

FROM PAGE ONE

PM targets SP

terror attacks in the state.

Referring to the Ahmedabad blasts, when he was Chief Minister of Gujarat, Modi said: “Maine uss rakt se geeli hui uss mitti ko utha karke main sankalp liya tha ki meri sarkar inn atankwadiyon ko pataal se bhi khoj karke saja degi... apnre dekha hai abhi do din pehle he Ahmedabad bomb dhamake ke doshiyon ko saja mili hai. Jo hum Bharatiyon ko tabah kama chahte the unhein adalat ne saja sunai hai. Anek atankwadiyon ko faansi ki saza mili hai.”

(“I had taken a pledge with that bloodsoaked soil that my government will find these terrorists even in hell and punish them. You would have seen two days ago that punishment was announced by the court to those guilty in the bomb blasts who wanted to destroy us Indians. The death sentence has been announced for several terrorists.”)

Modi said that he was speaking about the issue especially because “certain political parties” have been “merciful” towards terrorists and adopted a “soft” approach to terrorism “for the sake of vote banks”. He described this approach as a “threat to the nation” and said every citizen must realise that.

Referring again to the perpetrators of the Ahmedabad blasts, Modi said: “Lekin inhone kya kiya... Yahan Samajwadi Party ka joh chunav symbol hai na, unka chunav ka nishan hai na, toh shuru mein jo bomb dhamake hue woh saare ke saare unhone bomb cycle par rakhe hue thehe. Cycle par bomb rakhe hue thehe... aur jahan log sabzi waqairah khariide ke liye aate hain, wahan cycle park karke chale gaye thehe, aur ek samay chaaron taraf yeh cyclon par rakhe hue bomb dhamake phute.”

(“What did they do? The Samajwadi Party’s election symbol here, it is their election symbol. In the blasts that occurred first, bombs were planted on bicycles and these bicycles were parked at places where people come to buy vegetables, etc. These bombs planted on bicycles bombs went off simultaneously.”)

“Main hairan hun yeh cycle ko unhone kyun pasand kiya (I am surprised why they preferred the bicycle),” Modi said.

On July 26, 2008, 22 blasts took place within 70 minutes at various locations in Ahmedabad, with explosives placed in buses and cars, and on parked bicycles.

On Sunday, Modi went on to refer to the blasts at the Sankatmochan temple and the Varanasi Cantonment railway station in 2006, when the SP was in power. He said that when the SP came to power again in 2013, its government took the decision

to withdraw the case against the accused Shamim Ahmed.

“Is it acceptable to you? Was the decision to withdraw the case against the accused in the Kashi blasts appropriate?” Modi said. He then asked the crowd: “Yeh logon ko aap kabhi bhi mauka denge to yeh apni wardatan karengi ki nahin karengi (If you will give them opportunity, will they create similar incidents or not?)”

Modi also accused the SP government in 2013 of deciding to withdraw cases against Tariq Qasmi, who was accused in a terror attack in Gorakhpur in 2007. He pointed out that the court did not accept the decision and sentenced the accused to 20 years.

Modi also said the SP government in 2013 had withdrawn cases against the accused in the blasts at court premises in Lucknow and Ayodhya in 2007. “But the court in that matter did not allow the conspiracy of the Samajwadi government and pronounced life term imprisonment for the terrorist,” he said.

Asserting that the SP government had issued orders for the withdrawal of cases against terror accused in 14 cases, he said: “Is it okay to show mercy to terrorists? Are these games of protecting terrorists okay?”

“Aur aaj lipapoti kame nikle ho. Yeh log visphot kar rahe thehe, dhamake kar rahe thehe, aur Samajwadi Party sarkar in atankwadiyon par mukadma tak nahin chalne de rahi thi. Atankwadiyon ko case wapsi ka return gift diya ja raha tha,” he said.

(And you [SP] have come out to cover it all up. They were doing blasts and the Samajwadi Party government was not even allowing trials to be conducted against those terrorists. The terrorists were being given return gifts in the form of case withdrawal.”)

Modi also targeted the Congress and alleged that the party addressed Osama Bin Laden as “Osama ji”, and that it cried over the killing of terrorists in the Batla House encounter, and insulted Indian Army and the police.

In 2013, following up on its poll promise that it would withdraw terror cases against innocent Muslim youths, the SP government ordered withdrawal of charges against 19 people, citing insufficient evidence in courts.

The Allahabad High Court stayed the government’s move while hearing a PIL filed by advocate Ranjana Agnihotri, along with five others. Agnihotri’s lawyer, Hari Shankar Jain, said: “The (then) state government filed a Special Leave Petition in the Supreme Court against the stay, and it is still pending.”

Among the 19 were alleged Hujj operatives Shamim Ahmed and Tariq Qasmi.

Ahmed was booked for al-

legedly planting a bomb in Varanasi in 2016 – the bomb did not explode. He was named in the chargesheet along with a cleric, Waliullah, and three students in Deoband from Bangladesh.

Waliullah’s lawyer Aarif Ali said: “The trial of Waliullah has reached the final stage (in a local court) as arguments have been completed. The three other accused and Shamim were never caught. Waliullah is currently lodged at Dasna Jail (Ghaziabad).”

