta region. As per the Act, schedule

1, the protected agricultural zone covers the districts of Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, Nagapattinam districts, Kattumannarkoil, Melbhuvanagiri, Keeralpalayam, Parangipettai and Kumaratchi blocks of Cuddalore district besides Aranthangi, Avudaiyarkoil, Manamalkudi, Thiruvarangulam and Karambakkudi blocks in Pudukkottai district. The Act has left out Chidambaram taluk in Cuddalore, Lalgudi in Tiruchy districts.

A study by Prof Janakaraj revealed that delta region has been sinking and state lost 5,000 acres of coastline in the past two decades. The government has not also spelt out steps to curb sand quarrying in the delta region.

The government should constitute a high-power committee involving experts, scientists, farmers and legal luminaries to introduce comprehensive act to protect the farmers and agricultural activities in the region. The NGO stated.

A small but necessary step to save Cauvery delta

M. R. VENKATESH | DC CHENNAI, FEB. 21

Eight years ago, it was a winter of discontent when the Cauvery delta was on the boil again. A crucial meeting of all stakeholders including farmers, economists and scientists took place in Thanjavur towards the end of December 2012 to discuss the implications of the Centre giving approval to a Gurgaon-based company then for drilling methane gas from coal-beds at the heart of Tamil Nadu's rice bowl.

The consensus was loud and clear, not to disturb the ecological fragility of the Cauvery delta. A top executive of the Great Eastern Energy Corporation Limited (GEEL), which by then had already been extracting methane gas "successfully" from coal beds in Raniganj in Asansol area of West Bengal, which had got the nod to extract gas from the "crevices of the lignite belt" in Mannargudi block, was also there to explain the company's point of view.

The Directorate general of Hydrocarbons, technical arm of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Ministry in Delhi, had then assessed a potential of 0.98 trillion cubic feet (tcf) of methane gas in the Cauvery delta, though the

company then was only to take up pilot drilling. Veteran agriculturist, himself a geologist-turned-farmer, S Ranganathan, who was then also heading the 'Centre for Cauvery Delta Development Studies' summed up the delta farmers' apprehensions succinctly.

Mannargudi S Ranganathan had then argued that, already given the uncertain water flows in the Cauvery river, a project like this could worsen the groundwater scenario as huge quantities of water will need to be pumped out during extraction of the methane gas. It could add to the salinity and excess sodium content of the soil already facing such a threat due to sea water intrusion in the wake of the horrific December 2004 Tsunami, and in turn large tracts of cultivable lands in the delta into 'barren waste land'. The Cauvery delta, comprising Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam districts, has been an "ancient irrigation system since 2nd century AD and it will be drastically hit," Ranganathan had further stressed.

While the Central government was looking at "encouraging" such explorations to tap what



Mannargudi S. Ranganathan

is "relatively cheap, clean, non-conventional energy source" to not only help reduce India's oil import bills, but also pave way for her energy security in the long-term, the trade-offs, at that Thanjavur meeting of all the stakeholders, came into sharp collision: Energy security at the cost of food security and livelihood means of millions of farmers whose USP is at growing paddy?

As a Correspondent covering those tense days in Thanjavur district, I remember that meeting unwittingly became a turning point in the debate, which began to gain momentum over desirability of allowing hydrocarbon explorations

in Cauvery delta. The then Jayalalitha regime then saw the wisdom of stopping further work on the methane project. And the latest Central government's G.O., which even waived the public hearing requirement for hydrocarbon drilling projects including in Cauvery onshore, in effect has deepened the delta farmers' apprehensions.

It is in this larger backdrop which witnessed subsequent prolonged agitations by villagers of Neduvassal and Kathiramanallam as more exploratory drilling for oil by other players began to take shape, and sporadic tensions in places like Kudavasal, Kamalapuram and Kovilkalpal in Tiruvarur district, that the Edappadi K Palaniswami led AIADMK government enacting a Bill in the Assembly on Thursday, 'Tamil Nadu Protected Agricultural Zone Development Bill', banning eight categories of industrial activities, including oil, natural gas, coal-bed methane and shale gas explorations, is a small but necessary step.

Area-wise, it covers the heart of the Cauvery delta districts of Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam, besides

some blocks in Pudukkottai and Cuddalore districts. The Bill as enacted seems a watered down version of what Mr. Palaniswami had first announced at the function to lay the foundation stone for a state-of-art veterinary research institute and livestock farm at Talaivaasal in Salem district, as Karur, Tiruchirappalli and Ariyalur districts have been excluded from its scope.

That ongoing projects will not be affected by this Bill is a measure of the legal complexities involved. For instance, ever since the ONGC first struck oil in a well at Narimanam in Nagapattinam district in 1985 and commercial production beginning in 1989, followed by Kovilkalpal oil well, the Cauvery Basin was expected to produce about four lakh tonnes of crude oil annually.

This was sufficient for the Chennai Petroleum Corporation Limited (CPCL), now part of IOC, to build a small refinery at Panangudi in Nagapattinam district in 1993. Its capacity was scaled up from 0.50 million metric tonnes per annum (mmtpa) to 1.0 mmtpa later. Now, CPCL is planning to set up a major 9 mmtpa capacity

grassroots refinery at Panangudi at a cost of over Rs.37,000 crore, and finalization of the detailed feasibility report is underway. That refinery is expected to play an important role in not only meeting Tamil Nadu's future energy needs, but transforming the agro-centric profile of the delta with downstream units.

But from the State's agriculture scenario point of view, as per official data, consider the ground realities: Still 40 per cent of the population are directly dependent on farming for their livelihood, 92 per cent of farmers belonging to small and marginal categories, the Cauvery delta districts continue to be 'Tamil Nadu's rice bowl' accounting for nearly 35 per cent of the annual paddy production, and there has been "gradual decline" in the State's net crops sown area from 56.38 lakh hectares in the 1950s to 48.85 LH in 2011-12. Given these numbers, other supportive policy initiatives were urgently needed to save what little is left of the Cauvery delta as the principal food-growing basket. Even if the new Bill raises more issues, in Tamil Nadu's long-term interest it is overdue to balance between agriculture and industry.

Facilitate more investments in TN, CM urges envoys

D. SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, FEB. 21

State Chief Minister, Mr. Edappadi K Palaniswami on Friday urged foreign envoys to be "bridge builders" in facilitating more investments from their respective countries into Tamil Nadu, even while exploring possibilities of their respective state development funding agencies to invest in infrastructure development here.

"Your good offices should help to cement better ties between us," Mr. Palaniswami said, addressing a group of High Commissioners and Ambassadors at a 'Diplomatic Outreach' programme, organised by the External Affairs Ministry and the State government.

Lauding the assistance rendered by officials of various countries during his tri-nation tour last year to attract more FDI (direct foreign investment) to the State, Mr. Palaniswami also sought their cooperation to implement Tamil Nadu's government's 'Yaadum Oore' initiative to reach out to the Tamil Diaspora in various foreign countries and get them engaged economically. Mr. Palaniswami had launched the initiative during his visit to New York last



CM Edappadi K. Palaniswami with High Commissioners and ambassadors at a 'Diplomatic Outreach' programme, organised by the external affairs ministry and the state government.

September.

Mr. Palaniswami, while appreciating the role of foreign envoys in facilitating investments, identified eco-tourism and medical tourism in particular for great collaborative efforts between their respective countries and Tamil Nadu.

Referring to steps taken by his government to attract investments from various countries, he said 304 agreements envisaging outlay of

over Rs three lakh crore in the state were made during the Global Investors Meet last year. "Fifty-nine of the companies have commenced operations while the projects taken up by 219 companies are in various stages of execution", Palaniswami said.

The government has taken up various steps to introduce business-friendly measures including single window clearance, expedit-

ing procedures involved for companies planning to make investments in the state, he added.

Palaniswami also mentioned about his 2019 tour of the U.K, U.S and Dubai during which investments worth Rs 8,835 crore were committed by various companies. "Currently, various projects have been inaugurated," he said.

As part of those efforts, on Friday, a memorandum of

understanding was signed between TIDCO (Tamil Nadu Industries Development Corporation) and SIPCOT (State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu) to set up a Polymer textile park on a 250 acre land in Ponneri near here at an investment of Rs 217 crore. "The Park to be equipped with modern features will attract investments worth Rs 3,000 crore and generate 7,000 jobs", he said.

Mr. Palaniswami was optimistic that companies from various countries would take part in the proposed Mega Textile Park planned in Salem and Tuticorin districts. On the software front, Palaniswami said Tamil Nadu has become the 'Software as a Service (SaaS) Capital of India following the presence of large IT companies.

The MoU signed between TIDCO and National Industrial Corridor Development and Implementation Trust (NICIDIT) on Friday for the Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor will be a milestone in the progress of the state, he said, even as he recalled former Chief Minister's initiatives to make Tamil Nadu the "most investment friendly destination in Asia."

OPS promises cut in property stamp duty

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB. 21

The stamp duty rate imposed by the government for buying properties will be reduced after conducting consultations with all stakeholders including officials and the government", O. Panneerselvam, the Deputy Chief Minister, has said.

The Deputy CM was inaugurating FAIRPRO 2020 organised by the Confederation of Real Estate Developers Association of India (Credai) at Chennai Trade Centre at Nandambakkam here on Friday.

"Last time I met Credai officials, they took up with me the matter of reducing stamp duty for property deals. I had given them an assurance to cut the duty. I will take the matter seriously. The duty will be cut so that our government's goal of 'house for all' can be achieved. Apart from that a single window scheme will be also introduced to ease out the anomalies relating to property deals. The government will pro-



Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam at FAIRPRO 2020 organised by the Confederation of Real Estate Developers Association of India (Credai) at Chennai on Friday.

vide all support for builders to improve their business. I hope this year's FAIRPRO will draw more business than last year," said Mr Panneerselvam.

WS Habeeb, president, Credai Chennai, presided over the function. Rajesh Lakhoni, Secretary, Housing and Urban Development Department, D Karthikeyan, Member-Secretary, Chennai Metro-

politan Development Authority (CMDA) and Chandra Sekhar Sakhamuri, Commissioner, Directorate of Town and Country Planning (DTCP) attended the event. According to the organisers, as many as 70 developers will take part in the three-day property expo displaying over 400 residential projects with prices that range from ₹21 lakhs to ₹11 crore and above.

Police slap sedition charge on B'loru girl

Amulya raised pro-Pak slogans at anti-CAA stir

M.K. ASHOKA & M.B. GIRISH | DC BENGALURU, FEB. 21

Amulya Leona, a 19-year-old student had been handed over to judicial custody after police interrogation on Friday. She was arrested for shouting 'Pakistan Zindabad' on the dais during an anti-CAA protest organized at Freedom Park in the city on Thursday. Upparpet police who arrested her, slapped charges under IPC sections 124 A (sedition), 153 (A) (attacks upon the place of birth), 153 (B) (imputation, assertions prejudicial to national integration) and 504 (2) (intentional insult to provoke breach of peace) on her. AMIM President Asaduddin Owaisi who was present at the function, came running after hearing the Pakistan Zindabad slogan. He was going to the back stage to offer namaz. "These are crazy people who want to spoil the movement," he added. DCP Ramesh explained that they immediately took Amulya into custody for maintaining law and order and to

Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa said that Amulya may have Naxal connections and she will be investigated.

Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa said that Amulya may have Naxal connections and she will be investigated. Meanwhile, questions were raised if she was really anti-Indian? "I will not become a citizen of another country as I say zindabad to any other nation. I am an Indian citizen. It is my duty to respect my nation and work towards the welfare of the people of my country," she maintained in her Facebook account.

In this Facebook update, she starts by saying Hindustan Zindabad, then says Zindabad to Pakistan and later she takes the name of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Afghanistan, China and even Bhutan. She claims that whichever

the nation is, she would like to say zindabad to all.

She explains that, the concept of nation is but people. Whichever government serves people, they deserve a zindabad.

Meanwhile, the house of Amulya, who was arrested by the police for her pro-Pakistan sloganeering in Bengaluru on Thursday, located at Shivapura village in Koppa taluk of Chikkamagaluru, came under attack allegedly from right-wing Bajrang Dal activists, who pelted stones at the house and smashed the wooden window frames. Narrating the incident, Amulya's father Oswald Noronha (Vaji) says he left his house before Bajrang Dal activists stormed his house with stones and sticks and started attacking the windows. "I was a mute spectator to the attack on my house which was built about seven years back. I stood silently in the cover of darkness while the mob entered the house and started their attack despite people in the vicinity asking them not to do so," he recalled.

Congress, TDP fading out in Telangana, AP

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, FEB. 21

Following the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh, both Congress and the Telugu Desam (TD) are gradually losing out on their representation in the legislative bodies at the state and national levels. Their base is also getting eroded in both Telugu states. Incidentally, after April, the Congress would not have any representation in the Rajya Sabha from Telangana state, where the TD has no representation. In the biannual elections

to the upper House, slated for March, neither of the parties has a chance of winning a single seat in either state. The Congress ruled undivided AP for around five decades and the Telugu Desam did so for nine years. The TD was also at the helm in the residuary state of AP for five years. It may be recalled that four Rajya Sabha members of TD defected to the BJP and among them C.M. Ramesh, T.G. Venkatesh and Y.S. Chowdary are from AP, while Garikapati Mohan Rao remained the lone TD

MP from Telangana state.

From AP, TD has two Rajya Sabha members. One of them, Ms Thota Seetharama Lakshmi, is retiring on April 9, while Mr. Kanakamedala Ravindra Kumar will continue till April 2, 2024. Congress MPs T. Subbarami Reddy, K.V.P. Ramachandra Rao and M.A. Khan are retiring on April 9, from which date the party will have no RS member from the two states.

In AP, the Congress drew a blank in both Assembly and Legislative Council. It

was ditto with TD in the Telangana state Legislative Council.

In the 2018 TS Assembly elections, TD won two seats and one of them is supporting the TRS now. The Congress, which has one member in the TS Legislative Council, was dealt a severe blow when 12 of its MLAs jumped on to the TRS bandwagon, leaving it with just five members in the Assembly. While Congress has three MPs in Lok Sabha from Telangana state, it is likewise with TD in AP. Neither party can make

it to the Upper House till perhaps the next Assembly elections. As things stand, the prospects of Congress are rather dim in Telangana state and AP.

TD is almost washed out in TS and regaining power in AP does not seem very encouraging. Their making it to the Rajya Sabha will be dependent on how the two parties fare in the next Assembly elections.

The TD presently has a majority in the AP Legislative Council but then the Council is set to be abolished.

TENDERS / NOTICES

GREATER CHENNAI CORPORATION BUILDINGS DEPARTMENT
B.D.C.No. 81/3052/2018
e - SHORT RE TENDER NOTICE
Tenders are invited for the Superintending Engineer (Buildings) for the following work as per details furnished below
Construction of Temporary Fish Market at Loop Road in Ward-125, Zone-9
For more information see <http://tenders.gov.in> & www.chennaicorporation.gov.in
Tender Works Value approx. **Rs.58,43,826/-** EMD Amount **Rs.58,500/-**
Tender Date and Time: **03.03.2020 upto 3.00 P.M.**
Tender open Date and Time: **04.03.2020 at 3.30 P.M.**
DIPR/1020/Tender/2020 Superintending Engineer (Buildings)

GREATER CHENNAI CORPORATION Solid Waste Management Department
S.W.M.C.No.A7/0672/2020
Notice Inviting Tender
E- Tenders are invited for the following work in Single stage two cover system as detailed below.
The Superintending Engineer (SWM), Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC), invites online tender for "Selection of Concessionaire to process the Wet Waste handed over by the Greater Chennai Corporation and convert into Bio-CNG (100 MT Capacity per day) at Koyambud in Zone-X in DFBOT Model under PPP mode" are available online on www.tenders.gov.in from **06.03.2020 onwards.**
Date and time of Pre Bid Meeting: **18th March 2020 at 11.00 AM**
Last Date and Time of Submission of Bid: **08th April 2020 at 03.00 PM**
Bid Opening Date and Time: **09th April 2020 at 04.00 PM**
Cost of Tender Documents and EMD: **Rs.20,000/- + 12% GST EMD: Rs.9.75 Lakhs**
DIPR/1017/Tender/2020 Superintending Engineer/SWM

NORTHERN RAILWAY 'E'-TENDER NOTICE
Dy.CS/TE/WLDH acting for and on behalf of President of India issues Corrigendum to E-tender No. : NR-SNT-W-LDH67 (Design, supply, installation, wiring, testing & commissioning with part supply of materials for the Electronic interlocking (distributed) at Pathankot Junction on Firozpur division of Northern Railway).
1. **Certain Conditions in Tender Document have been modified.** Detail Changes to be checked on tender document uploaded through corrigendum on www.ireps.gov.in
2. **Certain items in Checklist for Guidance of bidder have been modified.** Detail Changes to be checked on www.ireps.gov.in
3. **Revised Tender Closing Date.** 12.03.2020
Tender Cost will remain the same.
Bidders will be able to submit their original/revised bids up to closing date & time only. Bids are to be submitted online only. Manual bids/offers are not allowed against this tender, and any manual offer received shall be ignored. No. NR-SNT-W-LDH-67
Dated: 19.02.2020 567/2020
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY TENDER NOTICE NO.05 DATE 19.02.2020
E-Mail: dycmcon@ner.railnet.gov.in Fax No. 0551-2282448
Website: www.ireps.gov.in
Invitation of tenders through e-Procurement system
Dy Chief Material Manager/Con, North Eastern Railway, Gorakhpur, and on behalf of The President of India, invites tenders through e-Procurement system for the supply of the following items. Complete description of the item and other condition are available on website www.ireps.gov.in.
Item No. & Due Date Brief Description of Stores Qty. Required Earnest Money ₹
1. 17195179 24.03.2020 Yellow aspect LED signal 110V AC, retrofittable in existing CLS housing 372 Nos. 60,140/-
2. 17195161 24.03.2020 Relay AC immune plug in type sty/le QB/CAT DC biased point contact for 24V, 2F (HD) 4B contacts. 700 Nos. 53,690/-
Note: 1. Above tenders are available on IREPS site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in. The firm desiring to participate against e/tender are advised to electronically regd. themselves on the above website for which they would require to obtain class-II digital certificate (if already not obtained) from certifying agencies authorized under govt. of India IT Act, 2000. Manual offers will not be accepted. 2. Advertised tender of Dy. Chief Material Manager/Con, NER, Gorakhpur, are being opened through EPS (E-Procurement System) only. Firms desiring to participate in Dy. Chief Material Manager/Con, NER/GKP should obtain necessary digital certificate and get themselves registered with CRIS/NE Delhi. Necessary details in this regard can be obtained from the website <http://www.ireps.gov.in>. 3. In case of difference between English and Hindi version of the tender notice the English version shall prevail. 4. Head of allocation towards cost of Earnest Money & S D money is 00844556. 5. Items above are reserved to be procured from RDSO approved source only.
CPROS-65 Dy Chief Material Manager/Con, N.E.R., Gorakhpur
About any passenger amenity complain SMS on Mobile No. 09794845955
"DO NOT TRAVEL WITH INFLAMMABLE ARTICLE IN TRAIN"

punjab national bank 35, Mint Street, Chennai - 600 079. Phone: 044 - 2520 2211.
MINT STREET BRANCH
"In terms of proviso to Rules 3 (1) of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, the service is effected of the below mentioned demand notice dated, the contents of which is hereunder published."
DEMAND NOTICE
Notice US 13(2) of the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002
You, the undermentioned borrower is hereby informed that the Bank has initiated proceedings against you under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and that the notice under 13 (2) of the Act sent to you by Registered Post Ack. Due has been returned undelivered. Hence you are hereby called upon to take notice and pay the outstanding loan amount mentioned against the said account with interest accruing therefrom within 60 days from the date of this publication, failing which the Bank will proceed against you by exercising its right under Sub-Sec. (4) of Section 13 of the Act by enforcing the below mentioned security to realize its dues with interests and costs. It is needless to mention that this notice is addressed to you without prejudice to any other remedy available to the Bank. Your attention is hereby drawn invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act in respect of time available to you to redeem the secured assets.
Borrower/Mortgagor: Mrs.D.Indumathi, W/o.Mr.Gopi Chander, Borrower: Mr.V.Gopichander, Both at, Door No. 25, Muthu Mudali Street, Vyasaradi, Chennai-600039; (A/c.No.252400NC00166591) Demand Notice Dated: 16.11.2019; NPA Date: 08.01.2019; Facility: Term Loan (Housing)-Rs.8,04,000/- Outstanding Amount: Rs.3,97,061/- as on 15.11.2019 with further interest and charges w.e.f. 01.01.2019 until payment in full.
Description of the Property: Property Owned by Mrs.D.Indumathi. All the piece and parcel of land and building bearing New Door No.25, old No.15 C, Muthu Mudali street, Vyasaradi, Chennai-600039, comprised in C.S. 89 and 89 part, R.S. No.551 Part as per patta 551/6, Block No.27, Perambur village, Purasawalkam-Perambur Taluk, land measuring an extent 1196.25 Sq Feet and common passage 172 Sq. Feet out of 344 Sq. Feet in all 1368.25 Sq. Feet together with building and the land bounded on the North by: Muthu Mudali Street, South by: Thiruvengadam Mudaliyars house, East by: Raghupathy's House and West by: Abu Naickers house within the sub-Registration District of Purasawalkam and Registration District of Chennai Central
Date: 16.11.2019 Authorised Officer Punjab National Bank
Place: Chennai