Qasmi, a Unani practitioner from Azamgarh, was arrested in Barabanki after police claimed to have recovered explosives from his possession in December 2007. He was subsequently booked in three other cases related to blasts that occurred earlier that year in the Lucknow and Faizabad courts, and in Gorakhpur – five people were killed.

The SP government filed withdrawal applications in two cases linked to the blasts. But the courts rejected the government’s plea. “Tariq has been convicted to life imprisonment in all the four cases. An appeal in all four cases have been filed in Allahabad High Court and are pending,” said his lawyer Mohammad Shoab. Qasmi, who is married and has four children, is lodged in Barabanki jail.

Nagaur rape

the ADG Crime and the family will be given a financial package as per the provisions of the SC/ST Act,” Nagaur district collector Peeyush Samariya said.

Jodli said the body will be handed over to the family and the cremation was likely on Monday.

Nagaur SP Ram Moorty Joshi said they had to deploy a big force to move the body due to the tension surrounding the protests. On acting in the wee hours, police sources said they wanted to avoid a sustained dharna in Jaipur.

The BJP has been protesting against the Gehlot government over the incident, and claimed the involvement of “politically influential people”. On Saturday, the family said a local Congress worker of Nagaur district, Aaydan Ram Dara, was involved.

Two Nagaur police officials were earlier suspended for failing to do enough to locate the woman, including through use of her call details.

The Nagaur police has arrested a Dalit, identified as Suresh Meghwal, and detained a juvenile for the rape and murder of the woman, who went missing on February 4 and was rescued on February 10. She passed away in Jaipur on February 17, while undergoing treatment.

Police said Meghwal had raped the woman and then, with the help of his juvenile friend, strangled her, leaving her in the forest thinking she was dead. Police had termed her rescue a “miracle”.

Punjab turnout

The voter turnout was also considerably low in AAP bastions in the Malwa region, from where a majority of its 20 MLAs had won in 2017. The polling in Mansa, Barnala, Bathinda, Faridkot, Muktsar and Sangrur districts was lower than in 2017. In Malwa region, Gidderbaha recorded the highest polling, at 77.80%.

Chamkaur Sahib and Bhadaur, from where Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi is seeking to be elected, recorded polling of 70% and 71.30% respectively till 5 pm. Channi is the sitting MLA from Chamkaur Sahib.

In Dhuri, where AAP CM face Bhagwant Mann is a candidate, 68% had voted till 5 pm.

The stronghold of the Badals at Lambi and Jalalabad from where former CM Parkash Singh Badal and SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal are contesting saw 72.40% and 77% voting respectively.

Mansa saw 77.21% polling, Malerkotla 72.84%, Fazilka 73.59%, Sangrur 70.43% and Muktsar 74.12%.

Patiala city, from where former CM Capt Amarinder Singh is seeking re-election, saw 62.10% voting.

The BJP stronghold of Sujapur, in Pathankot district, recorded 71.5%, the highest voting percentage in the Majha region. In Doaba region, Sultanpur Lodhi recorded 68.1%.

The Election Commission restrained actor and philanthropist Sonu Sood from visiting polling booths in Moga following complaints that he was trying to influence voters. His vehicle has also been impounded by police, officials said. Sood denied the charges, saying other candidates were trying to buy votes. His sister

Malvika Sood Sachar is a Congress candidate from Moga.

The Aam Aadmi Party raised multiple complaints of booth capturing in several areas and also alleged bogus voting. The state co-incharge, Raghav Chadha, alleged mismanagement by election staff at booths, where dysfunctional voting machines were not replaced for a long time.

WITH ENS, DELHI

Coaching hub

still optimistic, with 11 years to go for the upper age limit of 40.

For decades now, Prayagraj and its satellite localities of Naiin, Jhunsi and Phaphamau have hosted students like Rai – from backward districts of eastern UP to Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand – with aspirations of a government job. Approximately 5 lakh students stay here, many of them enrolled at the nearly 2,000-odd centres, preparing for everything from the elite IAS, IPS to PCS to lower-rank government jobs like police constable. This coaching hub comes at prices far lower than places like Delhi and Lucknow.

The BJP’s “Sankalp Patra” for UP polls claims that since 2017, 5 lakh youths have got government jobs in the state and 3 lakh contractual jobs, “without any discrimination”. It also promises to fill all vacancies in the state government at the earliest.

One week to go for voting in Prayagraj, in the fifth phase on February 27, those numbers ring hollow. An echo of this was heard more than 200 km away in Gonda on Saturday, where angry youths demanding Army recruitment obstructed a rally of Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh with slogans.

Recently, Prayagraj was one of the places where protests erupted over a change in railway recruitment exams, leading to them being postponed for now.

The BJP has fielded Harshvardhan Bajpai, a sitting MLA from a prominent political family. His main opponent is Samajwadi Party youth wing leader Sandeep Yadav. The Yogi Adityanath government, that changed the name of the city from Allahabad to Prayagraj, takes credit for a lot of infrastructural work before Kumbh 2018 here.