KERALA MEDICAL SERVICES CORPORATION LTD
(DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE, GOVT. OF KERALA)
Head Office : Thycoud, Thiruvananthapuram-14, (Telephone No. 0471-2945600, FAX No. 0471-2945647), E-mail : edrugs@kmscl.kerala.gov.in, website : www.kmscl.kerala.gov.in, CIN No. U24233KL2007SGC021616
No.KMSCL/DRG/ED/998/2019 Date : 20.02.2020
E-TENDER NOTICE
Online bids are invited from manufacturers/direct importers / loan licensees on behalf of Department of Health, Govt of Kerala for the procurement of following categories of drugs / supplies for the year 2020-21.
Sl. No. Tender No. and Date Category
1. KMSCL/OD/AC/RC/2020/001 dtd. 20.02.2020 Anti Cancer Drugs
2. KMSCL/OD/NAC/RC/2020/002 dtd. 20.02.2020 Drugs / Supplies
3. KMSCL/DRGED/I & II/RT/2020/003 dtd. 20.02.2020 Drugs
4. KMSCL/DRGED/III-VIII/RT/2020/004 dtd. 20.02.2020 Drugs / Supplies
5. KMSCL/DRGED/SPL/RT/2020/005 dtd. 20.02.2020 Specialty Drugs
The last date and time of online uploading of tenders will be 09.03.2020, 5.00 pm. The date and time of opening of Technical bid will be 13.03.2020 11.00 am. Tenders shall be downloaded and submitted online through the e-tender portal www.etenders.kerala.gov.in. (Sd/-) MANAGING DIRECTOR (Tender Inviting Authority)

CENTRAL ORGANISATION FOR RAILWAY ELECTRIFICATION
1, NAWAB YUSUF ROAD, CIVIL LINES, ALLAHABAD-211001
Tender No.: ELCORE-OHE-TSS-GR-294 Closing Date/Time: 16.03.2020, 15:00
E-TENDER NOTICE
CAO/RE acting for and on behalf of the President of India invites E-Tenders against Tender No. ELCORE-OHE-TSS-GR-294, Closing Date/Time 16.03.2020, 15:00 Hrs. Bidders will be able to submit their original/revised bids upto closing date and time only. Manual offers are not allowed against this tender, and any such manual offer received shall be ignored. Contractors are allowed to make payments against this tender towards tender document cost and earnest money only through only Payment modes available on IREPS portal like net banking, debit card, credit card, etc. Manual payments through Demand draft, Banker cheque, Deposit receipts, FDR etc. are not allowed.
1. NIT HEADER
Name of Work : "Design Supply, Erection, Testing & Commissioning of 25 KV, 50 Hz, Single Phase, AC, Electrification works including OHE & TSS as Composite Electrical Work" in Yelahanka (Excl.) - Bangarpet (Excl.) Section Gr. 294 of Bangalore Division of South Western Railway under RE Project Bangalore, Total 147 RKM / 170 TKM.
Bidding Type Normal Tender
Tender Type Open
Tender Closing Date, Time 16.03.2020, 15:00
Pre-Bid Required No
Advertised Value (Rs.) ₹ 391863585.19
Bidding Style Single Rate for Each Schedule Item.
Earnest Money (Rs.) ₹ 2109300.00
Tender Doc. Cost (Rs.) ₹ 10000.00
Contract Type Works
Bidding Start Date 02.03.2020
Ranking Order for Bids Lowest to Highest
Bidding System Two Packet System
Date, Time of Uploading Tender 18.02.2020, 18:47
Pre-Bid Query Date Time Not Applicable
Tendering Section OHE
Validity of Offer (Days) 60
Period of Completion 15 Months
Contract Category Expenditure
Are Joint Venture (JV) Firms allowed to bid Yes
Expenditure Type Capital (Works)
PR/234/2020/ANU "Serving Customers with a Smile" website: www.ireps.gov.in

CITY UNION BANK LTD.
Administrative Office : No. 24-B, Gandhi Nagar, Kumbakonam - 612 001. Phone : 0435-2402322, 2401622 Fax : 0435-2431746
POSSESSION NOTICE (Immovable Properties)
Whereas, the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of City Union Bank Ltd., having its Administrative Office at No.24-B, Gandhi Nagar, Kumbakonam - 612 001 and one of the Branch Offices of City Union Bank Ltd., as mentioned above. Under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13 (2) & (12), read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a Demand Notice dated mentioned below calling upon the borrowers, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of the said notice. The borrowers below named having failed to repay the amount despite the receipt of the above referred statutory notice, NOTICE is hereby given to the borrowers below named and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the properties described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said Act. The borrowers below named in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the properties and any dealings with the properties will be subject to the charge of City Union Bank Ltd., for an amount of and interest till the repayment of entire dues.
City Union Bank Ltd., No.24/38, Rajaji Salai, Opp. to PF Office, Tambaram West, Chennai - 600 045.
I. Name of the Borrowers: No.1) Mrs. Asia Trading Center, Represented by Mr. Mohamed Othumasha Maricar, No. 17, Saidapet Road, Vadapalani, Chennai - 600 026. No.2) Mr. Mohamed Othumasha Maricar, S/o. Mr. Sultan Gan Doshi Tulip, 201-6171, Aspirin Garden II Street, Kilpauk, Chennai - 600 010. No.3) Mrs. Rabiyyathul Fatima Banu, W/o. Mr. Mohamed Othumasha Doshi Tulip, 201-6171, Aspirin Garden II Street, Kilpauk, Chennai - 600 010. No.4) Mr. K. Suresh, S/o. Mr. Krishnan, No.163, Pammal Main Road, Pammal, Chennai - 600 075. No.5) Mr. K. Baranidharan, S/o. Mr. B.S. Kannan, No.4125, G.S.T. Road, Otteri, Vandalur (Post), Chennai - 600 048.
Date of Demand Notice: 18-10-2019 followed by paper publication dated 19-12-2019. Date of Possession: 19-02-2020. Amount Outstanding: Rs.2,63,35,217/- (Rupees Two Crore Sixty Three Lakh Thirty Five Thousand Two Hundred and Seventeen Only) within 60 days from the date of the said Notice with subsequent interest thereon from 15-10-2019 till the repayment of entire dues.
Description of Immovable Property: Schedule - A: (Property Owned by Mr. K. Suresh, S/o. Mr. Krishnan)
All that piece and parcel of the land measuring to an extent of 1.560 Sq.ft., comprised in Survey No.29/17, as per Patta No. 1593, Sub-Divided Survey No.29/27, situated in the Sambanthanar Street, No.88, Pammal Village, Pammal Municipality, Alambur Taluk, Kancheepuram District, together with building thereon (having Ground Floor and First Floor) planning Permit No.003413, P.P.No.140/2004 & File No.A1/254/2004, Dated 27-04-2004, bearing Door No.163, Sambanthanar Street, Pammal Main Road (Opposite to Nehru Street), Pammal, Chennai - 600 075 and bounded on the:- North by - Mrs. Prema & Mr. Dhinakaran's Property, South by - Pallavaram Kundrathur Main Road, East by - Mr. Sivalingam's Shop, West by - Mr. Murali's Shop and the linear measurements are:- North to South on the Eastern Side - 43 feet, North to South on the Western Side - 36 feet, East to West on the Northern Side - 43 feet, East to West on the Southern Side - 36 feet. Totally admeasuring to 1,560 Sq.ft. and the Property situated within the Limits of the Pammal Municipality and within the Jurisdiction of the Registration District of Chennai South and Sub-Registration District of Pammal. Plinth Area of the Building As per Plan:- Ground Floor - 650 Sq.ft., First Floor - 650 Sq.ft. & Head Room = Total - 1,300 Sq.ft. As per Site:- Ground Floor - 650 Sq.ft., First Floor - 650 Sq.ft. & Head Room - 250 Sq.ft. = Total - 1,550 Sq.ft.
Place: Pammal, Date: 19-02-2020
Schedule - B: (Property Owned by Mr. K. Baranidharan, S/o. Mr. B.S. Kannan)
All that piece and parcel of land comprised in Survey No.269/1, measuring Acre 0.15 Cent, 324/2B (Wet Land), measuring Acre 0.91 Cent, 352/1, measuring Acre 0.13 Cent and Acre 0.43 Cent, altogether measuring an extent of Acre 1.62 Cents and 70,567 Sq.ft., as per plan 72,425 Sq.ft., situated at No.58, Natham Village, Gummidipundi Taluk, Tiruvallur District and situated within the Sub-Registration District of Gummidipundi and Registration District of North - Chennai. North by - Property belongs to Jayavel Retti Land, South by - Property belongs to Murugan Land, East by - Property belongs to Perumal, Parthasarathy Land, West by - Property belongs to N.A. Jambulingam Retti Land and Anglamman Road.
Place: Natham Village, Date: 19-02-2020
II. Name of the Borrowers: No.1) M/s. Golden City Layout Promoters, No.899, G.S.T. Road, Tambaram-Sanatorium, Chennai - 600 047. No.2) Mrs. Soodikodutha Kothai Andai, W/o. Mr. N. Mageshwaran, No.19, II Floor, Marudapandi Street, Chittappakkam, Chennai - 600 064. No.3) Mr. N. Mageshwaran, S/o. Mr. Nambirajan, No.19, IInd Floor, Marudapandi Street, Chittappakkam, Chennai - 600 064. No.4) Mr. V. Balaji, S/o. Mr. Venkatesan, New No. 41, Old No.24, Periyar Street, Anna Nagar, Tambaram Sanatorium, Chennai - 600 047. No.5) Mr. P. Shannugam, S/o. Mr. Palanivelu, D.No.162, Kowshik Avenue, Bharathi Street S-1, C-Block, Sun Uthayam Sai Vilas, Chittappakkam, Chennai - 600 064. No.6) Mr. P. Rajkumar, S/o. Mr. Palanivelu, No.7-A, Navaneetham Nagar, Thirumala Nagar, Hasthinapuram, Chennai - 600 064.
Date of Demand Notice: 07-11-2019 followed by paper publication dated 19-12-2019. Date of Possession: 19-02-2020. Amount Outstanding: Rs.20,72,255/- (Rupees Twenty Lakh Seventy Two Thousand Two Hundred and Fifty Five Only) within 60 days from the date of the said Notice with subsequent interest thereon from 23-10-2019 till the repayment of entire dues.
Note: That our No.117-Chennai - Tambaram Branch has also extended Financial Assistance (CUB OSL SPECIAL-RR: 501812008053828) Dated 30-06-2019 requested by No.3 of you for which No.2 of you stood as Co-Obligor for the facility for a Total Amount of Rs.1,20,000/- at a ROI of 11.50% and the balance outstanding as on 22-10-2019 is Rs.1,24,379.42.
Description of Immovable Property: (Property Owned by Mrs. Soodikodutha Kothai Andai, W/o. Mr. N. Mageshwaran)
All that piece and parcel of 481 Sq.ft., of UDS of land out of the Total Area of 4,158 Sq.ft., with Flat No.F-3, First Floor, with a Plinth Area of 1,165 Sq.ft., and a Car Park at S&P Garden, Plot Nos.XVI & XXV, S.Nos.181 & 182, Nalambur Village, Ambattur Taluk, Tiruvallur District (approved layout), bounded on the:- North by - 24 feet Road, South by - Plot Nos.5 & 24 feet Road, East by - Plot Nos.26 & 24 (as per Legal Opinion) Plot Nos.17 & 24 (as per Sale Deed), West by - Vacant Land and lying within the Sub-Registration District of Konnur and Registration District of North Chennai.
Place: Nalambur Date: 19-02-2020 Authorised Officer City Union Bank Ltd.

KERALA CONG (JACOB) SPLITS INTO TWO

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB 21

Kerala Congress (Jacob) a coalition partner of the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) has split.

A major faction of the party led by former MLA and party chairman Johnny Nellore announced the split at a meeting held in Kottayam on Friday. Party vice-president George Joseph presented a resolution regarding the split at the meeting. The resolution entrusted Johnny Nellore with the responsibility of holding merger discussions with the party led by MLA P.J. Joseph. The breakaway faction of Kerala Congress (Jacob) is planning to hold a convention in Ernakulam on February 29 to announce the formal merger with the Joseph group.

K'taka cops yet to act against seer

M.K. ASHOKA | DC BENGALURU, FEB 21

Has the state police under the ruling BJP adopted a prejudiced approach towards protests and happenings related to the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), NRC and pro-Pakistan sloganeering?

A day after Jevargi Aandola Math seer Siddalinga Swamiji made a controversial announcement that Rs 3 lakh would be paid to anyone who severs the tongues of the three Kashmiri students in Hubballi who were arrested for making a video which said 'Pakistan Zindabad', the police are yet to act in the matter. The Swamiji was speaking at a function

organized by Sri Rama Sene at the Municipal College Grounds in Gadag to commemorate Chhatrapathi Shivaji's 393 birth anniversary.

"This is not a country of Imran Khan to make slogans like 'Pakistan Zindabad'. This is a country of Shivaji and Modi. Kashmiri students shouted slogans for Pakistan when the whole country was mourning the victims of the Pulwama attack. Srirama Sene will give Rs 3 lakh to those who can cut the tongues of these Kashmiri students. One lakh for each tongue," he had remarked.

Gadag SP N. Yathish said that the police is verifying the incident before deciding on the course of action.

BANG ON TARGET



Sarang cannon being successfully tested in the LPR firing range of Khamaria, in Jabalpur district of Madhya Pradesh, on Friday

Student denied admission for not filling religion slot

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB. 21

Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa said that Amulya may have Naxal connections and she will be investigated.

The alleged denial of admission to a student in a school over not filling the religion column in application form has triggered a major controversy in Kerala's capital Thiruvananthapuram. The state education department has sought a report from the authorities of St Mary's School on the matter following Kerala education minister C Raveendranath's intervention. Sampoorna is a school management system project implemented by the Kerala education department to automate the admission system and process of over 15,000 schools in the state. Since the parents had written 'nil' on the religion column the school authorities told them that

the student could not be given admission. It was pointed out that the software will not register the student if 'nil' is mentioned in that particular column. With the school authorities insisting that the parents would be responsible for any issues that might occur in future, they decided not to admit the child in that institution. The school management maintained that admission was not denied to the student. They insisted on filling up the column since benefits given to the students are also based on religion and if it is left unfilled of 'nil' is mentioned the child might be deprived of the assistance in future. However, the parents have now decided to admit the child in some other school even though the department has promised all help.

IN BRIEF

Another nun accuses Franco of sexual abuse

Kochi/Kottayam, Feb 21: The Save Our Sisters forum, which spearheaded the protests against rape accused Bishop Franco Mulakkal in 2018, on Friday alleged "cover up" by police after fresh reports claimed that another nun had given a statement against the top priest alleging sexual harassment. The SOS alleged that the police failed to act in the sexual harassment charges levelled against the former Jalandhar diocese Bishop by the nun, who is also a key witness in the 'nun rape case.'

According to the media reports, another nun belonging to the Missionaries of Jesus congregation, who is the 14th witness in the rape case, had given a statement to the investigation team in September 2018 alleging that the Bishop had sent her lewd messages on her phone in 2015. "Police did not register a case in the second case of sexual allegations against the Bishop by the nun. We suspect the role of influential people in keeping the nun's statement secret so far. It is a mystery," SOS convener Felix J Pulloodan and joint convener Shaju Antony said in a statement here. They demanded a thorough probe into the case.

The SOS expressed apprehension that the nun, who is currently with the Missionaries of Jesus congregation under Jalandhar diocese, will be forced to change her statement "yielding to the pressure tactics of the Bishop and his supporters." Police have not reacted to the reports of fresh allegations quoting the statement given to the investigation team by the second nun. — PTI

Pregnant woman in Odisha made to do sit-ups

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO BARIKUDA, FEB. 21

A pregnant lady in Mayurbhanj district was allegedly forced to do more than 20 sit-ups and also later thrashed by a forest guard on suspicion of stealing woods from the forest.

As per the allegations, a lady forest guard of Duhiani range under Karanjia forest division on Thursday assaulted her and her elderly mother in Barhapanapashi village. She also reportedly brought them to her range office and thrashed them there too.

The pregnant woman has sustained a fracture in one of her hands because of the beating and has also been complaining of stomach pain since the sit-ups.

Following the thrashing, family members of the pregnant woman lodged a complaint at Karanjia police station for physically assaulting them without any particular reason.

Describing her ordeal, the victim said, "The forest guard Kavita madam came to our home searching for some stolen woods. When she couldn't find any stolen items with us, she got angry and started thrashing my mother. When I objected, she thrashed me too. I kept pleading to release me as I am pregnant, but she beat me black and blue and I ended up with a broken hand."

Duhiani Ranger Saroj Kumar Panda said, "I have already submitted a detailed report of the incident to DFO. All things will be clearer once the police enquiry gets completed."

Following the incident, villagers took to street and blocked Karanjia-Barikuda main road by placing burning tyres on the road.



Children make paintings depicting US President Donald Trump, First Lady Melania Trump and PM Narendra Modi, ahead of former's maiden official visit to India in Mumbai on Friday. — PTI

WH to take call on Trump's Sabarmati visit: Rupani

No intimation received regarding Modi, Trump's visit, says Ashram

Ahmedabad, Feb. 21: The White House will decide if US President Donald Trump will visit the Sabarmati Ashram during his day-long trip to the city on February 24, Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani said on Friday.

Rupani's statement came against the backdrop of speculation in the last two days that the US president will not visit the Sabarmati Ashram, a place closely associated with Mahatma Gandhi.

Earlier it was announced that after landing at the airport here on February 24, Trump will go to the Sabarmati Ashram and spend around 30 minutes there. "All preparations are in final stages for the visit of US President Donald Trump. He will directly come to Ahmedabad from Washington. After that a grand roadshow will be organised. Then he will go to the Motera stadium for 'Namaste Trump' programme, where two top

Trump will leave without meeting opposition team

New Delhi, Feb. 21: For the first time, no Opposition delegation will officially meet a US President during his visit to India, Congress sources said here on Friday, as no such meeting is scheduled with Donald Trump.

According to sources, this will be the first time no delegation of the principal opposition party will be meeting a visiting US President.

Mr Trump's planned events include an official banquet hosted by the President of India, which some opposition leaders are likely to attend. Sources said leader of opposition in Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad may attend this banquet, but no official meeting of the visiting president has been planned with the opposition leaders. "When (visiting) prime ministers and presidents

have to meet Congress leaders, they make proposals directly. There is no proposal before the Congress to meet the US President," Congress spokesperson Anand Sharma said, when asked whether any Congress delegation will call on the US president. During the UPA rule, a slot used to be kept for the opposition to meet the visiting US president or other dignitaries. — PTI

the last one week. Since there is no official announcement yet (about cancellation), we believe that Trump is coming," he said.

He had earlier said that they would gift Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography and charkha to Trump during his visit to the ashram. Sources said that route of Trump's roadshow will also be changed if the US president skips his visit to the Sabarmati Ashram.

"It will be a shorter version of the 22-km roadshow presently planned," they said. Sabarmati Ashram is the place from where Mahatma Gandhi led India's non-violent freedom struggle. Over the last few years, leaders from several countries, including Chinese President Xi Jinping, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, have paid a visit to the ashram. — PTI

Surat corp makes female staff stand naked for med test

Surat, Feb. 21: Female trainee clerks of Surat municipal corporation (SMC) were allegedly made to stand naked together in a room for a medical test at a civic body-run hospital here, prompting authorities to order a probe.

The shocking incident comes days after students of a girls' college in Gujarat's Bhuj town were allegedly forced by hostel authorities to remove their undergarments to prove they were not menstruating. In its complaint to the commissioner on Thursday, the SMC Employees Union alleged even unmarried women were checked for pregnancy by female doctors. The alleged incident took place in the Surat Municipal Institute of Medical Education and Research (SMIMER) hospital, run by the SMC, on February 20.

Acting on the complaint, Surat Municipal Commissioner Banchhanidhi Pani on Friday formed a three-member committee to probe the allegations and submit a report in 15 days. The committee comprises former dean of the medical college Dr. Kalpana Desai, assistant municipal commissioner Gayatri Jariwala and executive engineer Trupti Kalathia.

As per rules, all trainee

employees need to undergo a physical test to prove their physical fitness for the job upon the completion of their training period, said officials. Upon completion of their three years of training period, some female trainee clerks came to SMMER hospital for medical test, which is mandatory. The union said though they are not against the mandatory test, the method adopted for women staffers in the gynecology ward was not proper.

"Instead of calling the women one after another in the room for the test, lady doctors made them stand naked in groups of 10. This act of compelling them to stand naked with others is highly deplorable. This method is illegal and against humanity. It is necessary that each woman is checked separately," said the union in its complaint. According to the general secretary of the union, Ahmed Shaikh, women staffers were put in an embarrassing situation by lady doctors with their absurd questions about pregnancy during the test. "Doctors should stop asking private questions about pregnancy. Moreover, even unmarried women in that group were subjected to a physical test meant for checking if they were pregnant or not. — PTI



Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and his son and state minister Aadiya Thackeray calling on Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

None to fear on CAA: Thackeray

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 21:

Maharashtra Chief Minister and president of the Shiv Sena, the estranged ally of the BJP, Uddhav Thackeray on Friday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the first time after taking over the reins of the state, and said he discussed the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the National Population Register (NPR) and the National Register of Citizens with Mr Modi.

"I have made my stand clear on all these issues," he said after the meeting which lasted for nearly an hour. "No one has to fear about CAA. I had said CAA is not a legislation to throw anyone out of the country. An atmosphere is being created in the country that the NRC is dangerous for Muslims."

Mr Thackeray said he had good discussions with the Prime Minister on the issues concerning the state. "I told him that whatever political developments that have taken place, Maharashtra should get cooperation from the Centre. He has promised me...Centre's cooperation."

that NRC will not be implemented across the country. The Congress and the NCP, the alliance partners of the Shiv Sena, have been critical of the CAA-NPR-NRC.

Mr Thackeray later met Congress president Sonia Gandhi and veteran BJP leader L.K. Advani. He was accompanied by his son and state minister Aadiya Thackeray in the meetings. "Talking about NPR and Census...the census happens every 10 years and it is important that it takes place. I have assured all the citizens of my state that no one's right will be taken away," he said.

Mr Thackeray said he had good discussions with the Prime Minister on the issues concerning the state. "I told him that whatever political developments that have taken place, Maharashtra should get cooperation from the Centre. He has promised me...Centre's cooperation."

We blocked no road, protesters tell Shaheen Bagh interlocutors

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA IDC NEW DELHI, FEB. 21

The two Supreme Court-appointed interlocutors resumed the third day of their discussions with the Shaheen Bagh protesters on Friday evening with the latter demanding that the Supreme Court pass an order ensuring their security if they opened the parallel road to the protest site. The Delhi police admitted the protesters had not blocked the parallel road, but it was the police that barricaded the road to ensure security at the Shaheen Bagh protest site.

Meanwhile, the Noida police reopened the road linking Noida to Delhi's Kalindi Kunj briefly for

40 minutes on Friday morning, leading to some traffic movement. The police said the barricades at Noida's Mahamaya Flyover were removed for some time Friday morning "only to clear the passage of a bus. The barricades were restored minutes after the road was reopened."

A woman protester told senior advocates Sanjay Hegde and Sandhana Ramachandra, the two interlocutors: "When several adjoining roads are open, why are they insisting that we move from this road. This is not the only road connecting Delhi and Noida."

Mr Hegde said: "Today is Shivratri. Aaj agar koi gaali de tab bhi duwa ban jati hai. It is your right to speak, speak up. Say

India," Rupani added. Meanwhile, Amrut Modi, a trustee of the Sabarmati Ashram, said they have not yet received any intimation about the cancellation of Trump and Modi's visit to the ashram. "Preparations have been going on since

everything you want to say. Let's take a joint decision for all parties affected here."

The protesters told the interlocutors the Delhi Police had barricaded the roads parallel to the tent as well two other roads that connect Shaheen Bagh and Kalindi Kunj. It was not they who blocked the roads, but the police. The interlocutors also called the Delhi police to the spot to discuss the matter with protesters.

A police official told the interlocutors and protesters that the parallel road was shut off to ensure protection at the protest site.

The official said some other roads in the area were also barricaded to ensure protection.

Height of Ram temple may be raised to 160 ft

New Delhi, Feb. 21: The map prepared by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad around three decades ago for building a grand Ram temple at Ayodhya could be altered to raise the height of the proposed structure from 125 feet to 160 feet and add an additional third floor, temple trust sources said.

On Thursday, members of the Ram Janmabhoomi Teerath Kshetra Trust including general secretary Champat Rai, Vimlendra Mohan Pratap Mishra and Anil Mishra met Nripendra Mishra, the head of the temple construction committee, during which they discussed various issues related to the

construction of the proposed temple. According to a Trustee, Mr Mishra will hold discussions with experts and other concerned groups to finalise the temple's design, a plan for all construction-related works and to decide when the construction will be started.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday asked members of the trust to ensure that construction work on the temple is conducted harmoniously and without any bitterness, the trust's general secretary Champat Rai said. He gave the opinion when the trust members called on him at his residence. — PTI

HEALTH | DIKTAT Officers were given a target of 7 sterilisations, failing which they could be retired

Sterilisation circular in MP withdrawn

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, FEB. 21

A circular issued by Madhya Pradesh government seeking compulsory retirement of officers concerned for not meeting the target on vasectomy has threatened to resurrect the ghost of the emergency-era *nasbandi* (sterilisation) campaign to haunt Chief Minister Kamal Nath, friend of Sanjay Gandhi, the brain behind the infamous drive.

The state government on Friday launched a damage

control exercise to stave off the controversy triggered by the circular by withdrawing the notification dated February 11 as well as shunting out director of National Health Mission Chavi Bhardwaj for the 'fiasco'.

The circular issued by state government's National Health Mission director made it mandatory for each officer concerned to ensure sterilisation of at least 5-7 men in a year and directed top district officials and chief medical and health officers to apply 'no work, no pay' rule for the

● **BJP spokesman Rajneesh Agrawal slammed the circular saying that it exposed the coercive style of functioning by the government.**

● **Congress spokesman Syed Jaffer said the state was only following directive by the Centre on population control.**

cerned if they still failed to deliver.

The circular cited National Family Health Survey-4 report that recorded sharp decline in male sterilization in MP, while suggesting such tough measures.

Bhardwaj, however, denied that any coercive measure has been mooted by the state government on sterilization.

"No targets have been set nor punitive measures are advised from the state," she told the media.

She was shunted out as officer-on-special duty

(OSD) without charges while being shifted to state secretariat.

However, a Congress spokesman here Syed Jaffer said the state government was only following directive by the Centre on population control. The officers concerned are always under pressure to meet the target during end of financial year. But, nobody would be dismissed from service nor anyone's increment would be stopped, he said.

BJP spokesman here Rajneesh Agrawal, however, slammed the circular

saying that it exposed the coercive style of functioning by the Kamal Nath government.

"The state government has withdrawn the circular under pressure. But, the circular spoke volumes on the style of functioning of Kamal Nath government which believed in intimidation and coercion," he added.

"The circular is a reminder of the infamous emergency-era *nasbandi* campaign conceived by Sanjay Gandhi, friend of Kamal Nath", another BJP leader said.

DECCAN Chronicle

22 FEBRUARY 2020

Trade pact off, no clear agenda for Trump visit

US President Donald Trump hadn't yielded to India's request to be the Republic Day chief guest this year despite the great show of friendship at the "Howdy Modi" tamasha in Houston in September, organised with the joint efforts of Hindutva groups in the US and the Indian embassy in Washington.

India will now fete the US leader in Ahmedabad on Monday as he begins a two-day India visit, and will be given a reception at a "Namaste Trump" rally at the city's Motera Stadium, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi will naturally be at hand to show off his friendship with the US President. If it was Indians who essentially put up the show in Texas to create the impression of great chemistry between Mr Modi and Mr Trump, it will again be Indians putting their best foot forward to massage the US leader's ego in Ahmedabad.

That shows how crazily active India has been to first placate him — in 2017 he denounced India as "tariff king" — and then cultivate him. However, in order not to lose focus, President Trump, who is also the most transactional American leader imaginable, proclaims personal friendship of a very high order — whatever that may mean — with Pakistan PM Imran Khan and China's supreme Xi Jinping.

It's interesting nevertheless that Mr Trump will be in India on a stand-alone visit, meaning he won't be covering any other nation in the region on this trip. Ordinarily, this will be a signal honour if anticipated agreements that brought the two nations closer were on the anvil. Curiously, this appears to be lacking. Both sides made it clear there is going to be no agreement on trade now. With the US leader up for re-election in November, an agreement can only be visualised after that if he wins.

Under Mr Modi's stewardship, India and America are almost as close as India and the Soviet Union were in another era. In 2018, we signed COM-CASA (communications compatibility and security agreement), thus completing three of the four "foundational" military agreements before the US takes any country into its bosom. This means a close politico-military nexus with America has been established. The proximity is such that India will now place a liaison officer with US forces in Bahrain, from where the US military commands the Gulf, and the US CentCom and AfriCom. These arrangements were reached in December in Washington. The previous year India was placed by the US in a very special military trade category which makes it eligible to buy 90 per cent of all exportable US military equipment without licence. Only Japan and South Korea are in this special category. The firm American embrace means India will be firmly allied with Washington, with other relationships having less of a meaning.

In the light of all this, the presidential visit will probably be a mutually beneficial public relations exercise for Mr Modi and Mr Trump. The PM's second term has been deeply controversial, mostly due to Kashmir, CAA, and other Hindutva-related measures, while the President could do with Indian-American votes in November.

Uplifting gesture by Lingayats

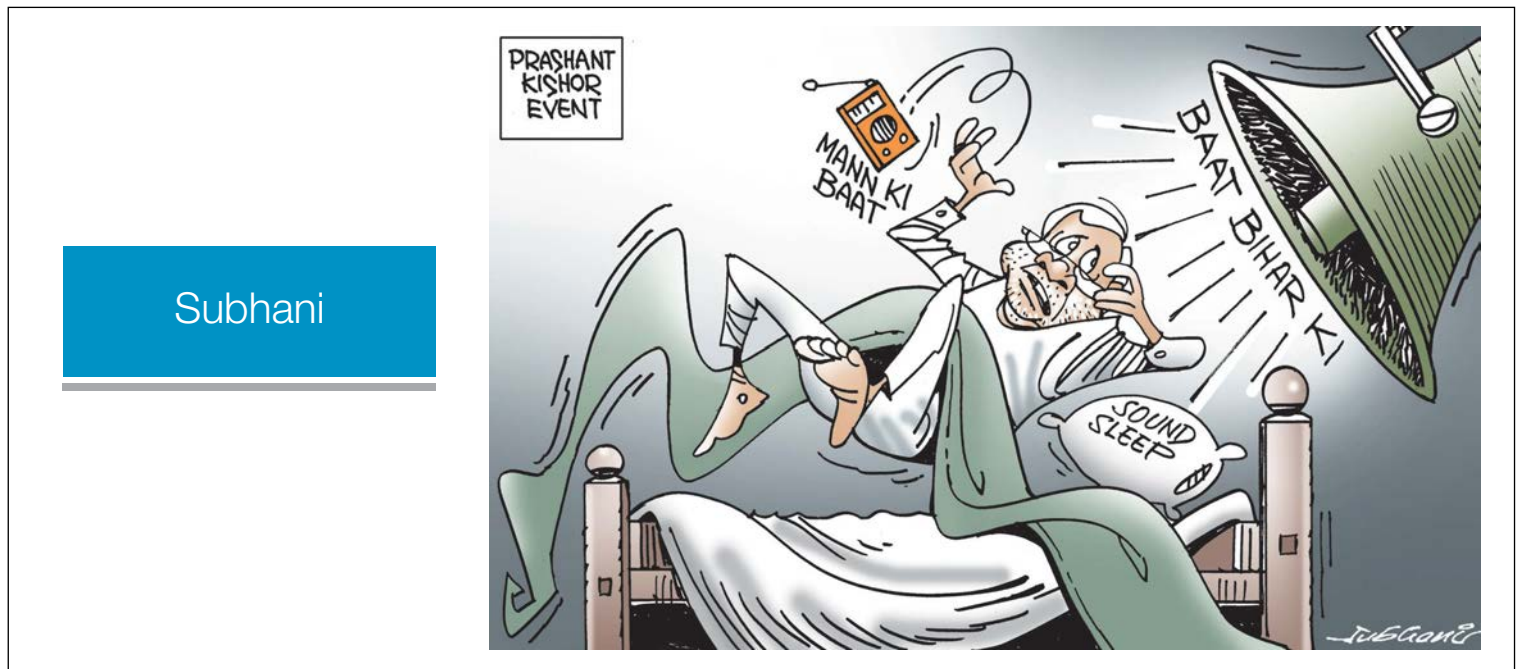
It's not all doom and gloom even in these trying times of divisiveness as India's secular pluralism faces a severe challenge in the citizenship law, the first ingredient in a cocktail of three-letter acronyms, along with NPR and NRC. Amid conflicts, it must be spiritually uplifting that a young Muslim was chosen to head a new Lingayat mutt in North Karnataka.

It isn't unusual in Gadag for men of any community to head the jatra committee. Anyone with faith in Basava philosophies and who is religious have held the honour from time to time, and Sharief Mulla is the choice now. This may be unusual to religions that are more doctrinaire, but Basavana or Basaveswara, the 12th century poet-philosopher-saint who went on to establish the Lingayat faith while serving as the local king's treasurer, was a thinker way ahead of his time.

Imagine a teenager's search for enlightenment after renouncing his high birth and cutting the sacred thread in that day and age, and going on to preach the immorality of caste and the intrinsic value of people born poor. What a visionary. But Basava's radicalism was to prove near fatal to him as his king didn't take kindly to an inter-caste marriage he arranged of an outcaste boy with a brahmin girl, and he had to flee while Kalyana was consumed by riots featuring his followers: the Virashaivas.

In this century, the Lingayats have forcefully sought recognition of their being distinct from Hinduism, a move that didn't get the Centre's support despite a JDS(S)-Congress government granting it two years ago, or a caste within Hinduism. Amid complications like these comes the touching act of the Lingayats of one village being bold enough to appoint a Muslim as head of the mutt.

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Subhani

New landed gentry of a Divided India



Sharada Annamaraju

A curious aspect strikes passersby in Hyderabad's upscale Jubilee Hills area. Lanes upon bylanes, villas on sizeable estates once occupied by bustling families today lie vacant. In exchange for a meagre wage, a small family or an individual maintains the grounds, and lives in a tenement on site. In adjacent Banjara Hills, more such properties are being replaced by builder apartments and exclusive gated communities priced at crores of rupees. This phenomenon has swept most of India's metropolitan cities, and is especially visible in New Delhi, where every third residence is under remodelling for sale or lease. As influential families with generational wealth from pre-Independent India, or ones that acquired it in the years post-liberalisation and the information technology boom have turned global, with members migrating and settling abroad in pursuit of a better life, their movement and behaviour is starkly altering the politics of land back home in India. These properties largely retain their original ownership, or are replaced with complexes where the plot owner retains one or several flats. They may have invested in more realty in what was once suburbia, now swallowed by cities and soaring property value. With their families (some second generation) occupying the upper classes in the global north, the new landed gentry of India divides its time abroad, and drops in to maintain these properties and settle pending matters on leases. Not much binds

A phenomenon has swept most of India's metropolitan cities, and is especially visible in New Delhi, where every third residence is under remodelling for sale or lease

Our current Prime Minister and his colleagues in so many ways reflect the interests of this well-heeled, well-educated group. Largely abroad, back home occasionally to tend to matters, ensure the bare minimum to keep one's head above water, and then onward to peregrinations. India then is a plot or a property to be managed; Indians are paltry tenants.

The link between overseas Indians with the funding and rise of fascist groups back home are well documented. The inimitable journalist Ravish Kumar, speaking at the University of California (Berkeley) in November 2019, noted how the very people who managed to use welfare systems to rise and establish themselves abroad, funnel resources to ensure these routes never appear in India, and if they do, are corrupted or destroyed. The recent abolition of the Dividend Distribution Tax makes real estate investments lucrative for non-resident Indians and further rewards them for their pro-establishment choices. The intent to retain land at all costs within families or clans swings votes conservative. The global landed gentry of India, despite their semi-feudal or significant open outlook in other realms, chooses politics which ensure the status quo as it identifies the consequences of owning multiple fixed assets. Personal biases or ideological politics drive owners to rent to individuals of favoured communities or financial ability, indirectly aiding ghettoising and gentrifi-

cation. If they choose to sell, it is largely to wealthy companies, and influential individuals and families who inevitably hail from the dominant classes and castes. As people are pushed together in ghettoised neighborhoods, the local government reduces access to civic amenities, and further isolates citizens from crucial contributors to mental health such as community parks.

Property value speculation and impacting factors further drive individuals to band together towards the kind of politics that erases or disallows settlements of oppressed communities and migrants, many employed in the very construction of the high-rises that the landed groups invest in. The land is seen as rightfully belonging to the upper classes and castes, and illegal were anyone else to occupy it.

Over time, realty will move into the hands of a generation settled abroad that will not be invested in the well-being or concerns of a large population largely alien to them. The land-holdings only form a cross-continental financial safety net, as we see with the former royal families of India, who slip in and out, maintaining palaces left to them by ancestors as high-end hotels serving to network with the global elite. We have effectively created a colonising class populated by our own fellow citizens.

As the nation enters its third month of dissent provoked by the brute forces of right-wing extremism, and grows increasingly disenchanting with capitalism, how a polarised India tackles the ravages of a new zamindari system will shape democracy, and the fortunes of its citizens, for decades to come.

The writer has worked as a communications professional for various non-profits across India, and is based in New Delhi

LETTERS HISTORIC BILL

This refers to the report *Bill makes Cauvery delta Protected zone* (Feb. 21). Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami has to be congratulated for having passed a historic Bill in the Tamil Nadu Assembly to prevent the setting up of hydrocarbon or similar projects in the Cauvery delta region. The Tamil Nadu Protected Agricultural Zone Development Act, 2020 piloted by Chief Minister seeks to protect agriculture lands in Cauvery delta region and prohibits certain activities in the region. The Bill would help the farmers to improve farming activities to increase farm products and productivity to serve the interests of the farmers. By this achievement, Edappadi K Palaniswami clears the fear in the minds of the villagers and farmers and proves himself as a farmer-friendly Chief Minister.

R. Balasubramanian, Sakkangudi

TAKE INSURANCE COVER

We are glad that actor turned political leader, Kamal Haasan and his heroine had a miraculous escape on the sets of Indian 2. It's true that accidents are like tsunamis. At the same time, the actors and directors, who are paid crores, seldom care for the safety of technicians, who operate age-old and outdated equipment, etc. No doubt, Kamal has announced ₹1 crore compensation to the bereaved families, but we are not sure whether it is for each family or the entire crew who lost their precious lives. In fact, there should be insurance cover of at least one crore rupees to each technician, who are the worst sufferers during such accidents. Neither is this the first instance nor is it going to be the last and the concerned authorities should initiate to take insurance cover to these technicians without any further delay.

Capt. N. Viswanathan, Coimbatore

PATIENCE IS THE KEY

After the miserable ODI whitewash, Kohli & co., eyes will be on Basin Bridge Test to prove that they are the best in the world. But the weather and pitch conditions would be most favourable to the New Zealand team, which they have already exploited after winning the toss. Though Rishabh Pant is sticking to the wicket, still it is a surprise as to why Wriddhiman Saha, the best wicket-keeper has been benched. So is the case with the selection of over aggressive Prithvi Shaw, ahead of Shubman Gill, who has patience. Hope, as avowed by our vice-captain, Ajinkya Rahane, our team is able to post at least 300 to put pressure on New Zealand batsmen. Keeping our fingers crossed.

N.V. Krishnan, Chennai

A long way lies ahead for peace in Afghanistan



Zahid Hussain

Such is the irony of history that yet another superpower is negotiating its exit from Afghanistan as the war-ravaged country recently observed the 31st anniversary of the withdrawal of the last Soviet soldier from its soil. While the Russian forces pulled out in 1989, a decade after invading Afghanistan, it has already been nearly two decades since the Americans have been engaged in an unwinnable war. Roughly, 3,500 American and allied troops have been killed in a war costing trillions of dollars. The US went into Afghanistan in 2001 out of revenge, with little understanding of a land, which is often described as the "graveyard of empires". The US officials are now engaged in protracted peace negotiations that could bring their soldiers back home. But there's still a long way to go before the exit is possible. In a major breakthrough, the two sides have agreed to a temporary truce raising prospects of a deal that may bring an end to the US war in Afghanistan. But given the

complexities of the Afghan conflict, achieving a workable political settlement may not be so easy. If everything goes well, a peace agreement between the US and the Taliban is likely to be signed by the end of this month that will be followed by intra-Afghan talks. The format of the talks that is likely to be held in Oslo next month is yet to be finalised. Indeed, the possibility of the 18-year-long US war coming to an end has never been so close. But much will depend on the next phase that would require intra-Afghan negotiations on the post-US withdrawal setup. It may not be that easy given the existing political fragmentation in Afghanistan. A divided dispensation with various power centres in Kabul makes it extremely difficult to reach a political settlement. With the ongoing power struggle there is still no clarity on who would represent the Kabul government in the ensuing Afghan negotiations. While President Ghani insists that he would lead the talks, others want a more inclusive representation. In contrast, the

Taliban are much more united and prepared for talks. Increasing international recognition has given the militia greater confidence. There are also indications of some of the warlords and power groups striking separate deals with the Taliban, further weakening the Kabul government's position. Then there is the question of whether the Taliban would agree to a longer ceasefire while the talks continue. There is no indication yet of the insurgents agreeing to a permanent truce without an accord on the future political setup. The Taliban leaders are still holding their cards close to their chest. It's certainly going to be a long-drawn-out and extremely complicated dialogue process, given past events. A major reason for the Taliban not agreeing to a longer ceasefire is that it would be hard to mobilise the fighters once they have gone home. Reduction in violence, and that too for a shorter period, still keeps the fighters at the post. The Taliban had only committed to a halt in roadside and suicide bombings as well as rocket attacks.