Avnish Pandey, from Deoria, arrived in Prayagraj back in 1998 with hopes of joining the IAS. He reached the interview stage in the Civil Services exam twice and in the PCS four times. Now 40, he teaches at coaching institutes. He says he kept trying for the above two services, and did not look for others. “But there are many examinations for which you apply and only god knows when the final results come.”

Pandey would have been the first in his family with a government job. The same dream brought Suryakant Yadav, from Pratapgarh, here 21 years ago. He has since then got degrees in MSc (Maths), MA (Ancient History), LLB and BED, and cleared TET (Teacher Eligibility Test), CTET (Central Teacher Eligibility Test) and a UGC NET in History. But only now does Yadav, 39, have a job. “I have appeared in around a hundred examinations and am finally going to join as a Junior Assistant in the next few months.”

At the Amarnath Jha Hostel, which has produced several top bureaucrats, PhD scholar Amarjit Singh says he is tired of exams being put off again and again over “leaks”. “I am a staunch supporter of the SP,” he says. “But paper leaks have happened both under the SP and BJP, and they just pass the buck to each other.”

The last such leak was of the TET paper in November 2021. The exam was held again last month. Students say it takes up to four years at times before final results are declared.

Pushpendra Pratap Singh, 36, got the job of a primary teacher after spending over 15 years here, and still resides in Chhota Baghada, an area where most students live in cheap rented accommodation. He says the government appears to have turned exams into a means of revenue generation. “The UPSC charges Rs 100 as fees for the Civil Services exam Aptitude Test and Rs 200 for the Mains. For PCS the fee is Rs 125, for B.Ed entrance exam, they charge Rs 1,500, and for TET Rs 1,200,” Singh lists.

Around 5 lakh students appeared for the B.Ed examination held in August 2021 in UP, over 18 lakh for the TET last month, while nearly 10 lakh applied for the Aptitude Test for the Civil Services and nearly 7 lakh for PCS in 2021.

Power Minister Shrikant Sharma, who was earlier spokesperson for the UP government, says, “We inherited several problems, but we have made all systems of recruitment transparent.

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Economist Shrayana Bhattacharya on why she spent 15 years interviewing women who are SRK fans, and what that revealed about the economy and womanhood

If there is still any problem, we will solve it as well, finish recruitment in time.”

Indian Embassy

The previous Embassy advisory, issued on February 15, asked citizens, especially students, to leave Ukraine temporarily amid “uncertainties” and avoid non-essential travel to and within the country.

The statement from the Embassy of India in Kyiv had read: “In view of the uncertainty of the current situation in Ukraine, Indian nationals in Ukraine, particularly students whose stay is not essential, may consider leaving temporarily. Indian nationals are also advised to avoid all non-essential travel to and within Ukraine.

“Indian nationals are requested to keep the Embassy informed about the status of their presence in Ukraine to enable the Embassy to reach them where required. The Embassy continues to function normally to provide all services to Indian nationals in Ukraine,” it had said.

Sunday’s move to get family members of Embassy officials out comes amid concerns that Russia could invade Kyiv soon.

1 in 3 IPOs

32 trading at a premium as on February 18, a dozen generated capital gains of up to 15 per cent which includes seven that have risen by up to 10 per cent, according to data compiled by *The Indian Express*.

Amongst the losers, investors in CarTrade Tech and One97 Communications (Paytm) suffered the maximum value erosion with shares trading over 60 per cent below their issue price. Even Zomato witnessed a sharp 36 per cent correction over the last one month; it is currently trading at Rs 86, which is 13 per cent over its issue price. FSN E-commerce (Nykaa) saw its share price fall from Rs 2,071 on January 17 this year to Rs 1,397 on February 18. The issue was priced at Rs 1,125. Data Patterns dropped from Rs 815 to Rs 652.20 during the same period.

The sharp fall must be seen in the context of a larger selling pressure in tech stocks. While the BSE Tech fell 8 per cent against the Sensex fall of 0.7 per cent since December 31, the Nasdaq has lost 13.4 per cent compared with the 6 per cent in Dow Jones.

Half-a-dozen IPOs are quoting at a premium of over 100 per cent and another six have returned between 50 per cent and 100 per cent capital gains since their listing.

The CEO of an asset management company said investors should be careful when there are many IPOs. “It is always seen that when the markets are on a high, IPOs tend to bunch up as companies hope to command a high premium. In such cases, promoters don’t leave much on the table for investors; they make the most,” said the CEO, who did not wish to be named.

The CEO further raised concern over the huge valuation demanded by new age technology companies and investor appetite. “If these companies could not make profit in lockdown when everything turned online, I am not comfortable with them when the economy has opened up,” he said.

The top ten gainers appreciated between 58 per cent and 273 per cent with Paras Defence and Space Tech topping the list with a gain of 273 per cent; its shares jumped from Rs 175 to Rs 654 after listing October 1, 2021.

The top loser is CarTrade Tech which came out with an IPO at Rs 1,618 per share. This share is now trading at Rs 586, a discount of 63.8 per cent. Investors also lost in the high-profile IPO of Paytm. The company which offered its shares at Rs 2,150 is now quoting at Rs 833.9 on the exchanges. The market capitalisation of Paytm

has crashed from the IPO valuation of Rs 1.5 lakh crore to Rs 54,057 crore as on February 18.

“The large size of Paytm’s IPO coupled with a complex business model and high valuation metrics dampened the performance post listing. Despite this, the IPO story of India races ahead and the IPOs which were launched after Paytm, such as Go Fashion and Tega Industries proved to be extremely successful,” said Mohit Ralhan, Managing Partner & Chief Investment Officer of TIW Private Equity.

The year 2022 is expected to witness IPOs from UC, Ola, Byju’s and Delhivery. India is home to 79 unicorns; 42 emerged in 2021 alone. “India is the third-largest startup hub in the world and has developed a strong ecosystem of entrepreneurs and venture capital investors, supported by favourable government policies, which will continue to feed into India’s accelerating IPO boom. The story has just begun, and the future looks quite bright,” Ralhan said.

An investment banker said the fate of the IPO market is linked to the strength of the stock market. If the stock market remains volatile and shows major correction, some of the issuers might postpone their IPO plans. On top of this, if issuers price their IPOs at high levels without leaving anything on the table for retail investors, there are bound to be some post-listing disasters.

With the US Federal Reserve planning to hike rates and tighten the monetary policy, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have started exiting from newly listed IPOs along with secondary markets.

Market regulator SEBI is also concerned about valuations. The IPO market price discovery is not as “transparent and efficient” as secondary market price discovery. SEBI Chairman Ajay Tyagi said while addressing a CII summit in September last year. In a consultation paper last week, SEBI said new age companies should make disclosures about their valuations based on issuance of new shares and acquisition of shares in the past 18 months before filing draft offer documents.

Capex push

Tamil Nadu Finance Minister Palaniivel Thiaga Rajan.

TS Singh Deo, Chhattisgarh’s Health Minister and representative to the GST Council, said the capex loans are a burden on the states’ repayment amount and add to the debt burden for future governments.

“Chhattisgarh will get Rs 3,400 crore, it is interest-free to be repaid in 50 years, so each annual tranche would be smaller. Yet it is money to be given back... It is neither a devolution nor a grant and it is burdening us with loans because we have to show it as capital expenditure. Are we in a position not to take it? We are starving for funds, they are thrusting things down our throats. Where is the option? We are losing more than that this year in GST and then every year we are going to lose Rs 5,000 crore in GST,” he said.

In Budget 2022–23, states have been allowed to borrow up to Rs 1 lakh crore from the Centre through 50-year “interest-free loans” to make capital investments. In 2021–22, the Centre had allowed states an additional Rs 15,000 crore for capital investment under a similar window. The Budget proposed a hike in the capital expenditure by 24.47 per cent to Rs 7.5 lakh crore compared with the revised estimate for 2021–22 at Rs 6,02,711 crore.

Thiaga Rajan questioned the condition of no prepayment being allowed. “On what logic does it make sense, what purpose is served by not allowing prepayment. If I’m the lender, I should be happiest if it’s prepaid because I’m getting it in advance

where it actually means something,” he said.

Former Finance Secretary Subhash Chandra Garg said the apprehensions are understandable. “The Central government used to give a lot of loans to the states for capex and other expenditures but that had been discontinued in 2005... By restarting this practice, states would now remain indebted to the Centre for 50 years. So, for such a small amount, the state may end up mortgaging their fiscal independence and sovereignty to the Centre,” he said.

Queries sent to the Finance Ministry did not elicit any response. A senior Finance Ministry official, however, said that as of now, most states are obligated to take consent of the Government of India under Article 293 (3), given their ongoing loans commitments, including multilateral loans.

“All external loans to States get routed through GoI. The choice would be with States to remain united and not take this assistance. Prepayment is a matter of terms and conditions. But who will take a high-cost loan to prepay a zero cost debt?” the official said.

In an interview with *The Indian Express* earlier this month, Finance Secretary TV Somanathan had said capital expenditure by states will have a quicker effect since it has a “greater geographical spread and a greater diversity of projects” compared to capex by the Centre. Also, state projects benefit small and medium enterprises more, he said.

According to Article 293 (3), “a State may not without the consent of the Government of India raise any loan if there is still outstanding any part of a loan which has been made by the State by the Government of India or by its predecessor Government, or in respect of which a guarantee has been given by the Government of India or by its predecessor Government.”

It further states that “a consent under clause (3) may be granted subject to such conditions, if any, as the Government of India may think fit to impose.”

Incidentally, in recent years, states, in aggregate, have incurred a higher level of capital expenditure than the Union Government.

Saha

an outpouring of support from former cricketers who have expressed solidarity and urged him to reveal the journalist’s name. Former India spinner Pragyan Ojha, the Indian cricketers’ association representative, tweeted that “we will make sure our cricket community boycotts this so called journalist!”

On Saturday evening, Saha had posted the screenshot with a tweet: “After all of my contributions to Indian cricket, this is what I face from a so called ‘Respected’ journalist! This is where the journalism has gone.”