There was a massive escalation in attacks from both sides in the days before the truce agreement was set to be implemented. The Taliban had launched a series of spectacular attacks on the Afghan forces in various provinces killing several government soldiers. Similarly, American ground and air forces have intensified their attacks on Taliban strongholds, killing a number of militants. Many civilians have also reportedly been killed in the attack by the air forces. It remains to be seen whether the two sides uphold the truce, a precondition for the signing of the peace agreement on February 29 in Doha. Under the proposed agreement, some 5,000 Taliban prisoners held by American and Afghan authorities will be released, further reinforcing the insurgent forces. It is apparent that the Taliban have also shown flexibility in their demand for a complete withdrawal of American forces. The drawing down of American forces could start immediately after the signing of the agreement

— from about 13,000 to 8,600. But it would take several months for the complete withdrawal of US troops depending on the successful implementation of the deal. However, the US security agencies would continue to engage in operations against Al Qaeda and the remnants of the militant Islamic State group. It is evident that there is bipartisan support in the US for withdrawal from a festering war in Afghanistan that even the biggest superpower with its entire military was not able to win. But a peace deal paving the way for America's exit from Afghanistan will certainly give a huge boost to President Donald Trump's bid for a second term. Still, there is still a long way to go for a peace settlement to end the nearly two-decade-old US military presence that began shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Importantly, for peace to return to Afghanistan, it is imperative that all Afghan factions must reach an agreement among themselves.

By arrangement with Dawn

Trump bhaisaab aayega: Aapun ke vaastey kya?



Shobhaa's Take

I mean... get over it, guys! Two men who totally get the new communications lingo of bombast and insults will be meeting next week to further their own selfish interests. One will use the India gig to kick off his re-election campaign and the other — well, just to stay relevant. What's in it for us? Donald Trump and Narendra Modi between them have more numbers on the plate than any other two individuals on the planet. Orange Hair boasts he is number one on FB, while 56-inch Chest stays at number two. The game of schoolboyish one-upmanship continues, as the two big

drives to what is being tom-tomed as the "world's largest stadium". Making sure everything goes tickety-boo at the massive stadium is a certain Jay Shah, son of India's No. 2 (odious thing — but what to do? Some things just stick!) Amit Shah. Young Jay Shah wants to ensure that the Motera Stadium visit (which will attract zillions of eyeballs) goes off minus a glitch. Never mind, that as someone who heads the BCCI, Jay Shah has kept the important business of cricket on hold, and postponed the interviews for national selectors till after Donaldbhai departs.

Oh yes, in the interests of making the Lotus-Potus visit a little more pan-Indian and a little less Gujju-centric, the official "Kem Cho" greeting has been replaced by a more acceptable "Namaste". Though, personally speaking, I rather like "Kem Cho", it has a cheery, informal ring to it, and is much catchier than the staid "Namaste". Besides, given how well "Howdy, Modi" resonated

Orange Hair boasts he is number one on FB, while 56-inch Chest stays at number two. The game of one-upmanship continues, as the two big boys representing the world's most powerful democracies issue love letters to one another.

across the media, "Kem Cho" could also have become a part of international jargon, even if some might have goofed up thinking it is the Korean *Khimchi* spelled wrong. Like Mr Trump and most of America, Mr Modi and our beloved Gujaratis project a robust, non-nonsense practicality. No wonder the two leaders get along. In fact, so "shaana" is Mr Trump, if you read between the lines of his recent India statements, he has taken care to differentiate his personal equation with Mr Modi with his official policy. "I happen to like

Modi a lot," he said. Ohhkkkk. But hey, what did he mean by petulantly adding that the US has not been treated well by India? Huh? Calling his host country "tariff king" is hardly the most complimentary note to kick off the visit. And just in case anybody was expecting a big trade deal on this trip, The Donald has made it clear it ain't happening! He has merely dangled a carrot, while concentrating on the optics. He has been promised seven million people between the airport and the stadium. In reality, there could be a piddly 10,000, who've been "persuaded" to line up obediently and cheer the visitor. If only one could've hired a clever Bollywood/Hollywood special effects team to fix the visuals virtually in a sophisticated hi-tech studio! The natives would have been spared the glare!

In between all this *golmal*, we are dealing with our own complex issues, struggling to find a way through the thickets. The Shaheen Bagh impasse continues, with no

immediate solution in sight. Supreme Court-appointed mediators Sanjay Hegde and Sadhana Ramchandran are up against a great deal of resistance, as they attempt to open up a fair and free dialogue with protesters. As interlocutors, all they can do at this stage is assure the emotional women that constructive dialogue was the only way forward. "We are here to listen," the protesters were told, even as the emotionally charged ladies frequently broke down while listing out their demands. God knows whether anything worthwhile will come out of this intervention, but at least it's a start. It goes without saying that the charming Yogi Adityanath's vicious tirade against any and every protester goes unabated. The last brilliant quote had him taunt those who didn't fear bullets by suggesting they harboured a death wish! To paraphrase the great sage, he said, "If someone arrives with the desire to die, how can such a person survive?" He also

added that nobody died in police firing. The victims were rioters shot by other rioters. And hello! If people were in possession of illegal firearms — someone had to die, right? Right, *sirji*. You are absolutely right. As always.

While polite, state-supported, self-declared patriots think nothing of entering libraries, women's hostels, campuses and creating mayhem, we the bystanders are supposed to put our hands together and clap when President Trump shows up. That too, *khaali haath*. His re-election is a done deal. But it will still make a fantastic photo-op back home, to see a sea of brown folks greeting the Great White Hope. As for us bewildered citizens waiting for something to fall neatly into place — at this point just about anything will do! Swear! We would love to say "Kem Cho" to both men, because, honestly speaking, we have no clue what the outcome will be!

Readers can send feedback to www.shobhaade.blogspot.com

Treating Trump better may be good for India; but let's not forget China



Sanjeev Ahluwalia

A visit by the United States President, months before the American elections, can be many things — a farewell trip, collecting paybacks for past favours or simply a low-risk, synchronised "feel good" ride amidst millions of adoring Indians — reliving thereby the past grandeur of America as a global beacon for developing world fantasies of equity, justice and morality.

The one thing it cannot be is an occasion for the signing of a trade deal of any significance. Why would the host country bother to negotiate one especially if it involves, as it does today, extending favours to the US by either buying military equipment; opening up domestic markets to US exports on a preferential basis; going slow on imposing a quasi "minimum alternative tax" on the turnover in India of US tech giants — which book no profits but record explosive growth using an endless inflow of equity support or indeed deprive domestic tech giants of the opportunity to store and massage data just as US tech giants do in their own home jurisdictions.

Giving into each of these concessions means angering domestic interest groups who will remember the pain imposed in the next election. In comparison, the glow of an IOU from POTUS could turn to dust, come November this year, should Bernie Sanders or Michael Bloomberg be the new President.

India has never been an aggressive internationalist — we remain what Mahatma Gandhi wanted us to be in the 1930s — a largely self-sufficient village, which minimises global trade links. Ironically, even America, once the great liberaliser, is listening to the Mahatma today and shutting down its borders via high tariffs and stricter immigration rules.

It is deliciously ironic that our citizens behave differently and look endlessly for opportunities abroad to escape low wages and bad public services at home. It is no wonder then that that our wish list for external achievements remains firmly bounded by the middle-class dream of more H-1B visas and a permanent seat at the UN Security Council — where grandstanding is the order of the day — never mind that we simultaneously openly discredit the salience and effectiveness of the UN, United Nations system itself.

Look no further than enjoying at Ahmedabad a grander version of the Narendra Modi-Donald Trump event in Houston last year in September. Sadly, President Trump is an uninspiring speaker. Hopefully, the cultural events would be grander and better than the lackluster stuff Desi Americans put together. Mr Modi revels in the warmth of millions of Gujaratis and can be relied upon to dominate the event with his practised rhetoric.

Cutting to the chase, the POTUS visit underlines our

We need a mix of deeper commercial and trade relationships with China and strategic understanding of affinity with the US. This will require us to abjure copying Trump's strategy of always winning at negotiations.

growing influence in America — a country that had not so long ago barred Narendra Modi from visiting it. His becoming Prime Minister in 2014 changed all that — as it necessarily must. To his credit, Mr Modi has leveraged his energy to blitzkrieg the who's who of international politics with an outreach strategy unparalleled for Indian PMs.

Friends in high places are useful diplomatic assets. One of the purposes of determinedly cozying up to the US is to put China on notice that our influence extends way beyond our economic reach — something China yearns for despite a treasury bulging with yuan and US dollars.

Indian warships now patrol the Indo-Pacific high seas alongside those of the US, Japan and Australia — a "quad" determined to keep the seas open — meaning, free of permanent Chinese encroachments. Multi-sector collaboration between government departments of the US and India should be pursued to build closer professional relationships which are the core of sustained, effective collaboration. To this end we should see more, not less, of the US executive branch in India.

For the US, if it pulls out from Afghanistan, India presents an alternative channel to "influence" domestic affairs in Afghanistan. We

have a good relationship with Iran to the West and a long history of engagement with Afghanistan. All this will need deep restructuring of India's diplomatic priorities and working structures.

The only worry in reworking our relationship with the US in this manner is the hostility and suspicion it would arouse in China. The more powerful China becomes, the more skittish it gets about "retaining face" internationally. Coupled with their deepening economic woes and the more recent pandemic assault, President Xi is likely to be even more eager to be seen to remain the "big man" of China. An India preening around in borrowed boots from the last departing GI in Kabul is unlikely to be palatable to him, not to say of the bile it would evoke in Pakistan.

This is the real task before Prime Minister Modi. Can he find a path to President Xi's heart like he has found to President Trump's? Ahmedabad (2014) and Mahabalipuram (2019) were tentative steps which should be deepened. Some concessions can help, particularly if made in the context of joint cross-border infrastructure projects.

Rolling back the recently increased copycat import tariffs is desirable. Global value chains do not function well in an environment of regulatory constraints. Nor are we good at picking and choosing winners, East Asian style.

Far better to adopt generalised tax regimes which push value addition and exports via competitiveness. These shall create a new set of domestic winners and losers. But so long as the aggregate balance of payments impact is positive, we can work out domestic arrangements to soothe the pain of the losers.

The 2019-20 Economic

Survey has done yeoman service by explicitly establishing that India has not lost out from the 14 free trade agreements it has signed since 1997. Our exports of manufactured goods increased by 13.4 per cent versus an increase of 12.7 per cent in imports. Similarly, merchandise exports increased by 10.9 per cent versus an increase of 8.6 per cent in imports. In both cases, a net gain in exports.

We need an impossible mix of deeper commercial and trade relationships with China and a comprehensive strategic understanding of affinity with the US. Navigating this path will require us to abjure copying President Trump's strategy of always winning at negotiations. Some deals are best lost.

Opening our domestic market can provide China the growth boost it desperately needs to retain its domestic "feel-good" quotient. The US and the other RCEP countries would also benefit.

The "tiger" economies of Southeast Asia grew during the three decades from 1960 to 1997 by following Japan in a "flying geese model of growth" — with the lead economy periodically vacating a growth sector for the ones following.

China can be our lead goose. It has five times the economic heft of India. It can generate the trade volumes needed to fulfill our \$1 trillion export ambition.

India cannot realistically hope to outgrow either China or the United States before 2040, at the very earliest. Why let blind ambition or prejudice stop us in the meantime from getting a piece of the cake being carved up between the two global giants?

The writer is adviser, Observer Research Foundation

Of hate speech, misfits, weirdoes and 'thought police' in Boris' Britain



Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings

"Can the mind really control matter? Or have we construed the phrase to flatter The vanity of the conscious mind Which fears the cosmos will leave it behind?"

From *Showcase Mein Itna Tho Godown Mein Kitna?* By Bachchoo

The boast of modern democratic societies is that they uphold the principles of freedom of speech. These don't extend to incitements to crime. In contemporary free societies, which define some forms of misogyny, homophobia and racism as hate crimes, there arise some difficult questions.

Leaving these three categories aside, what is the law to make of religious dissent? Are Protestants committing a crime if they assert that the Pope is an imposter? Am I guilty of hatred if I say I don't believe that God has sons and urge followers, on Twitter, say, to deny the possibility of virgin birth? (Not being a twit, I don't do Twitter!)

Christianity has evolved with very broad shoulders and any such assertion will not lead to being burnt at the stake. Other religions have not achieved this goal of tolerance.

An Indian publisher withdraws a historical, critical book on Hinduism, not because the Indian State bans it, but through fear caused by the fury of Hindu readers who disagree or object to parts or all of the text.

Then there is the case of a world-renowned writer whose book led to his being condemned to death for writing fiction which was derided as being insulting to the Prophet Muhammad. The late V.S. Naipaul called it "an extreme form of literary criticism".

There has never been any foolproof way of policing thought — articulation in one form or the other is nowadays held to be the evidence or the proof of unacceptable opinion. It's true that in the past people have been persecuted and even put to death for what they "might believe" or hold sacred, but today the other great presumption of "innocent until proved guilty" should hold. Alas, in certain bigoted sections of society, no such principle obtains. People are punished by accusing and deranged mobs.

These thoughts are occasioned, gentle reader, by two episodes in Britain's contemporary doings. Boris Johnson, on assuming the office of Prime Minister, appointed as his chief aide a fellow called Dominic Cummings. I won't be conveyed to the Tower of London for saying here that this person strikes me and millions of others in Britain, and even abroad, as what we call a "weirdo". One of his traits is an attempt to control the policies and workings of government.

In this mode he, it is thought, persuaded Boris Johnson to tell Sajid Javid, the chancellor (finance minister) he had appointed, to sack all his advisers, experts and aides. This service would be provided by the aides and experts of Boris

Johnson himself. In other words, the chancellor will have only the advice that Dominic Cummings sanctions. Sajju didn't like it, had the spherical guts to say it was not what any self-respecting minister should or would accept, and there and then submitted his resignation.

But that was and is only the beginning of Weird Dom's doings. He sent out a public message saying he wanted to recruit to No. 10's team people who were "misfits and weirdoes". One of those who applied, presumably accepting this description of himself, was Andrew Sabisky.

On his appointment, it was revealed that Sabisky had written an article which said that black people had inferior IQ to whites. He also opined that the law should enforce compulsory and permanent contraception on women from the "underclass" to prevent the growth of such a class in the country. This is all good Nazi stuff and may fit perfectly into the plans that Dominic Cummings has for Britain's immediate future. But should they be the principles by which Boris Johnson and his government operate? Judging by their own expressed opinions, it is possible that one or two of Johnson's present Cabinet are of the mindset that would perhaps secretly entertain these views. Alas, we can't today act as thought police and demand their quick execution.

Sabisky didn't just think these things, he wrote them and as the outcry that followed his appointment broke, he resigned. No doubt he will be appointed to some far-right thinktank as an innovator and will insist that *Mein Kampf* be introduced as a compulsory text in all primary schools.

The second peculiar instance is the case of Harry Miller, a former policeman, now a businessman who was visited by police and accused of a non-criminal hate incident. Harry had used Twitter to express his opinion that people who changed their gender through operations, hormones, etc were not in reality transformed into men from women or women from men. Based on scientific evidence, he, at times provocatively on Twitter, opined that you were born with your gender and though you were free to think what you liked and had the protection of the law from discrimination, the reality was that men with surgically shaped vaginas or hormonally induced breasts still weren't women.

The opinions got him arrested and a "non-criminal hate incident" was recorded against him. In court he testified that his opinions had provoked his opponents to record an anonymous online video threatening to kill him and rape his family.

He sued the police and the judge hearing the case said that he was entitled to his opinion, the police were wrong and that we didn't live in an Orwellian state in which opinions which didn't instigate hatred were free to be expressed.

Judge Knowles ruled that the police in the UK were not the Stasi or the Gestapo and should not behave as such. The instructions on "hate incidents" should be reviewed. Going further, he said there existed a right to express opinions freely but there was no right to be offended. I agree.

I hope the cooks in the Tower serve a good Dhansakh.

Waris Piya: Our collective spiritual consciousness



Ghulam Rasool Dehvi

Waris Ali Shah, more popularly known as Sarkar Waris Piya of Dewa Sharif, was an Indian Muslim mystic from Barabanki, a district in Uttar Pradesh. Besides an array of beautiful spiritual traits, Dewa Sharif is India's only dargah where Holi is celebrated as "Eid-e-Gulabi" with a similar fervour as in Hindu faith traditions. Before Holi comes, invoking the blessings and significance of such mystics is vital to our collective spiritual consciousness.

Born into the 26th generation of Imam Hussain,

Waris Piya was not an ordinary saint, but a successor to the prominent Sufi order — Qadriyya-Razzakiyya, and thus the founder of Waris Silsila in modern Indian Sufism. With a profound knowledge in classical Islamic sciences, Waris Piya was a widely travelled *murshid* (master) of people from across the country, irrespective of faith and creed. For decades, they all come together to celebrate the Sufi Holi as Eid-e-Gulabi at the sanctum of Dewa Sharif. A custodian of this dargah, Ghani Shah, asserts that Waris Piya exhorted his *mureeds* (disciples) to

venerate every religion as a spiritual foundation based on the mutual feelings of love and devotion.

Ghufur Shah, a Warisi scholar, notes in his book: "The Blessed Lord Haji Hafiz Syed Waris Ali Shah," that Waris Piya undertook the Hajj pilgrimage several times, and held extensive visits to the West, especially the European countries, including Germany, England and Turkey. During his travels to Europe, Waris Piya also met and blessed the Sultan of Turkey and Bismarck of Berlin, and had an audience with Queen Victoria in England.

A close relative in Waris Pak's family lineage Prof. Wahajuddin

Alwi, who is wedded to his great granddaughter, Asma Parween, tells us: "Since Waris Piya wanted people in India to transcend religious/sectarian divides, he participated in Hindu festivals like Holi. His non-Muslim *mureeds* and regular disciples included Raja Udyat Narayan Sing, raja of Oudh, Thakur Pancham Singh talukdar of Eta, Pundit Deendaar Shah of Indore, Sahaj Ram Dixit, Thakur Grur Mohan Singh, a zamindar of Bhagalpur. They were spiritually in parallel with his Muslim bureaucrat *mureeds* such as governor general Ghulam Mohammad and Justice Sharfuddin."

Remarkably, Waris Piya allowed a mystical "gender

fluidity" to flourish among his disciples. He did not deter women from entering his sanctorum. Though it caused him troubles from male chauvinists, he showed a sincere willingness for women's equal spiritual participation. Interestingly, it also happened to Baba Farid, whose female disciple Bibi Fatima served as a senior teacher in his circle. But a male teacher became jealous of her and complained to Baba Farid: "How can you have a woman in our senior circle?" Baba Farid replied: "When the lion(ess) comes out of the jungle you had better run, you won't have time to tell whether it is a male or female lion!"

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IN BRIEF

Sri Lankan panel favours burqa ban

Colombo: A Sri Lankan parliamentary committee on national security has proposed an immediate ban on the burqa and suspending the registration of political parties on ethnic and religious basis, following the Easter Sunday terror attack that killed over 250 people. The proposals featured in a special report presented in Parliament on Thursday to resolve 14 controversial issues following the April 21 Easter attack last year. The report was tabled by MP Malith Jayatilaka, chairman of the Sectoral Oversight Committee on National Security, reports said. According to the report, a number of countries have already banned the burqa. The report suggested that the police should have the power to ask anyone wearing a face covering in a public place to take off such clothing in order to establish the identity of the person. If such a request is not complied with, police should have the power to arrest the individual without a warrant, the report said.

Assange may seek asylum in France

Paris: WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who is jailed in Britain fighting extradition to the United States for espionage and computer hacking, may seek asylum in France, his lawyer Eric Dupond-Moretti said on Friday. Dupond-Moretti told Europe 1 radio that Assange's legal team would be in contact with French President Emmanuel Macron to make the case for Assange to get asylum in France. Assange has said that his youngest child and the child's mother are French. Assange's lawyers noted the request for asylum was "not an ordinary demand" because Assange is not on French soil. The French asylum request would be based on humanitarian and health grounds, as Assange was showing signs of "psychological torture".

Varadkar quits, to stay caretaker PM

Dublin: Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar resigned on Thursday, but stayed on as interim leader while the country's three main parties battle out coalition talks after an inconclusive election. Varadkar tendered his resignation as *taoiseach*, or premier, to President Michael Higgins after the first sitting of Ireland's lower house of parliament since the February 8 election which radically recast the political landscape. "In accordance with the constitution, the *taoiseach* and the government will continue to carry on their duties until successors have been appointed," a government statement said. Parties in the 160 seat Dail nominated candidates to lead a new government as *taoiseach* but with none commanding a majority it was adjourned till March 5.

MINISTRIES UP FOR SALE IN IRAQ!

Baghdad: With Iraq rocked by months of protests against corruption and nepotism, the judiciary is investigating allegations ministries are up for sale as politicians wrangle to form a new government. These "sales and purchases", which insiders say have dogged Iraqi politics for years, are again a hot issue as prime minister-designate Mohd Allawi seeks to build a cabinet acceptable to both protesters and the political class. Similar allegations have surrounded other governments formed since Saddam Hussein was toppled in 2003 — but this is the first time the judiciary has questioned Iraqi politicians over the matter. Political commentator Ibrahim al-Soumeidhi, who is close to the negotiations, claimed on Twitter that one group had offered him \$30 million in return for a ministerial portfolio. He was followed by Kazem al-Sayadi, a lawmaker with the State of Law Alliance of former premier Nouri al-Maliki — bitterly opposed to Allawi. "The oil ministry is selling for 10 billion dinars (around \$8.4 million), who wants to buy?" Sayadi tweeted. The judiciary swiftly launched investigations.

Outpouring of grief



Flowers and candles are set around a monument for the brothers Grimm, Hanau's best known sons, at the marketplace in Hanau, Germany, on Friday as thousands took part in vigils across the country after a gunman with apparent far-right beliefs went on a killing spree. — AP

'Russia meddling to boost Trump again'

2020 polls: Intelligence officials warn US lawmakers

Washington, Feb. 21: Russia is interfering in the 2020 campaign to try to get Donald Trump re-elected, US intelligence officials have warned lawmakers in a briefing that infuriated the president, who then replaced his intelligence chief, US media reported. Trump erupted in anger at acting director of national intelligence (DNI) Joseph Maguire when he learned of the February 13 session with the House Intelligence Committee, *The Washington Post* and *New York Times* said on Thursday. Maguire aide Shelby Pierson reportedly told lawmakers Russia was once again meddling in the US election on Trump's behalf. Trump complained that the Democrats would use the information against him, the reports said. The president was also annoyed by the presence of Adam Schiff, the Democratic head of the investigation that led to Trump being impeached for abuse of power and obstruction of Congress, according to the *New York Times*. Maguire had been a favourite to be nominated for the permanent DNI post but Trump soured on the official, *The Washington Post* said, when he heard about the classified election security briefing. The president berated Maguire in an Oval Office showdown last week for the "disloyalty" of his staff, the *Post* reported, effectively thwarting his chances of becoming a permanent hire. Trump announced on Wednesday he was

Trump ally Stone gets 40 months' jail, a scolding

Washington, Feb. 21: Donald Trump's longtime ally Roger Stone was sentenced on Thursday to 40 months in prison for impeding a congressional investigation, in a case that ignited a firestorm over the US president's political interference in the justice system. Stone, a veteran Republican operative and one of the president's oldest confidants, was convicted in November of lying to Congress, tampering with a witness and obstructing the House investigation into



Roger Stone

whether the Trump campaign conspired with Russia to cheat in the 2016 election. "The truth still matters," said US district court judge Amy Berman Jackson as she handed down the sentence to

Stone, who will remain free while his request for a new trial is considered. "Roger Stone's insistence that it doesn't, his belligerence, his pride in his own lies are a threat to our most fundamental institutions, to the very foundation of our democracy." Trump said soon after that he believed Stone had a "very good chance" of being cleared in the long run, accusing the jury without evidence of being "tainted". But he ruled out immediately issuing a pardon that many had been expecting. — Agencies

Trump disses Parasite, Pitt

Colorado Springs, Feb. 21: President Donald Trump on Thursday scorned the best picture Oscar for South Korean film *Parasite*, asking how a foreign movie could get the honour. "How bad was the Academy Awards this year?" Trump asked the crowd at a packed reelection campaign rally in Colorado Springs. "We got enough problems with South Korea, with trade. On top of it, they give them the best movie of the year?" he asked in

disbelief. Trump, whose presidency has been built on a nationalist "America first" slogan, said it was time to bring back classics from Hollywood's golden age. "Let's get *Gone With the Wind*. Can we get *Gone With the Wind* back please? *Sunset Boulevard*?" he said. Trump also took a crack at Best Supporting Actor winner Brad Pitt, calling him "a little wise guy". Pitt had used his award acceptance speech to support the impeachment of Trump. — AFP

SYRIA: ERDOGAN CALLS FOR CONCRETE ACTION

Ankara, Feb. 21: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called for "concrete action" to prevent a crisis in Syria's last rebel stronghold in a phone call with his French and German counterparts, his office said Friday. "The president stressed the need to stop the aggression of the regime and its supporters in Idlib, and emphasised the importance of providing strong support through concrete actions to prevent a humanitarian crisis," the presidency said following the call with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron.

Meanwhile, in their phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Merkel and Macron expressed their "concern over the humanitarian catastrophe for residents of Idlib province," Merkel's office said. A months-long offensive by Russia-backed Syrian troops against rebels backed by Turkey in northwest Idlib has seen close to one million civilians flee the violence. The two European Union leaders "expressed their willingness to meet Putin and Erdogan to find a political solution to the crisis, the chancellor's office said. Merkel and Macron "called for immediate end to the fighting and unfettered humanitarian access to people in need", their statement said.

Since Syria's civil war erupted in 2011, the country has never seen so many people displaced in so short a time. In nine years, millions of civilians have fled their homes and more than 380,000 have been killed. Russia on Wednesday objected to the UN Security Council adopting a statement that would have called for a ceasefire in Idlib, diplomats said, after a tense closed-door meeting. The UN urged neighbouring Turkey to admit the new displaced people but Ankara is resisting as it already has some 3.7 million Syrians on its territory. — AFP

US-Taliban deal likely on Feb 29

Riyadh/Kabul, Feb. 21: The United States and the Taliban will sign an agreement on February 29 at the end of a week-long period of violence reduction in Afghanistan, US secretary of state Mike Pompeo and the Taliban said on Friday. Afghan, international and Taliban forces will observe the reduced violence period beginning at midnight (7.30 pm GMT), an Afghan official and Taliban leaders said earlier. "Following lengthy negotiations between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and the United States of America, both parties agreed to sign the finalised accord in the presence of international observers," a Taliban spokesman said in a statement. Both sides would also make arrangements for the release of prisoners, spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said. Separately, Pompeo said in a statement that the US and the Taliban have been engaged in talks to facilitate a political settlement in Afghanistan and to reduce the US presence in the region. The agreement will be signed upon the successful implementation of an understanding with the Taliban on a significant and nationwide reduction in violence, Pompeo added. The agreement could represent a chance for peace in the country after years of war and a US troop presence that dates back to 2001. US and Taliban negotiators have been meeting in Doha since 2018 even though fighting has raged in Afghanistan and thousands of civilians and combatants have been killed as the insurgents have expanded their terri-

torial control. "Based on the plan, the reduction in violence (RIV) will start between the Taliban and international and Afghan security forces for one week," Javid Faisal, spokesperson for the Afghan National Security Advisor, said. "We hope it is extended for a longer time and opens the way for a ceasefire and intra-Afghan talks," he added. Three senior Taliban leaders — two in Doha and one in Afghanistan — also confirmed that they had agreed on reduction of violence in Afghanistan for seven days. All three spoke on condition of anonymity. One Taliban leader based in Doha said that the period could not be called a "ceasefire". "Every party has the right of self defence but there would no attacks on each other's positions in these seven days," he said. — Agencies

● **NATO CHIEF** Jens Stoltenberg on Friday welcomed a historic US-Taliban agreement, saying it had opened a possible route to sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

● **PAKISTAN PRIME** Minister Imran Khan has said that for the first time the Afghan peace process was moving in the right direction. The Foreign Office said Pakistan believed the signing of the agreement would pave the way for the next step of intra-Afghan negotiations.

Iran is back on FATF blacklist

Paris, Feb 21: A multinational financial watchdog reinstated sanctions against Iran on Friday, saying the Islamic republic has not taken sufficient measures against money laundering and the financing of terrorist groups. In a statement issued after a meeting in Paris, the 38-nation Financial Action Task Force (FATF) announced it was lifting a sanctions suspension it granted in 2016 to give Iran time to work on reforms. Given "Iran's failure to enact the Palermo and Terrorist Financing Conventions in line with the FATF Standards, the FATF fully lifts the suspension of counter-measures," the body said, referring to the United Nation's 2001 convention against organised crime. It also called on FATF members and "all jurisdictions to apply effective counter-measures." Iran is alone with North Korea on the agency's blacklist. Last month, an Iranian arbitration body gave its approval to an anti-money laundering bill seen as crucial to maintaining international trade and banking ties. The govern-

ment of President Hassan Rouhani said the laws were needed to meet demands set by the FATF. The government is hoping to salvage banking and trade ties after the United States walked out of a landmark 2015 nuclear deal with Iran and reimposed crippling unilateral sanctions. The other parties to the deal — Britain, France, Germany, China and Russia — have sought to salvage the agreement and maintain trade with Iran, but have called on Tehran to meet the FATF requirements. The FATF said Friday that it would keep Iran on a "high risk jurisdictions list," and will decide on next steps "if Iran ratifies the Palermo and Terrorist Financing Conventions, in line with the FATF standards." "Until Iran implements the measures required to address the deficiencies identified with respect to countering terrorism-financing... the FATF will remain concerned with the terrorist financing risk emanating from Iran and the threat this poses to the international financial system," it said. — AFP

PARLIAMENTARY | ELECTION As Iran votes turnout is seen as a key measure of support for leadership

Hardliners set to sweep parliamentary polls

Tehran, Feb. 21: Iran went to the polls on Friday for a general election that conservatives are expected to dominate amid voter apathy after an economic slump, multiple crises and the disqualification of thousands of candidates. The 11th parliamentary election since the 1979 Islamic Revolution comes after steeply escalating tensions between Iran and the United States and the accidental downing of a Ukrainian airliner by Iranian air defences that sparked anti-government protests. As he cast the first ballot

in the election, supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei urged all Iranians to take part, saying that doing so would "guarantee the country's national interests". Voters formed long queues at polling stations in south Tehran, where conservatives have a solid support base, but far fewer were seen waiting to vote in upmarket northern neighbourhoods. One official accused Iran's enemies of overplaying an outbreak of the new coronavirus — which killed two people in the Islamic republic this week

— in a bid to harm the credibility of the election. "The counter-revolutionaries' latest trick was to exaggerate the coronavirus news by saying that finger ink had been infected," Tehran election committee chief Shokrollah Hassanbeygi said, quoted by semi-official news agency ISNA. In a bid to allay fears over the spread of the coronavirus, the use of ink-staining to stop people voting multiple times was made optional. Experts predict a low turnout that they say will serve the conservatives at

the expense of President Hassan Rouhani, who was re-elected in 2017 promising more freedoms and the benefits of engagement with the West. After three hours of voting, five million of the 58 million people eligible to vote had done so, a statement by the interior ministry said. Around half of the 16,033 hopefuls will contest the 290 seats up for grabs across 31 provinces after the Guardian Council barred thousands of would-be candidates, mostly moderates and reformists. — AFP



Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei at a polling station in Tehran on Friday — AFP

IN BRIEF

New snail species named after Greta

London: Scientists have discovered a new species of land snail, and have named it *Craspedotropis gretathunbergae* in honour of the Swedish activist Greta Thunberg for her efforts to raise awareness about climate change. According to the study, published in the *Biodiversity Data Journal*, the newly discovered species belongs to the so-called caenogastropods — a group of land snails known to be sensitive to drought, temperature extremes, and forest degradation.

Rome to unveil tomb of Romulus

Rome: An ancient tomb thought to belong to Rome's founder Romulus was presented to the world on Friday, after months of investigation by history sleuths. The 6th century BC stone sarcophagus, with an accompanying circular altar, was discovered under the Forum in the heart of Italy's capital over a century ago — but experts could not agree on whether or not it belonged to the fabled figure. According to legend, Romulus founded the city after killing his twin brother Remus. The brothers had been raised by a she-wolf — the symbol of Rome shows them sucking at her teats — but later fell out over where to build the new metropolis.

BULLIED BOY QUADEN GETS GLOBAL AID

Sydney, Feb. 21: An Australian boy with dwarfism who was bullied to the point he wanted to "die right now" has received a deluge of celebrity messages and donations for a trip to Disneyland. A video of 9-year-old Quaden Bayles uploaded to Facebook by his mother showed him crying and repeatedly saying he wanted to die after being bullied at school. The clip had been watched more than 16m times by Friday and the boy's mother, Yarrakra Bayles, said she was sharing it to raise awareness of the impact bullying was having on her child. "I've got a son that is suicidal almost every single day," she says in the footage. Support for the boy built as the video spread online, and a GoFundMe page started by US comedian Brad Williams had raised over \$150,000 to give Bayles a trip to Disneyland in California by Friday.

NZ MAN JAILED FOR BRITON'S TINDER MURDER

Wellington: A New Zealand man was jailed for life Friday over the "depraved" murder of a British backpacker he met through the online dating app Tinder. The 28-year-old was given a non-parole period of 17 years for strangling Grace Millane in December 2018 in a case that shocked New Zealand, which is usually regarded as a safe place to travel. Millane disappeared on the eve of her 22nd birthday, a few days after arriving in Auckland while on a year-long round-the-world trip after graduating from university. She met her killer for the first time on the evening of her death after matching with him on Tinder and the pair went back to his city-centre apartment after visiting several bars.

Coronavirus death toll climbs to 2,236

New virus cases soar in South Korea and Chinese prisons, 2 more deaths among 13 new cases in Iran

Beijing, Feb. 21: Two more people died from the new coronavirus in Iran, infections nearly doubled in South Korea, and clusters surfaced in Chinese prisons Friday, rekindling concerns about an epidemic that has killed more than 2,200 people in China.

The World Health Organisation warned nations could face a serious problem if they fail to "hit hard now" against the virus, which has infected more than 75,000 in China and over 1,100 abroad.

China has pointed to official figures showing new cases slowing this week as evidence that its drastic containment measures are working, but fresh infections emerged at two Beijing hospitals, and more than 500 others were reported in prisons across the country.

Chinese authorities have placed tens of millions of people under quarantine in hard-hit central Hubei province, restricted movements in other cities far from the epicentre, and closed schools nationwide.

At a Politburo meeting chaired by Chinese President Xi Jinping Friday, the leadership said that the epidemic's peak "has not yet arrived", and the situation in Hubei and Wuhan remains "grim and complex," according to state media.

Many nations have banned travellers from China and airlines have suspended flights to and from the country. But clusters and outbreaks continue to emerge, and 13 people have now died outside mainland China.

Iran's health ministry reported two more deaths among 13 new cases of coronavirus in the Islamic republic, bringing the total number of fatalities to four and infections to 18. Earlier cases had already prompted Iraq to ban travel to and from its neighbour and Kuwait's national air carrier to suspend flights.

In South Korea, the number of cases nearly doubled to 204, making it the hardest-hit country outside China.

More than 120 members of Shincheonji Church of Jesus, a religious sect in the southern city of Daegu, have now been infected. It started with a 61-year-old woman who developed a fever on February 10 but attended at



Medical workers, wearing protective gear, school a suspected coronavirus patient to another hospital from Daenam Hospital in Cheongdo county near the southeastern city of Daegu in South Korea on Friday.

■ THE FIRST CASE of the novel coronavirus in Lebanon was confirmed on Friday, the health minister said, adding that two other suspected cases were being investigated. A medical source at the hospital where the woman is being treated said that she returned from Iran with a high fever, but that her immunity was good and her condition stable.

least four church services before being diagnosed.

The mayor of Daegu — South Korea's fourth-biggest city, with a population of over 2.5 million — has advised residents to stay indoors.

"With so many confirmed cases here I'm worried that Daegu will become the second Wuhan," said Seo Dong-min, 24, referring to Hubei's capital, where the virus first emerged.

Two Australians evacuated from the Diamond Princess cruise ship, meanwhile, tested positive for coronavirus on their return home despite being cleared in Japan.

An Israeli also tested positive upon returning home — becoming his country's first COVID-19 case. The cases will fuel questions about Tokyo's policy of allowing former Diam-

ond Princess passengers to return home after testing negative.

"If we don't hit hard now using the window of opportunity we might be faced with a serious problem," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said Thursday.

Prisons and hospitals: China reported 118 more deaths on Friday, raising the toll to 2,236, most of them in Hubei.

The National Health Commission also said in its daily update that China tallied 889 new cases, up from the previous day when it reported the lowest number of new infections in nearly a month, fuelling hopes that the epidemic is nearing its peak.

Among those, 258 were outside Hubei, ending a 16-day streak of new infections falling in the rest of the country. —PTI

Vaccine by April, promises China

Beijing, Feb. 21: China could start clinical trials for a potential vaccine for the novel coronavirus around late April, an official said Friday. Public and private researchers around the world have been working to develop treatments and vaccines to combat the COVID-19 virus that first emerged in central China in December.

More than 2,200 people have died and more than 75,000 have been infected by it in China. Another 11 people died abroad, with some 1,100 infections in around 25 countries.

"Several research teams were trying different techniques to develop a potential vaccine, and the earliest vaccine is expected to be submitted for clinical trials around late April," Xu Nanping, vice science and technology minister, told a press briefing.

China's vaccine development and research is currently "basically in step with other countries", he added. The World Health Organization said Tuesday it could take a year or longer for a vaccine to

In Ukraine, health minister joins evacuees to allay fears

Kiev, Feb. 21: Ukraine's health minister volunteered to spend two weeks in quarantine as authorities looked to calm panic Friday after protesters attacked buses carrying evacuees from coronavirus-hit China.

On Thursday, protesters blocked roads and hurled stones at vehicles carrying 72 people evacuated from China and bound for a medical facility in the town of Novi Sanzhary in the central Poltava region. Protesters said they

feared the evacuees carried the virus and posed a threat to their community. Riot police with armoured vehicles moved in to disperse the protesters, sparking clashes that injured nine policemen and one civilian.

Authorities called for calm, with senior officials rushing to the town and President Volodymyr Zelensky urging solidarity. In a bid to allay fears, Health Minister Zoryana Skaletska said she would be joining the evacuees,

who include 45 Ukrainians and 27 foreigners, in quarantine.

"I will spend the next 14 days with them, in the same premises, under the same conditions," she said. "Today we agreed on the conditions of my stay and I was sent to the observation zone," Skaletska said on Facebook later in the day.

Zelensky said "unprecedented" measures had been taken to prevent the spread of the virus across Ukraine. —AFP

Hong Kong makes masks amid shortages

Hong Kong, Feb. 21: With chronic face mask shortages in the midst of a virus outbreak, Hong Kongers have started making their own — with a pop-up production line and seamstresses churning them out on sewing machines.

In one of the most densely populated cities on earth, face masks have become hot property as people scramble for protection against the new deadly coronavirus. Long queues — sometimes thousands strong — routinely crop up outside pharmacies when supplies are in, and there is anger at the government's failure to have stockpiled.

Some are turning to DIY solutions — albeit of ques-

tionable quality. Judy, a 73-year-old old shopping in the district of Wanchai, was spotted in a home-made mask. "I found the material — my handkerchief, and some non-woven fabric — and I combined them and used some wire for the top, and some elastic," she said, declining to give her surname.

While Hong Kong's economy reels, business has been brisk on one street in the working-class Sham Shui Po district that boasts many fabric and tailoring shops.

A colourful array of cloth masks hangs outside many of the cramped storefronts as shoppers haggle over the din of whirring sewing machines. Elase Wong, a

tailor, said she was giving away her face mask sewing design. "Some people couldn't buy any masks... So if they can make them themselves, that would be great," she said.

"I hope everyone can achieve self-sufficiency." The cost of masks has skyrocketed with scarcity and the government resisting price controls or rationing, as in nearby Macau and Taiwan. A set of 50 simple surgical masks can sell for up to 300 Hong Kong dollar (USD 40), while the top of the range N95 variety is going for as high as 1,800 Hong Kong dollars a box. A film director nicknamed Tong was this week putting the finishing touches

to a face mask assembly line in an industrial building. "I was shocked by the price of face masks," said. "I did some research and realised that masks are not that difficult to make. Why do people have to bear such a high cost? Because there is no production line in Hong Kong".

With the help of an investor he managed to import a machine from India, and plans to ship more. Currently in the testing phase, the device will produce 60-80 surgical masks per minute from Saturday in a dust-free room.

Tong said the masks will be sold online for 1-2 Hong Dollars each, limited to one box per person. The

administration of chief executive Carrie Lam says it is doing all it can to secure new supplies of face masks amid a global shortage.

Output has been ramped up on a prison labour production line and there are plans to set aside 1.5 Hong Kong dollars billion to support the creation of domestic factories. The lack of stockpiles has sparked criticism of Lam, even from among her pro-Beijing political allies.

Many have expressed surprise that a city which suffered 299 deaths during the 2003 SARS outbreak was not better prepared. Since SARS, Hong Kongers have embraced higher communal hygiene standards. —AFP

'New' soil bacteria to beat pollution

New York, Feb. 21: Researchers have found a new species of soil bacteria that can break down organic compounds, including cancer-causing chemicals that are released when coal, gas, oil and refuse are burned, an advance that may lead to new ways of fighting environmental pollution and global warming.