Following the interview request, which included the line “Choose whoever can help the most”, another message from the screenshot read: “You did not call. Never again will I interview you. I don’t take insults kindly. And I will remember this.”

After Saha’s post whipped up a storm on social media, Virender Sehrawal tweeted: “Extremely sad. Such sense of entitlement, neither is he respected nor a journalist, just chamchagiri. With you Wridhih.”

So did former off-spinner Harabhajan Singh: “Wridhi you just name the person so that the cricket community knows who operates like this. Else even the good ones will be put under suspicion... What kind of journalism is this.” Harbhajan tagged BCCI president Sourav Ganguly, secretary Jay Shah and Union Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs Anurag Thakur in his tweet.

Former coach Ravi Shastri

chipped in. “Shocking a player being threatened by a journo. Blatant position abuse. Something that’s happening too frequently with #TeamIndia. Time for the BCCI prez to dive in. Find out who the person is in the interest of every cricketer. This is serious coming from ultimate team man WS,” he posted.

Former India pacer RP Singh, too, backed Saha. “When it is about BCCI or cricketers, we hear so many ‘sources’ from all the journalists. Can a single source tell me who this so-called journalist is who has threatened Saha?” he tweeted.

Usually calm and impassive, 37-year-old Saha came out all guns blazing on Saturday after not being picked in the team. He told this newspaper that he was surprised at some of the statements from chief selector Chetan Sharma at the press conference after the selection committee meeting.

Sharma had told the media that it was not the end of the road for Saha and other seniors. But Saha said: “I asked him if I would be considered for the team’s next Test assignments, in England and beyond? He paused for a second or two before telling me that from now on, I wouldn’t be considered.”

Apparently, Saha’s pullout from the first round of Bengal’s Ranji fixtures was misconstrued as him losing motivation after both coach Rahul Dravid and Sharma had conveyed to him that his international days are over. But the wicketkeeper dismissed such a suggestion, saying the pullout was due to personal reasons as his wife had just recovered from a bout of dengue.

Saha also claimed that Ganguly had sent him a WhatsApp message after his defiant 61 against Sri Lanka in Kanpur that “as long as I’m here (helming the BCCI), you would be in the team”. “Such a message from the BCCI president really boosted my confidence. What I’m struggling to understand is how things have changed so fast,” Saha said.

(WITH SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY)

Simlipal

carried out yearly, both the campaign and community participation has been intensified this year after Simlipal National Park and the surrounding forests saw major fires in February and March 2021. There was no crown fire, but the ground fire left a trail of destruction. The fire season lasts until May.

The Simlipal reserve sprawls over 2,750 sq km in Mayurbhanj district, and is home to three out of every four tigers in Odisha and 20 per cent of the state’s elephant population. There are 68 villages within the reserve – mostly in the buffer zone – and about 1,200 on the periphery.

Barehipani, however, lies in the core area of the Simlipal tiger reserve, nearly 30 km from villages in the buffer zone. The village is accessible by a kutcha motorable road, but has no electricity or mobile phone network. The villagers depend on the forest for dry wood, and consume sal seeds, seasonal mushrooms, and a variety of leafy greens.

“We want to be prepared for any forest fire, but we also want to ensure that no fire is caused by human activities, knowingly or unknowingly. Last year, we collaborated to douse the fire. But it was a challenge because the fire was already raging. This time, we are taking all the steps beforehand so in case there is a fire, we can contain it better,” Mandodari Lohar, one of the SHG members, said.

“We have resolved to impose a fine of Rs 5000 on any person who is found guilty of lighting a fire,” Sushila Devi said. The SHGs have also been creating fire lines, which involves burning a strip of vegetation and clearing the land so in case of a fire, the spread is restricted.

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MCD ELECTIONS

Surveys to CVs: AAP & BJP vet candidates

ABHINAV RAJPUT
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 20

WITH MCD elections two months away, the incumbent BJP and its key challenger AAP have started the process of identifying candidates.

Senior AAP leaders said that multiple surveys by different agencies are being conducted at the ward level to gather feedback on aspirants. Potential names are also being sought from Vidhan Sabha observers, district in-charges, and MLAs. "To ensure that meritorious candidates are given a chance, names are being taken from different levels. These would be matched with the surveys," said a senior AAP leader. He added once the Punjab election ends, leaders would brainstorm over the chosen names.

AAP MCD in-charge Durgesh Pathak said the party is confident of finding suitable candidates who are liked by people and have served the community: "Under the leadership of CM Arvind Kejriwal, we are sure that people will give AAP a chance this time."

At the BJP camp, senior lead-



(Left) Ticket hopefuls at BJP MP Gambhir's office; AAP leader and Deputy CM Sisodia at an MCD poll campaign



ers said aspirants have started queuing up at offices of MPs and hundreds of CVs are being received daily. For instance, between January 7 and 11, East Delhi MP Gautam Gambhir's office received over 400 CVs. According to an aide of the MP, the CVs mostly have details of posts being held by the person in the party, pictures with top leaders and news cuttings.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Gambhir said, "I have met hundreds of prospective candidates for the upcoming elections at my office and received their applications. The process is still underway. The criteria is simple — the person should have been serving the people of her area with com-

plete honesty and should be a loyal party worker."