The researchers, including Dan Buckley from Cornell University in the US, said the new bacterium, *Paraburkholderia madseniensis*, belonged to a genus known for their ability to degrade volatile compounds, and in some cases, the capacity to form plant root nodules that trap atmospheric nitrogen in the soil. In the study, published in the *International Journal of Systematic and Evolutionary Microbiology*, the scientists sequenced the bacterium's genes, providing evidence that *madseniensis* was a unique species.

The researchers noticed that *madseniensis* is especially adept at breaking down aromatic hydrocarbons, which make up lignin — a major component of plant biomass and soil organic matter.

According to the scientists, the newly identified bacteria could be a candidate for natural waste degradation research, and an important contributor to the process of cycling carbon minerals in the soil. When the scientists conducted research to learn more about the symbiotic relationship between the bacteria and forest trees, they found that the trees feed carbon to the bacte-

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■ THE NEWLY identified bacteria is a candidate for natural waste degradation research

ria, and in turn the bacteria degrade soil organic matter. By this process, they said, the bacteria help release nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus for the trees. The study noted that understanding the process by which these bacteria break down carbon in soil may hold the key to the sustainability of soil, and the ability to predict the future of global climate. —PTI

Structure built every October melts back into the river Torne when spring arrives

Tourists brave cold for night at Sweden's ice hotel



Sweden's ice hotel which is built every October from the frozen waters of the nearby river Torne.

Jukkasjarvi, Feb. 21: High above the Arctic Circle and nestled in the snow-dusted forests of northern Sweden, gaggles of tourists gathered on a February morning for a glimpse of hallways, bedrooms and a wedding chapel sculpted from ice, part of the 30th incarnation of Sweden's ice hotel. Stopping in blue-white hallways to take snaps of a chandelier and ornately decorated bedrooms entirely carved from ice, the tourists are among the 50,000 day visitors to the hotel every year, founded in 1989 by a hotelier looking to attract visitors to the remote town of Jukkasjarvi, 200 kilometers north of the Arctic Circle.

Built every October from the frozen waters of the nearby

■ INDIVIDUAL SUITES cost more, and feature sculptures and designs by artists from around the world.

river Torne, the winter hotel has 35 bedrooms. Temperatures reach -5°C (23 Fahrenheit) in the rooms, which start at around three times the average price of a night in a three-star establishment in Stockholm.

Individual suites cost more, and feature sculptures and designs by artists from around the world. One room inspired by the aurora borealis — the northern lights that can be seen in the skies nearby — features lighting that changes

colour, as well as a giant snow sculpture of a reindeer's head, all set to a soundtrack of ambient music and, occasionally, reindeer grunts.

Around 20,000 guests spend a night in the hotel every year. However, 25-year-old guide Julia Hansers said that guests usually react less to the cold than to the tranquility.

"A lot of people coming here live in the city, and there you always have some sort of sounds and noise around you, and inside the ice hotel it's completely quiet," said Hansers, peering out from under a thick woolly hat.

Bo Bjerggaard, a galleryist from Copenhagen, spent a night wrapped in a sleeping bag and a reindeer-skin throw. —AFP

quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	41,170.12 -0.37
Nifty 50	12,080.90 -0.37
S&P 500*	3,346.71 -0.79
Dollar (₹)	71.60 0.10
Pound Sterling (₹)	92.53 -1.12
Euro (₹)	77.38 -0.29
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	42,800.500 1.16
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	57.87 -1.44
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.422 0.038
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.493 -0.032

* As of 9:30 pm IST

Forex reserves rise by \$3.09 bn to \$476 bn

Foreign exchange reserves rose by \$3.09 billion to a record high of \$476.092 bn in the week to Feb. 14, mainly due to a rise in foreign currency assets, RBI data shows. In the previous week, the had increased by \$1.701 bn to \$473 bn. Foreign currency assets rose by \$2.763 bn to \$441.949 bn. Gold reserves rose by \$344 million to \$29.123 bn. The special drawing rights with the IMF were down by \$6 mn to \$1.430 bn.

NCLAT rejects plea against Sintex Prefab



The NCLAT has dismissed the Lloyd Insulations' plea to initiate insolvency proceedings against Sintex Prefab and Infra. The NCLAT bench headed by Justice S. J. Mukhopadhyaya observed that there was a pre-existence of dispute between the parties and upheld the order of the NCLT, Ahmedabad. The NCLT had on Jan. 2, rejected the plea of Lloyd Insulations (India), an operational creditor.

Wipro Digital buys Rational Interaction

Wipro Digital, the digital business unit of Wipro, said it has acquired digital customer experience (CX) firm Rational Interaction. It didn't disclose the acquisition amount. Washington-based Rational Interaction has over 300 employees. It helps brands create sustained CX program success with core offerings that include strategic advising, customer acquisition, and customer lifecycle management.

CITI hails govt's mega textile park proposal

The Confederation of Indian Textile Industry hailed the textile ministry's initiative to set up mega textile park. Mega textile projects will attract FDI, joint venture projects and help build large vertically integrated textile giants, CITI said. It found that producers like Bangladesh and Vietnam grabbed the space vacated by China due to scale of operation and cost competitiveness. India does not have large players to tap such demand.

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Investors seeking high risk premium

JLR cans plan to sell dollar bonds

Laura Benitez
LONDON, FEB. 21

Jaguar Land Rover Automotive Plc has shelved plans to issue a US dollar bond after investors demanded too high an interest rate to compensate for the risk the coronavirus poses to the luxury carmaker, according to people familiar with the matter.

Jaguar hired Bank of America Merrill Lynch to meet investors in the US last week ahead of a potential sale of new bonds, and days after warning the deadly virus outbreak was impacting its supply chain. The company gained enough interest to prepare an eight-year bond in the high 7 per cent yield range, according to the people who asked not to be named because they're not authorised to speak publicly.

But news this week that the company could start to run out of Chinese parts for its UK factories in about two weeks, and that it may never recoup the sales lost to the virus, has scuppered its chances of issuing debt at acceptable levels. Jaguar, a unit of Tata Motors Ltd, gets



about 20 per cent of its sales from China.

A spokeswoman for Jaguar told Bloomberg News that the meetings with US investors were planned as a roadshow to "lay the groundwork" for a future transaction.

The company "routinely monitors the debt capital markets so could decide to issue a new bond anytime it thinks conditions are favorable," she added.

Officials at BAML declined to comment on the potential deal.

The maker of the Land Rover Discovery SUV is scheduled to repay the equivalent of about \$1.2 billion of maturing bonds

over the next two years, including a \$500 million note due in March 2020.

The company is not facing any near-term pressures to raise new funding and has around \$6 billion of liquidity to help tackle any near-term maturities.

Jaguar returned to the bond market for the first time in almost a year in November, selling 800 million euros (\$864 million) of debt following a positive set of results. It took advantage of investor optimism around the company at the time and raised an additional 200 million euros just a month later.

— Bloomberg

NCAER pegs down FY20 growth to 4.9%

FC Bureau
NEW DELHI, FEB. 21

Anticipating Indian economy to improve its growth rate to 5.6 per cent in next fiscal, the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) on Friday pegged the country's GDP growth for the current fiscal at 4.9 per cent, a tad below 5 per cent estimated by the National Statistical Office (NSO) recently.

"The GDP growth is forecast to be 4.9 per cent in Q3 of 2019-20, and 5.1 per cent in Q4 in the same fiscal. However, the annual growth rates for 2019-20 and 2020-21 are forecast to be 4.9 per cent and 5.6 per cent, respectively," said an NCAER statement.

The economy grew at 6.1 per cent in 2018-19.

"Due to better rainfall in the monsoon as well as the post-monsoon seasons and considerable improvement in the storage of water in major reservoirs of the country, the prospects for growth in the agricultural sector remain bright," the think-tank said.

Hotelier drags Oyo to NCLT for unfair deals

Archak Sengupta
HYDERABAD, FEB. 21

Gravity dictates what goes up must come down. The SoftBank Group-backed hospitality start-up, Oyo, will prove to be no exception. The parent company of Oyo Rooms, Oravel Stays Private Limited, which saw its valuation shoot up to \$10 billion last year, is up for a rude awakening after the Ahmedabad bench of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) has listed a case for hearing on February 24.

The case may set off a chain reaction, as multiple hotels, which have signed an agreement with Oyo, have been grumbling for long about the start-up not adhering to the monthly 'minimum guarantee' mentioned in their agreement. Till date, most hoteliers had only filed cases of cheating against the firm in various police stations across the country. Now, taking a step further, Hyderabad-based Conclave Infratech has dragged the Gurugram-headquartered start-up to NCLT for indulging in unfair business practices.

According to officials of Conclave Infratech, Oyo has offered them the entire agreed amount only for four months since they entered into a deal in May 2018. Of which,

Conclave Infratech received the renegotiated minimum guarantee twice. It further said that not only did Oyo fail to provide the agreed amount but it also used to deduct various other amounts under various heads that were not previously agreed upon. However, the officials agreed that Oyo did send a representative to settle their dues.

But the officials said they were "clueless about the latest development in NCLT."

Oyo saw its consolidated net loss balloon to \$335 million last year from \$44 million in FY18. The company, which claims to have around 43,000 hotel partners and a million rooms on its inventory, cited the international expansion and high operational expenditure costs as reasons for the spike in FY19 losses. "Since China and other international markets were in development and investment mode during that time, they contributed to 75 per cent of the losses," Oyo said.

While the company's internal projections showed in November it may not make a profit in India and China until 2022, the company, in its bid for profitability is laying off roughly 2,000 people in India.

GMR stake sale deal gets CCI green light

New Delhi, Feb 21: The Competition Commission of India has given approval for GMR group's proposed 49 per cent stake sale in its airport business to France's Groupe ADP.

The regulator's clearance is through the green channel, which allows for an automatic system for speedy approval of combinations, subject to certain conditions.

On Thursday, GMR Infrastructure said the French group would acquire 49 per cent stake in its airport business for Rs 10,780 crore, a deal that will help GMR reduce its debt burden.

In a tweet on Friday, the watchdog said it has received "green channel combination filing from Aeroports de Paris SA for acquisition of 49 per cent stake in GMR Airports Ltd and 100 per cent stake in GMR Infra Services Ltd".

Applications received under the green channel are deemed approved.

Aeroports de Paris SA (ADP) would buy 100 per cent stake in GMR Infra Services Ltd and then 49 per cent shareholding in GMR Airports Ltd (GAL), as per a notice submitted to the CCI.

GMR Infra Services is an operating and holding company. Its primary business is to hold shares in GAL, according to the notice.

Under a share purchase agreement, Groupe ADP would have 49 per cent stake in GAL for an equity consideration of Rs 10,780 crore.

Out of the total, Rs 9,780 crore would be towards secondary sale of shares by GMR Group and Rs 1,000 crore would be equity infusion in GAL, GMR Infrastructure said on Thursday.

"As part of the terms of transaction, GMR will retain management control over the Airports Business with Groupe ADP having the customary rights and board representation at GAL & its key subsidiaries," it had said.

Earlier, GMR group was to enter into a deal with Tatas for the airport business. A GMR spokesperson confirmed the deal with Tatas has been called off.

GMR Group operates airports in New Delhi, Hyderabad and in the Philippines. —PTI

Inbound, outbound travel hit over virus

Sangeetha G
CHENNAI, FEB. 21

While studies estimate that the tourism industry will lose \$550 million just on Chinese arrivals, the industry believes the impact will be much higher, as both out-bound tourism as well as arrivals from other countries have taken a major hit from the coronavirus outbreak in China.

Dun and Bradstreet estimates that the loss on fewer Chinese arrivals itself will be around \$550 million. China accounts for 3 per cent of India's foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs), finds Dun and Bradstreet. As per government data India received 10.6 million foreign tourists in 2018-19.

"At estimated earnings of \$2,800 per Chinese tourist, the tourism industry would have foregone rev-

enue of \$ 550 million in the near future," finds D&B.

However, the impact of coronavirus on tourism industry is much more. "Chinese tourist arrivals have almost become nil. China-bound travel also has been affected. We have seen at least 20 per cent of tourists cancelling their trip to different parts of China due to the coronavirus infection. Those who had not booked their tickets have postponed their trip indefinitely," said Iqbal Mulla, chief counsel, Global Tourism Council.

Travel to other South-east Asian countries like Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand has also taken a hit due to reports of infection in those countries. Tourists from other parts of the world are avoiding the south Asian region and proximity to China is hurting India in this case.

Market gets thrifty with PSU valuation

Ashwin J Punnen
MUMBAI, FEB. 21

With the government lining up a huge divestment programme, most of the public sector stocks are trading at a discount to their private sector counterparts. This divergence comes despite higher return on equity (RoE) commanded by public sector companies compared to private sector firms.

An analysis shows that at the end of FY19, PSUs, excluding BFSI sector stocks, traded at a price-to-earnings (P/E) multiple of 9.4 times as against 28.6x for their private sector peers, thus, marking a discount of 67 per cent.

Interestingly, the market is unwilling to give higher valuation to public sector undertakings despite they are giving better return on equity (RoE), a key gauge to the capital allocation efficiency of a company.

While RoE of PSUs stood at 15.4 per cent, that of private sector firms stood at

12.7 per cent.

However, in terms of valuation, there is a huge divergence as most of the public sector stocks are trading at a discount to their private sector counterparts.

According to Motilal Oswal Financial Services, apart from regulatory headwinds and intermittent stake sale by the government through divestments, the other two factors driving this valuation divergence were the higher share of cyclical businesses in earnings and the lower earnings growth expectation.

According to analysts, high RoE is desirable but improving RoEs is the key for market-cap creation.

"Evidently, companies with high RoEs trade at premium valuations. However, we note that markets are usually quick to factor in such high RoEs in the price. This is corroborated by our analysis of BSE200 companies which revealed mixed per-



formances in terms of market cap creation by high-RoE companies v/s low-RoE companies (outperformance/underperformance: CAGR of -1 per cent to +4 per cent) over the three tested cycles (FY03-08, FY08-13 and FY13-19)," the report said.

The government has trebled the target for disinvestment proceeds from Rs 65,000 crore in 2019-20 to Rs 210,000 crore in 2020-21.

India Inc's RoE has undergone two phases over the last 16 years (FY03-19) over FY03-08, representing small businesses.

"It is most amazing that after Amazon, Flipkart has also reportedly filed a petition in Bangalore High Court praying the stay against investigation ordered by Competition Commission of India though order of High Court also applicable on investigation against Flipkart," said Praveen Khandelwal, secretary general, Confederation of All

India Traders (Cait). Granting a stay on the probe, the court had found that the ongoing investigation by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) should be first completed before the CCI could initiate a probe.

Last year, the ED had initiated an investigation against Amazon and Flipkart for alleged violation of foreign direct investment laws. The court had opined that FDI violations being in the realm of

demand in places such as India and Turkey, they're also testing Europe's ability to absorb extra supply in a weak market.

At current forward prices of US and European gas, the profit margins of delivering US LNG to Europe and to Asia are thin, said a BloombergNEF note this week. Exporters of US LNG may be forced to keep gas at home during the next seven months despite the potential demand in the German power sector.

At least two Japanese buyers are also considering canceling cargoes from the US that they had expected to load before summer, according to traders with knowledge of the matter.

LNG exports have been a

Flipkart also moves HC against CCI investigation

Sangeetha G
CHENNAI, FEB. 21

Following in the footsteps of Amazon, Walmart-controlled Flipkart too has legally challenged the competition watchdog's probe ordered against it.

The move assumes importance as it comes ahead of US President Donald Trump's visit to India and the US administration has been expressing its concerns over the tightening of

FDI rules for e-commerce players.

Flipkart has approached the Karnataka High Court seeking a stay on the Competition Commission of India's probe against it regarding violation of anti-trust laws. Amazon had earlier approached the court and secured a stay on the investigation.

In its petition, Flipkart claimed that the CCI probe is without initial evidence on whether the company's

practices were harming competition.

"Such an order exposes responsible corporate entities ... to the rigours of an intrusive investigation prejudicially affecting not only its credibility and reputation, but also its commercial prospects," said Flipkart.

The CCI in January had ordered a probe into alleged violations of competition laws on a complaint filed by the Delhi Vyapar Mahasangh (DVM),

representing small businesses.

"It is most amazing that after Amazon, Flipkart has also reportedly filed a petition in Bangalore High Court praying the stay against investigation ordered by Competition Commission of India though order of High Court also applicable on investigation against Flipkart," said Praveen Khandelwal, secretary general, Confederation of All

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the ED and the adjudicating authority under the Fema, the case of CCI vs Bharti Airtel would apply to the case and the ED would have to give its report before the CCI could proceed with the matter.

The HC had also noted that while the CCI had asked Amazon for its comments in a previous case filed by All India Online Vendors' Association, it should have also called the parties in the current case.

Virus compounds US gas glut; LNG buyer cancels contract

Anna Shiryaevskaya & Naureen S. Malik
FEB. 21

A buyer of liquefied natural gas has cancelled two cargoes from Cheniere Energy Inc, the biggest US exporter, as a global glut pummels prices for the fuel and threatens to shut a key outlet for shale production.

Spanish utility owner Naturgy Energy Group SA has decided not to take delivery of two shipments from Cheniere, according to people with direct knowledge of the matter. The cargoes, one of which was scheduled for April delivery, were rejected by Naturgy's clients Repsol SA and Endesa SA, who had originally purchased the volumes from Naturgy

and will now pay a fee, the people said.

Cancellations of US cargoes were closely watched and highly anticipated amid a grim outlook on global prices. It could be an early sign that global oversupply is poised to hammer the US gas market, which is already straining under the weight of a domestic glut. Prices in Europe and Asia collapsed as storage levels rose during a mild winter, making it tougher for LNG buyers to make a profit reselling US cargoes abroad.

The coronavirus outbreak in China is stifling LNG demand from the world's fastest-growing importer. While China hasn't directly imported any US cargoes in more



than a year amid trade tensions, the virus has contributed to the global price rout.

The virus has wreaked havoc on commodity markets from LNG to copper while disrupting global industrial production, travel and supply chains. As Chinese demand for

the fuel declined, PetroChina Co. is said to have delayed discharge of multiple cargoes. Qatar and the world's biggest LNG trader, Royal Dutch Shell Plc, said they're working with customers to reschedule or reroute deliveries. While lower prices are opening up

demand in places such as India and Turkey, they're also testing Europe's ability to absorb extra supply in a weak market.

At current forward prices of US and European gas, the profit margins of delivering US LNG to Europe and to Asia are thin, said a BloombergNEF note this week. Exporters of US LNG may be forced to keep gas at home during the next seven months despite the potential demand in the German power sector.

At least two Japanese buyers are also considering canceling cargoes from the US that they had expected to load before summer, according to traders with knowledge of the matter. LNG exports have been a

relief valve for US gas producers as output from shale basins soars to record highs. In the Permian Basin of West Texas and New Mexico, where gas is extracted as a byproduct of oil drilling, prices have slid below zero amid pipeline bottlenecks; that means producers are paying others to take their supply.

More gas-fired power plants would have to be built in the US and abroad to ease the current supply glut, said Campbell Faulkner, chief data analyst for commodities broker OTC Global Holdings. "Until there is a boatload of new generation built domestically and abroad, there is simply not much room in the market" for more gas, he said. —Bloomberg

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle Russell's invaluable letters

Hamilton, (Alberta, Canada), Feb. 21: The names Albert Einstein, Ho Chi Minh, George Bernard Shaw, Lester Pearson, Dr. Albert Schweitzer and Nikita Khrushchev leap out from the letters in McMaster University's collection of Bernard Russell papers. The University's archives contain more than 1,20,000 letters as well as original Russell manuscripts, family pictures and documents neglected. McMaster paid 520,000 dollars to obtain the Russell papers in stiff competition from United States libraries and to the chagrin of British authorities who tried to prevent the loss of the papers. The letters Bertrand Russell wrote to the first of his four wives, Alys Pearsall Smith, are a contrast to the gloomy warnings of holocaust written in his later years. "I must kiss thy picture," he wrote when separated from Alys. Despite objections from his grandmother who opposed him marrying a commoner, Bertrand Russell wed Alys, an American Quaker. He confessed in his memoirs that his wife thought sex was beastly and he had stopped loving her after seven years. An embargo has been placed on the letters of the other three women Bertrand Russell married as well as on those of two women with whom he had spectacular love affair. The same embargo, usually lifted five years after death of the writer, applies to one letter from former Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson, written when Bernard Russell was at the height of his crusade against nuclear arms.

● **The University's archives contain more than 1,20,000 letters as well as original Russell manuscripts, family pictures and documents neglected**

Fat-shedding Duplantis promises more after pole vault world record



Sweden's Armand Duplantis celebrates after setting a new world record (6.17) in the men's pole vault final during the indoor athletics meeting Orlen Copernicus Cup 2020 in Torun, Poland, on February 8. — AP

■ **Duplantis, who announced his prodigious talent to a wider audience when he won the European outdoor title in Berlin in 2018 with a vault of 6.05m, a world junior record, acknowledged that the world record in Torun had not come as a surprise**

Paris: Swedish athletics star Armand Duplantis says his efforts to shed his "fat college kid" physique paid off as he soared to a new world record in the pole vault, and promptly promised more. Duplantis, known by his nickname "Mondo", sailed over 6.17 metres at an indoor meeting in the Polish city of Torun on Saturday. The 20-year-old, born in the United States to American father and coach Greg — himself a former pole vaulter who cleared 5.80m — and Swedish hepathlete mother Helena, had almost broken the record at a meeting just days earlier in Dusseldorf. He will have a chance to improve the mark in indoor meetings in Glasgow on Saturday, and then in France at Lievin on February 19 and Clermont-Ferrand four days later —

in the pole vault, athletics' governing body no longer makes any distinction between indoor and outdoor records. Duplantis' performance marks him out as a clear favourite for the Olympic title in Tokyo this year. He claimed silver at October's World Athletics Championships in Doha behind American Sam Hendricks just months after turning professional having attended Louisiana State University on an athletics scholarship. Duplantis credits a new fitness drive with success on the same pole he used in the Qatari capital. "I couldn't do much with it in Doha because I was just a big fat college kid at the time, I guess," said Duplantis. "I'm a lot more in shape now so I can get a lot more out of the pole." Duplantis, in an interview with World Athletics, also credited a more professional approach he has adopted this season. "Before I was a high school kid, and I was a college kid. On Friday night, Saturday night, I was a college kid. I don't regret that," he said. "But I wanted to take this to 100 percent, and be a professional. And I'm having the most fun I've ever had in my life." Duplantis' new record beat by one centimetre the previous best set six years ago by France's Renaud Lavillenie, the 2012 Olympic champion. "Have a good day baby, but not too good," Lavillenie texted Duplantis before his competition in Torun. 'ABSOLUTE IDOL' Duplantis openly admits that growing up in a track and field-crazy family that even had their own vaulting apparatus in the garden, "Renaud was my absolute idol". "There is no other person I'd want to take (the record) from." "The support he's given me through this whole process too, has been phenomenal." Lavillenie's former coach Damien Inocencio said

Duplantis' main strength was his natural speed, a real asset over 30-40 metres down the runway towards the plant and a propelled take-off. "Two years ago he ran a 100m in 10.56 seconds, so that comes naturally. He's also a good size (1.81m/5ft 11in) and a real competitor with a great mental strength," said Inocencio. Jean Gallione, who won Olympic pole vault gold for France in 1996, added: "He vaults in a very specific way. "When he beat the world record, it looked easy. All vaulting fundamentals are exceptionally mastered. "He arrives fast and importantly doesn't lose his speed because he's efficient on his final moments of his approach. He loads the flexion of the pole and very quickly unleashes it." Duplantis, who announced his prodigious talent to a wider audience when he won the European outdoor title in Berlin in 2018 with a vault of 6.05m, a world junior record, acknowledged that the world record in Torun had not come as a surprise. He opened with an easy clearance at 5.52m and then went on to clear 5.72, 5.92 and 6.01m at first attempts. A first effort at 6.17m was solid before the history-making vault on his second attempt. "I knew I had it in me," he said. "I knew it was a possibility. In Dusseldorf I had a great attempt at it - but you never know when you'll be in that kind of shape again, in world record shape again. "After that first attempt (in Torun), I thought, 'yeah, I just need two more attempts at this and I got it'. I was pretty confident that I had it." The question on everyone's lips is whether 'Mondo' can go higher in what is one of the most technical events in track and field, but often one of the most gripping to watch. "Of course," Duplantis said, happy to make world record attempts a habit. "Sure. If I feel good, why not go to 6.18?" — AFP

Stuck overseas: virus causes chaos in Chinese football

Hong Kong: The new coronavirus has scattered Chinese football clubs across the globe, with homesick players training for a season that has no start date and teams from other countries too scared to play them. The Chinese Super League was supposed to start later this month but the campaign was indefinitely postponed by the outbreak that has killed around 1,400 people and is centred on the Chinese city of Wuhan. The CSL season will not begin until early April at the earliest, according to state media, but the start date remains uncertain while the virus continues to spread in China and other countries. Chinese clubs have flown out to Spain, the United Arab Emirates, Thailand and Japan for pre-season training, despite having no idea when the campaign will begin or when they can safely return home. Meanwhile China's women's Olympic team were forced to exercise in the corridor of the Brisbane hotel where they were quarantined, in a stark illustration of the challenges facing Chinese football. Wuhan Zall, who finished sixth in the CSL last season, landed in Spain for a training camp near Malaga at the end of January, where they were met by medical personnel. None of the players or staff showed any symptoms. Jose Gonzalez, Wuhan's Spanish coach, pleaded for his players not to be demonised, saying that "they are not walking viruses, they are athletes". "I hope they find a little empathy in Spain, it can't

● **The Chinese Super League was supposed to start later this month but the campaign was indefinitely postponed by the outbreak that has killed around 1,400 people and is centred on the Chinese city of Wuhan**

be easy to be so many kilometres from home and know that your family is in the quarantine zone," Marca quoted him as saying. However, the Russian side FC Krasnodar cancelled a friendly against Wuhan seemingly because of fears over the virus. Europa Point FC of Gibraltar reportedly followed suit. Chinese FA Cup winners Shanghai Shenhua — shorn of striker Odion Ighalo, who has joined Manchester United on loan — have been in Dubai for nearly two weeks and will then head to Abu Dhabi for more training, according to the Oriental Sports Daily. Ighalo is yet to set foot in the Premier League club's training ground as a precaution against the virus. At Shenhua, the prolonged time away from home and the uncertainty can do about it. Now the epidemic back home is more serious. "The club management

provides psychological counselling to the players to make the atmosphere as happy and harmonious as possible." There are no known fatalities in Chinese football from the outbreak, but a youth player at second-tier Zhejiang Greentown tested positive for the new coronavirus, the club said this week. **TAKING NO CHANCES** Beijing Guoan, who have London-born Chinese international Nico Yennaris in their squad, play away at Thailand's Chiangrai United in the AFC Champions League next week as they return to competitive action for the first time since December 1. The squad are already training in Thailand, having been on South Korea's Jeju island. The club are taking no chances, gauging the players' temperatures twice a day and making them wear masks while travelling. Zhou Jinhui, the club chairman, visited the team on Tuesday and acknowledged that the players had been torn from their families at a difficult time. "This situation is the first time for everyone here today. To be honest, I have no good way to solve it," said Zhou. But he hopes that Beijing can beat Chiangrai to lift the spirits of football fans all over China. "You don't only have to go all-out, but you also need to adjust your mindset," he told the players. "Because for this game, not only will Beijing fans pay attention, but also many fans across the country will be watching." — AFP

Kuminga awaits his chance at stardom

NBA New York: He will not finish high school until 2021, but Congolese teen Jonathan Kuminga is already considered by some to be the young player who most interests the NBA. Kuminga is currently enrolled at The Patrick School in Hillside, New Jersey, 20 miles southwest of New York. He might be a couple years away from becoming a millionaire, but for now, the 6-foot-8 multiple threat spends most of his time in a modest red brick building, home of The Patrick's gym and classrooms. On Christmas eve, coach Chris Chavannes hosted a three-hour practice, with the highly touted prospect sometimes struggling to keep up. "I think where he came from they didn't have as much talent as we have here and it wasn't as intense," explains Chavannes, "so now you have to learn that grind, the physicality, the demands we put on them, mentally and physically." "But he's different because he loves basketball. He's a junkie. So the transition for him is not that hard." "That may be one of the few weak spots in Kuminga's profile as a player. At 17 only, he already weighs over 200 pounds and carries a highly muscular frame. "Physically he has a body that's college, NBA ready already", states former NBA player Al Harrington, who is one of the few high schoolers to have successfully jumped straight to the pros, back in 1998. The former St. Patrick player was 220 lbs (and 6'8") when he joined the NBA but thinks Kuminga is "built



Jonathan Kuminga

● **Jonathan Kuminga might be a couple years away from becoming a millionaire, but for now, the 6-foot-8 multiple threat spends most of his time in a modest red brick building, home of The Patrick's gym and classrooms**

ment as a possible window for a national team debut. "We are following him closely," Nkoi said. "We give ourselves time." **POSSIBLE TOP PICK** Since last year, "Jon" has been considered a possible top pick in the 2022 NBA Draft, becoming eligible for the selection process one year after his high school class graduates. "With his talent he could probably be the number one pick in the NBA", if he could enter straight out of high school said his cousin, Utah Jazz star Emmanuel Mudiay, who is also from DR Congo. While the NBA has discussed changing the rules to allow direct moves from the high school ranks to the League — something unseen in 15 years — any change is unlikely to come in time to prevent Kuminga from having to spend a year in college basketball. "Because he's so rooted and so grounded that makes it very very easy" for him to stay focused on the ultimate goal, making it to the NBA. And helping him stay on track, Patrick alumni like Harrington and Brooklyn Nets star Kyrie Irving sometimes drop by workouts and pass along advice. "For foreigners like us coming from overseas we have a mentality of our goal is set", Mudiay said. "His goal is to get to the NBA." — AFP

better than I was". "I think he's more physically gifted than I was at that age." Born and raised in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kuminga also has the skills to match his "Adonis" frame, as Chavannes puts it. "Usually you don't see a guy that size being able to handle the ball and post you, the speed and the athleticism, very rarely can you find a full combination, and he has it." Able to play at least four positions, Kuminga can push the ball up, drive, or wait for the right play with in a half court offense, with a reliable outside shot at the ready. Since arriving in the United States from the Democratic Republic of Congo at age 13, Kuminga has had a chaotic journey, attending four high schools in as many years. Several members of his family live nearby, but Kuminga has not been reunited with his parents since departing his homeland. "I am still a kid, so I miss them," said Kuminga, whose older brother, Joel Ntambwe, played US college basketball at Texas Tech University in Lubbock. The cost of a trip from Africa and visa issues prevent a reunion with his parents or any possibility of joining his homeland's national team in the near future, whose jersey he has never worn even in youth squads. Because of Kuminga's young age, Congolese federation manager Joe Nkoi Nevertheless doesn't mind the wait, but considers the 2021 AfroBasket tourna-

SHORT TAKES

India women might play in Hundred

New Delhi: Some of the players of the Indian women's team may be seen in action in 'The Hundred' tournament in the United Kingdom if the ECB can convince the BCCI on their involvement in the inaugural 100-ball competition starting in July. According to a report in *ESPNcricinfo*, England and Wales Cricket Board is currently engaged in a discussion with the BCCI about the participation of the Indian women cricketers in the tournament. Top Indian women players such as Harmanpreet Kaur and Smriti Mandhana have earlier played in England's T20 Kia Super League, which has now been disbanded to make way for 'The Hundred', which also has a separate men's tournament. The BCCI had apparently expressed its willingness to allow the women players in the Hundred when it met its ECB counterparts last December but since then there has been no firm decision taken on that front. — PTI

We're focused on winning: Warner

Johannesburg: Ahead of the T20I series against South Africa, Australia top-order batsman David Warner said the team's focus is to try and win as many games as possible. "For us, our focus is moving forward and trying to get the wins on the board and send a message to everyone that the World Cup is in our backyard and we want to be a team to be beaten," International Cricket Council (ICC) quoted Warner as saying. Australia has not played a T20 international since November 2019 and this is the side's first tour back to South Africa since the ball-tampering scandal in 2018. In 2018, Warner, Steve Smith, and Cameron Bancroft were involved in ball-tampering in the Cape Town Test and as a result, the trio was suspended by Cricket Australia for one year. "Its one-day cricket and Twenty20 cricket, and you don't really have much time over the short period of time to get underneath each other's skin or anything like that." — Agencies

BCB wants Kohli for centenary game

New Delhi: Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) wants India captain Virat Kohli to be part of the two T20 Internationals, scheduled in Dhaka between March 18 to 22, to celebrate the birth centenary of country's founder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The BCCI is considering BCB's request. The Asia XI and World XI teams are yet to be confirmed for the two games but BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury said that the matches will be held in the March 18-22 window. "We are still working on the scheduling and the players' availability for the games and will make the announcement soon. What I can say is that the games will be played between March 18-22 and we are in constant touch with the BCCI over the availability of the Indian players," Chowdhury said without referring Kohli's name. Asked about the Indian players' availability for the matches, BCCI president Sourav Ganguly, who was at the Board headquarters in Mumbai on Friday, said: "We have not yet finalised the names. We can send four to five players." — PTI

Jam session

Kiwis on song as fiery spell from Jamieson rattles India



Wellington, Feb. 21: India's top-order batsmen performed woefully on a challenging track as the side crawled to 122 for 5 with New Zealand's towering pacer Kyle Jamieson rattling the visiting big guns on his debut on a rain-hit opening day of the first Test here. Friday's play was called off after tea due to a heavy downpour, the gloomy conditions typifying India's batting blues with only Ajinkya Rahane (38 batting off 122 balls) matching wares when it came to winning the mental battle. The 6'8" Jamieson could not have asked for a better start, picking up 3 for 38 in 14 overs and his prized scalps included two of India's best long-form batsmen — skipper Virat Kohli (2) and the dogged Cheteshwar Pujara (14 off 42 balls). He also took a lovely

catch in the deep to cap off a day he will remember forever. What Jamieson did wonderfully well was mix up the back of the length stuff with fuller deliveries in between. He bowled the natural back of the length deliveries that climbed on the batsmen, pegging them on backfoot. He also mixed it up with fuller deliveries when the batsmen were just a tad unsure of their footwork. Bowling at barely 130 kmph, he troubled the visitors making it easier for senior pros Tim Southee (1/27 in 14 overs) and Trent Boult (1/44 in 14 overs) to bowl a more probing line.

Such was the disciplined effort from the Black Caps bowlers that India managed only 43 runs in the second session. Rahane played 122 balls, hitting four boundaries on a heavy outfield. Rishabh Pant was at the other end on 10. Mayank Agarwal (34 off 84 balls), who did the hard work of surviving the first session, was out after lunch as he tried a pull shot off Boult just after surviving a tough caught and bowled chance. Once Kane Williamson called it right under the overcast conditions, it was a challenge for the Indian batsmen. Young Prithvi Shaw's loose technique and tendency to close the bat face was always going to cost him. Southee bowled one that looked like angling in and Shaw closed the bat face as the ball moved a shade away after pitching, brushing his pad and then the off-stump. — PTI

««« New Zealand's Kyle Jamieson celebrates an Indian wicket in Wellington on Friday. — PTI

SCORECARD

India (1st Innings): Prithvi Shaw b Southee 16, Mayank Agarwal c Jamieson b Boult 34, Cheteshwar Pujara c Watling b Jamieson 11, Virat Kohli c Taylor b Jamieson 2, Ajinkya Rahane (batting) 38, Hanuma Vihari c Watling b Jamieson 7, Rishabh Pant (batting) 10. Extras (LB-1 W-3) 4. Total (for five wickets in 55 overs) 122. **Bowling:** Southee 14-4-27-1, Boult 14-2-44-1, de Grandhomme 11-5-12-0, Jamieson 14-2-38-3, Patel 2-2-0-0.

Taylor completes a special treble

Wellington, Feb. 21: Veteran New Zealand batsman Ross Taylor on Friday made history when he took the field against India in the opening Test here as he became the first player to play 100 matches in all three formats of the game. The ongoing match at the Basin Reserve is his 100th Test. Taylor was presented his 100th Test cap by former New Zealand wicketkeeper Ian Smith before the match. "Really excited about the occasion. It's very nice for the team and the family to experience something they might never do again," he said. "I'll need some help

drinking (the hundred bottles of wine), but they can be stored for a while. It keeps the tradition from Fleming, Brendon (McCullum) and Dan (Daniel Vettori) who all played over a hundred Tests each and hopefully we can celebrate this one with a win." The 35-year-old played his 100th T20 International against India last month. He has also played 231 ODIs for New Zealand. The right-handed batsman is already his country's leading run-scorer in Test and ODI with 7174 and 8570 runs respectively to his name. — PTI

Basin not easy track to bat, says Agarwal

Wellington, Feb. 21: Indian opener Mayank Agarwal on Friday said the tricky Basin Reserve wicket was very difficult to negotiate for the visiting batsmen and what made it worse was debutant New Zealand seamer Kyle Jamieson's "terrific" consistency on the opening day of the first Test here. Agarwal (34) was the only batsman, apart from vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane (38 batting), who was able to counter the New Zealand seamers as India scored 122 for five in the rain-marred first day. "I think it is quite tricky since the wind blows at more than a decent speed here. And you just have to make adjustments right there on the field. As a batsman, it's not easy, especially first day, on this track," said Agarwal, who survived the first session only to get out after lunch. "As a batsman, you never felt that you were completely in because even after lunch, it was doing a little bit." Agarwal

praised Jamieson's effort, saying he was impressed with the way he mixed it up. "I thought he (Jamieson) bowled exceedingly well. He hit good areas and he got good bounce. The way he used the new ball was fantastic and he kept testing us bowling in the right areas. "Since the wicket was soft, he was getting extra kick as well. As a batsman, you have to make that little extra adjustment to the bounce, which can be a little tricky," explained the opener. The 29-year-old from Karnataka felt it was a combination of both spongy surface and disconcerting bounce which made life miserable for him and his colleagues. — PTI

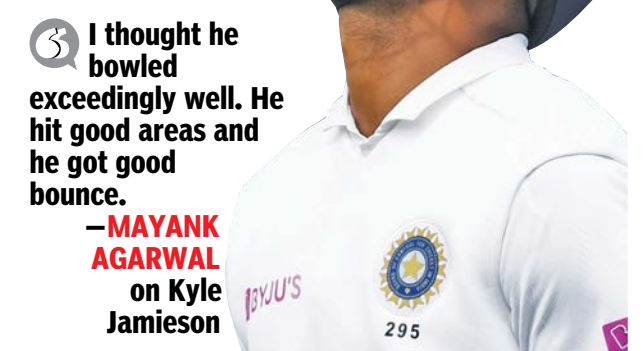
Getting Kohli out was massive, says Jamieson

Wellington, Feb. 21: Getting Virat Kohli and Cheteshwar Pujara out on his first day in Test cricket is the stuff dreams are made of and no wonder Kyle Jamieson thinks events of the past couple of weeks have been "surreal". Jamieson, who made an impact on his white ball debut during New Zealand's 3-0 ODI series win, picked three for 38 on his Test debut and also took a fine catch in the deep to leave India struggling at 122 for 5 on the first day of the opening Test. Is he able to believe what's happening? "Not really. It's still sinking in. The last couple of weeks have been pretty surreal as well. Pretty pleased and from a team perspective we're in a pretty good position as well," said the Auckland-born pacer, who is currently tallest, among international cricketers. "He's a pretty good batter and such a key to their line-up. To get him early was massive for us. To get a couple (including Pujara) early was where the emotion came from, certainly pretty special," said Jamieson. While Kohli's problems outside the off-stump has been talked about, Jamieson feels that "nitpicking" wasn't the smartest thing to do. "He's scored runs all around the world so

to try and nitpick that would be not the smartest. With the assistance of the pitch it was how we would try to make him play and he's so strong on the stump line. I probably missed a little bit but managed to get the edge which was good." The extra bounce that he generates has been his go to strategy since he came into the ODI side. "I tried to keep it simple the last few weeks. My role is to make them play and with that extra bounce bring them forward. There was a lot of assistance with pace and bounce and swing and seam. That simplifies my game plan to try to hit a good area. I stayed pretty relaxed which helped," he said. The height also helps him to bowl slightly more fuller than other seam bowlers, something that got rid of Pujara and Hanuma Vihari. "With my height, I can afford to go a fraction fuller, especially out here with the extra bounce. I try to make guys commit to play off the front-foot. "In that second spell, the first half of it, there were a lot of balls left on length. How do you commit them on the front-foot (is the key) and if it does swing or seam, you're in with a chance of bringing the edge in." — PTI



New Zealand's Ross Taylor with his children on his 100th Test prior to the first Test match against India at the Basin Reserve in Wellington on Friday. — Twitter



I thought he bowled exceedingly well. He hit good areas and he got good bounce. —MAYANK AGARWAL on Kyle Jamieson

WOMEN'S T20 WORLD CUP

Poonam Ki Raat!