"Our party is a democratic one where all such decisions are taken after due deliberations and discussions amongst all leaders and office bearers," he added.

BJP leader and aide of Northeast Delhi MP Manoj Tiwari, Neelkanth Bakshi, said around 100 people visit the MP when he is in Delhi. Aspirants have also lined up at the party office and visited state leaders for tickets.

Meanwhile, Delhi Congress president Anil Chaudhary said as many as 1,000 workers have submitted applications.

MCD elections are slated for April.

8-year-old dies after falling from high rise

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
GURGAON, FEBRUARY 20

AN EIGHT-YEAR-OLD boy died after allegedly falling from the balcony of his 12th-floor house in a residential society in Faridabad Sunday. Police said the boy was standing on a chair and leaning on a 4.5-feet railing of the balcony when he lost balance and fell.

The victim studied in class II.

Police said the incident took place around 1 pm in a society in Sector 88 in Faridabad.

Arjun Dev, station house officer, BPTT police station, Faridabad, said, "The boy was rushed to a nearby hospital, where he was declared dead on arrival. The family has not alleged any foul play. The boy fell from the balcony and died. We have initiated inquest proceedings under Section 174 of the CrPC."

A police officer, privy to the case, requesting anonymity, said, "The boy was standing on a chair in the balcony and leaning against the grill when he is suspected to have lost balance and fallen from the balcony. It appears that he was leaning over the grill to see the children who were playing in the society at the time of the incident."

Police said the body was handed over to the family after the post-mortem on Sunday.

Rule banning old vehicles to be enforced from April 1: Khattar

Gurgaon: Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar Sunday said according to the decision of the National Green Tribunal, the rule of ban on plying of diesel vehicles older than 10 years and petrol vehicles older than 15 years, will be strictly enforced from April 1, 2022.

He said that in the first phase, diesel vehicles older than 10 years and petrol vehicles older

than 15 years will be removed from the roads in Gurgaon. Auto drivers falling in the category will be given sufficient time to change their autos, said the CM.

He also interacted with representatives of the Auto Drivers' Association in Gurgaon. He said a camp will be organised on March 10, in which auto drivers can apply for new e-autos by giving their old autos. **ENS**

Business Blasters round two: 1,000 projects to be reviewed

New Delhi: Approximately 1,000 projects selected for round two of the Business Blasters programme will be screened by experts before 100 are selected for an investors' expo to be organised by the Delhi government.

These start-ups have been shortlisted from among 51,000 for round two. As part of its "Entrepreneurship Mindset Curriculum", the government started the Business Blasters initiative across all its senior secondary schools in September 2021, by giving Rs 2,000 as seed money to class XI and XII students to develop entrepreneurship ideas.

For round two, the teams will present their ideas at centres established at 28 government schools on February 25 and 26 and will be reviewed by a panel comprising industrialists, education department officials, and members from different universities of Delhi.

The top 100 teams will be presented at an investors' expo, where they will undergo another round of screening. Investors will be able to invest in these ideas and members of the top 10 teams will get direct admission to BBA courses in Delhi government universities. **ENS**

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	Total	Vacant
HOSPITAL BEDS	15,299	15,039
ICU BEDS	4,461	4,342
Feb 19	635	791
Feb 20	570	730
Total	2,545*	18,27,425
Deaths	2	56,199
Tests	4	54,614
Total	2,545*	18,27,425
Deaths	2	56,199
Tests	4	54,614

*Total active cases in Delhi

	Feb 19	Feb 20
Cases	62	62
Deaths	0	0
GURGAON		
Cases	198	193
Deaths	1	2



(From left) Zaid wakes up by 7.15 am on Friday and his mother, Meena, helps him get ready for school. He and his father, Dilshad Ali, then take an e-rickshaw to Sarvodaya Bal Vidyalaya at Peeragarhi village, which is 3 km away. His class teacher Kiran Vijeran greets him as he enters his classroom. Photos by Amit Mehra

HARDLOOK

Zaid goes back to school

Last week, the Delhi government reopened its schools for all grades after almost two years of closure. On Friday, *The Indian Express* followed Class II student Mohammed Zaid on his first day back — to understand the challenges a long hiatus in learning could pose

SUKRITA BARUAH
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 20

WHEN seven-year-old Mohammed Zaid left home for his first day of school on Friday, after Delhi's extended closures, he said he could not remember the friends he had in kindergarten before the pandemic struck. He only had a memory of a friend named Ayush Kumar, but he had not spoken to him for the almost two years of no school. When he returned home five hours later, he happily told his mother that he now has three friends whose names he can remember.

The last time Zaid, lovingly called Akki by his family, went to school was in March 2020; he was then a five-year-old completing KG. He continued to be enrolled in his school, Sarvodaya Bal Vidyalaya at Peeragarhi Village, a government school in West Delhi, but classes were replaced by remote teaching-learning.

Across Delhi, schools reopened for primary and middle school children on February 14 after an almost two-year closure, punctuated by fits and starts of unsuccessful reopening attempts in November 2021. That means that all of class I and most of class II, Zaid's first two years of formal schooling, were away from school. Though classes had begun on Monday, Friday was the first day for Zaid, his return to school delayed by a few days by a visit to his grandmother in Northwest Delhi.