Sydney, Feb. 21: Leg-spinner Poonam Yadav bowled a magical spell in her comeback game to steer India to a comfortable 17-run win over defending champions Australia in the opening match of the Women's T20 World Cup here on Friday. Put in to bat, India struggled to a below par 132 before Poonam (4/19 in 4 overs) foxed the Aussies with her googlies, turning the match decisively into her team's favour. Australia, who have won the competition four times in six editions, were all out for 115 in 19.5 overs. "A bowler like Poonam is someone who leads from the front. We were expecting a great comeback from her. Our team is looking nice, earlier we depended on two-three players," India skipper Harmanpreet Kaur said after the match. Poonam, who missed the preceding tri-series due to

a hand injury, also got good support from other bowlers including pacer Shikha Pandey. The 28-year-old from Agra was on a hat-trick but narrowly missed out as wicketkeeper Taniya Bhatia dropped a difficult chance. The tournament-opener saw a record 13,000 plus attendance with a sizeable chunk supporting India. India next play against Bangladesh in Perth on February 24. "It was great for me to come back from injury and perform like this. It was the third time that I was on a hat-trick but sat-

isfied that I was able to do the job for the team," said Poonam. Australia were off to a good start to their chase with opener Alyssa Healy making a 35-ball 51, laced with six boundaries and a six. However, Indian spinners led by Poonam triggered a collapse as Australia suddenly slipped to 82 for six. Poonam snapped four wickets, two in successive deliveries in the 12th over, to break the back of Australia's chase. Ashleigh Gardner tried her bit but didn't get any support from the other end. Earlier, India squandered a flying start to end up with a below-par total. Shafali Verma took India to 40 for no loss in four overs with a typically aggressive 29 off 15 balls but her fall derailed the innings as the other batters disappointed. — PTI



India's Poonam Yadav (right) and wicket-keeper Tanya Bhatia celebrate an Australian wicket during the first game of the Women's T20 World Cup in Sydney on Friday. — ICC

I am very proud of my daughter's performance, says Poonam's mother

Agra, February 21: After Indian spinner Poonam Yadav took four wickets and guided her team to a victory over Australia in the opening match of Women's T20 World Cup, her mother Munni Devi said she is proud of her daughter's performance. "India batting first scored a below-par score and the Australian team started well. At first, I was nervous but the team made a comeback later in the game. I am very proud of Poonam Yadav who took four wickets in the game. All the girls played well and their effort ensured India's victory," Munni Devi said. — Agencies

RANJI TROPHY QUATERFINALS

Jani's ton helps Saurashtra pile up 419 against Andhra

Ongole (AP), Feb. 21: A dogged century by Chirag Jani (121 off 297 balls, 12x4s) and his 157-run seventh-wicket partnership with Perak Mankad (80) helped Saurashtra pile up 419 in the first innings against Andhra on the second day of its Ranji Trophy quarterfinal match here on Friday. Skipper Jaydev Unadkat removed Andhra opener D B Prasanth (1) and Jyothisaikrishna (17) to leave the host at 40 for two from 22 overs at stumps, still trailing by 379 runs. Resuming at the overnight score of 226 for six, Jani and Mankad frustrated the Andhra bowlers and were still at the crease at lunch. They defied the attack led by Y Prithvi Raj and scored whenever presented with the opportunity.

BRIEF SCORES
At Ongole: Saurashtra 419 in 146.5 overs (Chirag Jani 121, Perak Mankad 80, Vishvarajasingh Jadeja 73, Sheldon Jackson 50; Prithvi Raj Yarra 3/51, K V Sasikanth 3/149) vs Andhra 40/2 in 22 overs (CR Ganeshwar (batting) 22; Jaydev Unadkat 2/20).
At Cuttack: Bengal 332 in 96.5 overs (Anustup Majumdar 157, Shahbaz Ahmed 82; Basant Mohanty 4/53, Suryakant Pradhan 3/115) vs Odisha 151/4 in 67.1 overs (Debasish Samantray 68, Shantanu Mishra 62).
At Valsad: Gujarat 602/8 decl. (Parthiv Patel 124, Roosh Kalaria 118 not out; Felix Alemao 3/86) vs Goa 46/2 in 16 overs.
At Jammu: Karnataka 14/2 in 6 overs (Karun Nair (batting) 4; Aquib Nabi 1/6, Mujtaba Yousuf 1/5) vs Jammu and Kashmir.
Kalaria's ton puts Gujarat in command
 Roosh Kalaria scored his third first-class century to propel Gujarat to a mammoth 602 for eight declared against Goa on the second day of their Ranji Trophy quarterfinal at Valsad on Friday. Resuming at the overnight score of 330 for four, the home team suffered two jolts as Goa's right-arm medium-pacer Felix Alemao struck with the second new ball, dismissing both the overnight batsmen (Patel and Gandhi). — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Mclroy grabs lead at Mexico golf

Mexico City: Rory Mclroy started strong in his bid to complete his WGC trophy collection, firing a six-under par 65 on Thursday for a two-shot lead in the Mexico Championship. The Northern Ireland star eagled his second hole of the day at Club de Golf Chapultepec, the par-five 11th. He closed with back-to-back birdies to break free atop a crowded leaderboard with two-time Masters champion Bubba Watson and 2017 PGA Championship winner Justin Thomas two shots back on four-under 67. It was a further stroke back to South African Louis Oosthuizen, Canadian Corey Conners and Americans Billy Horschel and Bryson DeChambeau. Mclroy, number one in the world again for the first time since 2015, is coming off a tie for fifth at the Genesis Open at Riviera in Los Angeles — where he shared the 54-hole lead but couldn't match eventual winner Adam Scott in the final round. — AFP

AIBA plans new boxing WC

Lausanne: Boxing's troubled governing body the AIBA announced Friday it was resurrecting the defunct team World Cup with the Russian city of Nizhni Novgorod chosen to stage the October finals. The AIBA is in a corner, stripped by the International Olympic committee of its right to run boxing at the Tokyo Games due to serious mismanagement. The last team World Cup was back in 2008 in Moscow and won by Cuba. An AIBA statement said the 2020 motto 'Boxing for Peace' was designed to mark the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. Choosing a Russian city to stage the finals goes against the WADA ban excluding Russia from hosting certain international competitions. WADA imposed a four-year international exclusion on Russia in December over its state-sponsored doping scheme, prohibiting Russia from participating in such events as this year's Tokyo Olympics. — AFP

Paul vs Dan in UFC fight night

Hyderabad: MMA fans are all geared up for another super fight coming up this weekend featuring Paul Felder and Dan Hooker at the UFC Fight Night 168 in the Lightweight Bout category for the main event at the Spark Centre in Auckland, New Zealand. Adding to the excitement, the co-main event will feature Jimmy Crute who will face off Michal Oleksiejczuk under the Light Heavyweight Bout category. Following are the other bouts: Lightweight Bout (Main Event) Paul Felder vs Dan Hooker; Light Heavyweight Bout (Co-Main Event) Michal Oleksiejczuk vs Jimmy Crute; Women Strawweight Bout Karolina Kowalkiewicz vs Yan Xiaonan; Heavyweight Bout Ben Sosoli vs Marcos Rogério de Lima; Lightweight Bout Brad Riddell vs Magomed Mustafayev; Featherweight Bout Kevin Aguilar vs Zubaira Tukhugov. **Live on TV:** UFC Fight Night 168 featuring Paul Felder and Dan Hooker from 5.30 am (Sunday) on Sony TEN 2, HD.

RING SET FOR WILDER, FURY RE-MATCH

Las Vegas: The most-anticipated heavyweight showdown in nearly two decades will transfix the boxing world on Saturday when unbeaten WBC champion Deontay Wilder faces Tyson Fury in a long-awaited rematch. In what is the biggest heavyweight collision since Lennox Lewis bludgeoned Mike Tyson into submission on the banks of the Mississippi River in 2002, Wilder and Fury go head-to-head 14 months after battling to a draw in Los Angeles. Tickets for Saturday's bout at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas have been changing hands for up to \$11,000, while promoters predict the event could generate more than 2 million pay-per-view sales in the United States alone. At the centre of the action are two of heavyweight boxing's most charismatic and skilful protagonists, the hard-hitting 'Bronze Bomber' Wilder and Fury, the eccentric, self-styled 'Gypsy King' from northern England. — AFP



Lucian Goian returned to haunt his former side Mumbai City FC as his goal helped Chennaiyin FC romp into the ISL playoffs. — IFL

CFC Goian to playoffs

Old boy Goian returns to end Mumbai dreams

DC CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI, FEB. 21

There was heart-break for Mumbai City FC in the most poetic form when Lucian Goian scored the winner against his former club to help Chennaiyin FC qualify for the Hero Indian Super League playoffs after a tightly-contested clash at the Mumbai Football Arena here on Friday.

Clear-cut chances were few and far between in what was an intense contest that saw Mumbai City reduced to 10-men in the second half. But Goian's 83rd-minute strike was

enough for Chennaiyin to win the contest 1-0 and complete the ISL play-off lineup. Mumbai City end the league stage in the fifth spot with 26 points. Chennaiyin, who have one more game left, have 28 points and occupy the fourth spot currently.

The match got off to a cagey start as both teams were reluctant to give away the first goal. Dragos Firtulescu, who was a late starting lineup replacement for an injured Andre Schembri, picked up the ball in midfield and released Lallianzuala Chhangte down the left flank. The Indian winger's

looping ball into the box forced Amrinder Singh to come off his line and punch the ball away from danger.

The teams had an equal footing in the game and the ball was sprayed from one half of the pitch to another. However, it were the defences that dominated the area in and around the two boxes.

The start of the second half saw two big incidents at either end of the pitch that helped to increase the tempo of the game. Vishal Kaith was extremely lucky to escape a sending off when he rushed off his line to get to Amine

Chermitti who was sent through on goal. The keeper brought the striker down outside the box and was cautioned with a yellow card despite protests from the players in blue.

The Islanders suffered a massive blow in the 54th minute. Chhangte was released in behind the defence and was fouled by Sourav Das with a tackle from behind. The Mumbai midfielder was shown a direct red and the hosts were reduced to 10 men.

Even with the disadvantage, Mumbai City were able to threaten Chennaiyin's defence after the hour-mark. Chermitti's

run behind the defence was well spotted by Carlos but the striker's shot, after a good first touch to bring the ball down, was disappointing and wide.

The teams pushed for a goal, albeit without conviction, in the final quarter of the match but Lucian Goian proved to be the difference in the 83rd minute. Nerijus Valskis flicked on Rafael Crivellaro's corner-kick from the right towards the far post from where the Chennaiyin skipper lashed a volley in and completed a fantastic turnaround for his team under Owen Coyle.

MCC 'A' DRUB RANSA 'A' IN TENNIS LEAGUE

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB. 21

Madras Cricket Club 'A' drubbed Ransa Sports Club 'A' 3-0 in the Sanmar-TNTA Chennai city club tennis league championship.

Results: A zone: Madras Cricket Club 'A' bt Ransa Sports Club 'A' 3-0 (Vinod Sridhar/Mohammed Fahad bt J. Jayanth/Krishna Teja Raja 6-1, 6-2; Rajeev Vijayakumar/Mohammed Fariz bt R.S. Mohit/Preeth Kumar 4-6, 6-4, 6-3; Manav Sree Kumar/Nait hrav Srinivasan bt Prashanth Selvaraj/Nishanth Panneer 6-1, 3-6, 6-2); Cosmopolitan Club 'B' bt Anna Nagar 'K' Block 'B' 3-0 (J Vimalraj Gokul Suresh Bt. M Nishanth/D Sathesh Babu 6-1, 6-1; B Lohithaksha/Abhar Rameez Samad bt Arjun Krishnan/R Vijayakumar 6-1, 6-3; R a m p r a k a s h Ravishankar/Himanshu Shankar bt A Praveenraj/Deepak Senthil Kumar 6-3, 6-1)

B Zone: Madras Cricket Club 'B' bt Madras Gymkhana Club 'A' 2-1 (Nithyaesh Natra/Siddharth Hande bt Sundeep Bathija/Vignest Bhasker 6-2, 6-0; RVRK Ranga Rao/Karthik Rajasekar bt M.P. Shankar/Niranjan Kumar 6-0, 6-3; Karthik Neelakantan/Riyah Dugar Lost to Murali Padmanabhan/Ganesh Amarnath 6-4, 2-6, 0-6); Nungambakkam Tennis Club 'C' bt Cosmopolitan Club 'A' 2-1 (V. Sathishkumar/A. Vikram Dhananjay Lost to C Rameez Samad/Salman Yasser Firdouse 6-7(2), 1-6; Madhan Kumar/Arnold Inigo bt G P Balaji/Karthik Kailash 6-4, 6-0; Johnson Raj /G Madhavan bt J a y a k u m a r Jagaveeran/Shivakumar Palani 6-3, 6-4).



N. Ramachandran, CEO of the Indian Triathlon Federation, unveils the jersey for 2020 NTT Chennai ASTC Triathlon Asian Cup on Friday.

Triathlon Asian Cup in city

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB. 21

The Tamil Nadu Triathlon Association under the aegis of Indian Triathlon Federation will organise the 2020 NTT Chennai ASTC Triathlon Asian Cup in Chennai on February 23. The event is returning to Chennai after two decades.

More than 100 participants (70 men and 30 women), including 30 triathletes from countries like France, Luxembourg, Serbia, Hong Kong, Japan, Kazakhstan, Chile, Switzerland, Azerbaijan, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Korea, Poland, Ukraine, Philippines, Nepal and Romania are expected to take part in this prestigious event.

Simultaneously the senior national championship will also be held with this Asian event. Around 70 participants from Indian States name-

An Olympic and Asian Games discipline, triathlon is a combination of three sports (Swimming 1.5 km), cycling (40 km) and road running (10 km) one after the other. The outside area of the INS Adyar Naval establishment will be the venue for the initial sea swimming.

ly Assam, Delhi, Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tripura, Manipur, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Pondicherry, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh apart from SSCB are participating in the event. There is thus an opportunity for an Indian to win two medals, in the Asian event and in the national championship.

An Olympic and Asian Games discipline, triathlon is a combination of three sports (Swimming 1.5 km), cycling (40 km) and road running (10 km) one after the other. The outside area of the INS Adyar Naval establishment will be the venue for the initial sea swimming. Thereafter the roads in the surrounding area form the arena for the next two phases. Triathletes coming out after swimming pick up their bicycles from the outside INS Adyar in the transition area, cycle down to Kamarajar Salai, turn right to go to War Memorial and then Flag Staff Road, Anna Salai and into Swami Sivananda Salai and thereafter to the Napier Bridge and turn into

Kamarajar Salai once again.

Approximately eight rounds of cycling and two rounds of running complete the event. (Details in map attached). The Indian Coast Guard will provide "Life Guard Cover" in the Sea for the triathletes. They have undertaken this task with a lot of preparation in consultation with the Indian Triathlon Federation. The Indian Navy has come forward with all assistance in the initial phase of the event in the sea as well as in the transition area.

N. Ramachandran, CEO of the Indian Triathlon Federation, said that the event can be considered a forerunner to the invitation events that the ITF has planned to give a fillip to Triathlon in the country. "Around three to four such invitation fixtures have been planned and conducted through event managers," he added.

Ojha swaps the ball with mike

Quits cricket for commentary

MOSES KONDETY | DC HYDERABAD, FEB. 21



Pragyan Ojha

Pragyan Ojha, the only Hyderabad cricketer to represent India in all three formats — Test, ODI and Twenty20 — announced his retirement from the game via a letter to the BCCI president on Friday. He's not going far from the field though, dumping his floppy flannels for designer suits in the commentary box.

"I am getting into commentary. We'll see how it goes," the 33-year-old told this newspaper.

To start with, "I am calling all the domestic games for the BCCI, both in English and Hindi," said Ojha, who is on the BCCI panel of commentators. "The IPL is also lined up... other series will gradually follow."

In an international career from 2009 to 2013, the left-arm spinner took 113 wickets in 24 Tests; claimed 21 scalps in 18 ODIs and got 10 wickets in the 6 T20s he played. He also has 424 wickets from 108 first class matches (best figures being 7/58) between 2005 and 2018.

Unlike most past cricketers, Ojha has no plans to start an academy. "I believe when I am talking about coaching or advising any youngster it will be my sole responsibility to be 100 per cent there. And for that to happen I need some time, for I believe a youngster's career will be affected if I am present but not giving my 100 per cent. I am very careful with the way I handle things," he explained. "I have to really get into that space where I give my best whenever I speak to any aspiring cricketer. Only when that happens, will I think about setting up a coaching academy or anything like that," he added.

CITY CLIPS

Pradosh, Vijay hit tons

Centuries from Pradosh Ranjan Paul and Vijay Shankar helped India Cements-Vijay CC beat MRF-Globe Trotters in the semifinals of the V.A. Parthasarathy Memorial Trophy at Guru Nanak College ground on Friday. Vijay CC will take on Alwarpet in the final on Sunday.

Brief scores: Sanmar-Alwarpet 322 in 49.4 overs (B. Sai Sudharsan 66, R. Kavin 62, P. Shijit Chandran 37, R. Sanjay Yadav 50; M.S. Sanjay 3/59, Adithya Arun 2/64, Hapreet Brar 2/74, B. Rahul 2/42) bt Take Solutions-MRC 'A' 191 in 43.3 overs (S. Arun 76, M. Affan Khader 45; R. Sanjay Yadav 4/35, D. Rahul 2/48, R.S. Jaganath Sinivas 2/19); India Cements-Vijay 313/7 in 50 overs (Pradosh Ranjan Paul 104, Vijay Shankar 100, K.B. Arun Karthick 59 not out; Sanvir Singh 2/16, H. Trilok Nag 2/53) bt MRF-Globe Trotters 237 in 41 overs (S. Anirudh 86, M.S. Washington Sundar 29, Maan K. Bafna 43; Vijay Shankar 2/46, Rahil Shah 2/38, M. Mohammed 2/34).



Ramachandrapublic School, winners of the under-14 TNCA city schools tournament for B. Somasundaram Trophy.

Ramachandrapublic School triumph

K. Abhinav (78) and Akshay R Sarangdhar (68 not out) excelled in Ramachandrapublic School's win over Nellore Nadar MHSS 'A' in the final of the under-14 TNCA city schools tournament for B. Somasundaram Trophy at Marina ground on Friday.

Brief scores: Nellore Nadar Mat.Hr.Sec.School 'A' 193/8 in 50 overs (A.P. Pragadeesh 68, J. Jai Simha 49 not out; K. Abhinav 3/30) lost to Ramachandrapublic School 197/2 in 48 overs (K. Abhinav 78, Akshay R Sarangdhar 68 not out)

Mathan, Ponnari shine in Singam Puli CC's win

S. Mathan Kumar's century (103) and P. Ponnari Muthu's (60, 5/65) all-round performance propelled Singam Puli Cricket Club to 162-run win over Egmore Excelsiors in the TNCA's fifth division 'D' league. A. Vethamuthu Maradona's six-wicket haul went in vain. **Brief scores:** IV-Division 'A': Prithvi Cricket Club 144 in 49.5 overs (V. Naresh Babu 3/40, Aashish Srikrishnan 3/46) lost to Park Town Recreation Club 145/4 in 37.4 overs (K. Mani Bharathy 42, S. Vishaal 40); State Bank of India Recreation Club 191/8 in 50 overs (P. Raghavendra 42, K. Dhilepan 40, A. Badrinath 31; V. Murali 4/45, P. Hari Hara Sudhan 3/63) bt National Recreation Club 143 in 37.3 overs (K. Shanmuga Sundaram 43; P. Vignesh 6/36, V. Sanjeev Kumar 4/59); Social Cricket Club 155 in 46.1 overs (A. Devi Prashad 48, T. Prasath 39; G. Venkat 6/43) lost to Gandhi Nagar Starlets Club 156/5 in 31 overs (B. Arun Kumar 90 not out; I. Prakash 4/41); Young Men's Association 270 in 49.5 overs (T. Chandru 61, R.M. Karthik 54, J. Parthiban 48; M. Anush 4/52) bt Purasasankam Cricket Club 163/7 in 50 overs (M. Sathish 57; V. Vasudevan 3/36).

V-Division 'D': Kumbhat Cricket Club 217/8 in 50 overs (T. Rajah Ram 55 not out, D. Aswath 39, S. Karthick 39; M. Kaviarasan 3/57) bt Lusruraj Cricket Club 104 in 39.4 overs (T. Rajah Ram 3/18); Air India Sports Club 255/8 in 50 overs (J. Jeevanandham 75, N. Guruprasad 52 not out, M. Kaushik 36; S. Rajesh 3/72, Shameen Mohamed 3/35) bt Companions Cricket Club 146 in 41.4 overs (G. Bala 34; D. Gopinath 6/43); Singam Puli Cricket Club 303 in 49.5 overs (S. Mathan Kumar 103, V. Santhana Sekar 67, A. Vethamuthu Maradona 42 not out; P. Ponnari Muthu 5/65 bt Egmore Excelsiors 141 in 29.1 overs (P. Ponnari Muthu 60; A. Vethamuthu Maradona 6/33).

V-Division 'E': C. Appaiah Chettiar Memorial Cricket Club 53 in 25.1 overs (D. Suresh 4/18) lost to Indian Oil Sports and Recreation Club 54/1 in 9 overs; Comrades Cricket Club 156 in 44.3 overs (K. Sai Balaji 38, M. Balamurugan 32; R. Ram Kumar 4/44) lost to Venkat Cricket Club 157/4 in 31.1 overs (A. Santhosh Kumar 68 not out, S. Senthil Kumar 57); Shivaji Cricket Club 278 in 48.3 overs (A. Hannel Steve Delwyn 92, Pradeep Ravi 46; S. Manikandan 3/58, M. Amarnath 3/48) lost to Vijay's Recreation Club 282/7 in 48.4 overs (M. Suriyah 105, U. Hari Krishna 57, B. Amal 34; Devendar Soni 3/52); Harnath Cricket Club 139 in 46.3 overs (K. Stephen 42; G. Govinath 4/30, G. Akash 3/35) lost to Triplicane Friends United Cricket Club 140/2 in 30.5 overs (P. Vishnu 42, D.R. Madhusudhan 40).