He was excited about school from the moment he woke up — even insisting on carrying his school bag himself during his walk and e-rickshaw ride to school — and eagerly participated in his morning lessons, but his day catapulted to a high when his class teacher, Kiran Vijeran, or Kiran ma'am, took them to the school's playground for 15 minutes of play after the first two classes.

Like the other boys, he rushed to a red winding slide but hesitated once he reached the top and let other boys go ahead. It was the first time he was go-

ing to use a slide. But once he slid down, he jumped and yelled "Yippe!" and ran right back to the top.

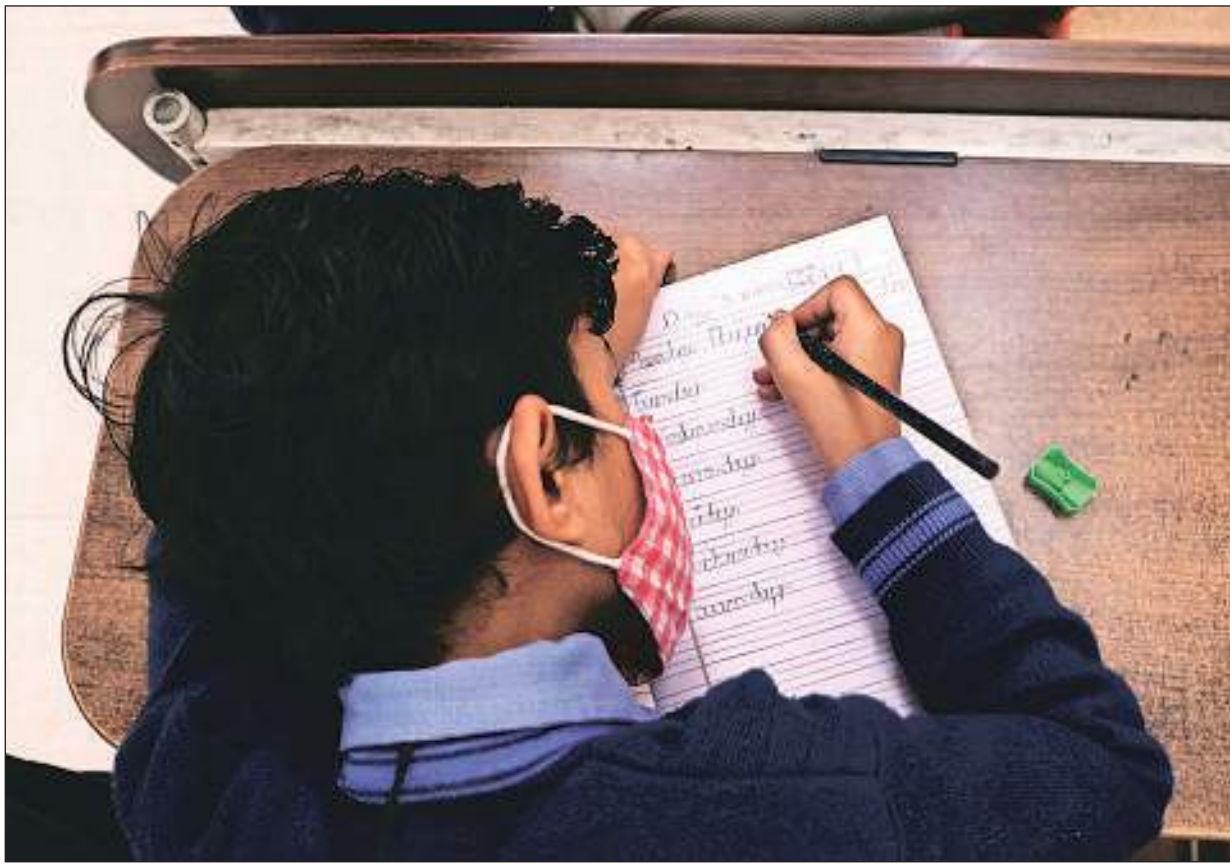
When he flopped back on his chair after 15 minutes of frenetic play, he said, "Jhoole pe mazaa aaya... friends ban rahe hai thode thode... Now Aman is my friend. I have made one friend, I'll make others also... All the other boys are also my friends now, but I don't know their names. I think when I play with them, they will all tell me their names."

Then he remembered that there was a friend whose name he knew. He asked Yash, the boy sitting in front of him, "Dost, inme se Ayush Kumar kaun hai?" He pointed to a boy sitting on the other side of the room. "Achha, woh hai mera dost!" exclaimed Zaid. But Ayush said that he did not remember him. "Arey, main hoon tera dost. Akki," he shouted across the room. Ayush paused and looked at him, then wiggled his finger knowingly and said, "Achha, abhi yaad aaya."

Like many of his classmates, Zaid comes from a working-class family. His father Dilshad Ali (41) is a daily wage carpenter and his mother Meena (35) does sewing work at home when work comes by. Zaid is the youngest of three siblings — his eldest sister Sayema (15) is a Class X student at a government school in Multan Nagar, and his second sister Uzma (10) is a class V student at a private school in Nangloi where she has an EWS seat.

The family of five live in a one-bedroom home in a narrow gali in Nihal Vihar. While Zaid was away from school, the scope for play had been limited. Meena said that she is not comfortable with him being outside because "the mahaul (atmosphere) here is not good".

Dilshad said that they had tried to keep the children engaged during the lockdown. "The activities that they have in school, we can't offer them at home. In school, they can play in the open with other kids, it's not possible here... But we tried to keep them active to the best of our ability so that their minds



(Clockwise from top) During a Math class in which children learnt the days of the week; Zaid chats with his new friend during lunch time; the seven-year-old with his sisters at their Nihal Vihar home. Photos: Amit Mehra

wouldn't get disturbed, through studies, ludo, carrom, and other games."

Zaid's first day at school was equal parts study and play, with the time at the playground followed by a session for them to tinker with Play-Doh clay. Their

first two weeks at school will continue to have an emphasis on play and conversations.

"The biggest loss for children during the lockdown was felt especially by those from working-class families in a city like Delhi — there were no opportunities to

play, their parents are scared of sending them to parks... the loss of their friend circle was also big problem for them... they've just been speaking to their parents and siblings. They don't have the environment to share the things they can share with their friends,

and that younger children share with their teachers, but they're doing it now in school... The teacher's role in these two weeks is to help them build their friend circle again and recreate the environment from which they had been disconnected," said the

school's primary section in-charge Anil Jakhar.

Their first class of the day had been a 'Happiness Class', beginning with a mindfulness session. While other boys piped up with responses to Kiran ma'am's question on what sounds they could hear with their eyes closed, Zaid sat quietly. After that, she told them a story about a boy who threw his things around the house after returning from school, because of which he could not find them the next day and missed school.

"Do any of you also do things like this?" she asked the class. Zaid raised his hand and explained to his class, "I take care of my school shoes, bag and clothes so that I can go to school on time," and received a round of applause. After that he became an active participant in the class.

When the teacher dusted the board, he ran up, picked up a piece of chalk, wrote the word 'Pussy' on the board in cursive and ran back to his seat. She asked him what it meant. He responded, 'Cat'. She asked him if he had a pet cat at home. He said, "No, I just wanted to show you that I can write 'Pussycat'."

The teacher moved on to a Math class in which they were learning days of the week. She wrote down the days on the board and asked them to copy these down. While busily writing in his notebook, he told his teacher and the class, "I'm writing without looking at the board."

The last class of the day was her going back to the basics in Hindi, teaching them to differentiate between 'a' and the 'aa' matra. With the boys tripping over each other to read the words she wrote on the board aloud, Zaid declared that he was the first to read out the sentence 'Cycle par chadh' leading to a small dispute in the class over who read it first.

Kiran Vijeran said that like the other boys, Zaid is considerably behind where he needs to be to start class III in a little over a month. "It was not possible for us to conduct online classes regularly because the children had issues like no data or phones

available... At KG, Zaid was at the level he needed to be, where we stop with 'ka', 'kha', 'ga', 'gha'. In class II, they have stories, chapters, matras. He is bright and has clearly been doing work at home but is not able to do things children should be able to do in class II, like form sentences," she said.

She added that these children will need foundational work for six months to one year to be able to catch up.

While school was closed, Zaid's primary engagement with teaching-learning was through weekly Hindi, Math and English worksheets sent by the school which he had to solve and send to his teacher. "All the worksheets and activities that he had done during the lockdown, I helped him do all of those," said his 15-year-old sister Sayema.

The oldest of the siblings and a keen student, she has been helping both her siblings with most of their schoolwork while school was out. After returning from school, she takes a break, eats, naps, helps her mother around the house, and helps both her siblings. Since she is a board-year student with her term II exam due soon, she said that her window to study is from 11 pm to 2 am when everyone is asleep. "I sit by the front door with the phone torch and study then. There are no disturbances," she said.

When Zaid returns home on Friday afternoon, he rattles off all he did in school that day to his mother. "I played on the slide... My friends are Aman, Ayush and Yash... We learnt Sunday, Monday... We got clay and I made *sabse badhiya flower*." Meena made him macaroni, his favourite dish, for lunch. Right after lunch, he is ready to do his homework.

He needs to identify 20 words in his Hindi textbook with the 'aa' matra. But he has misunderstood the question and thinks he needs to find all the words with the 'aa' matra on page 20.

"Mai samjhaati hoon," said Sayema, bending over his book to help him identify 'saaf', 'hota', 'bimaar' and 'jaanwar'.

Govt's Armed Forces Preparatory School to be fully residential

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 20

THE NEW Armed Forces Preparatory School for the Delhi government, with its campus in Southwest Delhi's Jharoda Kalan, will be its first experiment with a fully residential school.

The announcement for the school had been made by Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia in his 2021 budget speech, under the government's 'Deshbhakti Budget'. Applications for admission to the first batch are currently ongoing.

The school is being considered as one of the government's new Schools of Specialised Excellence. According to a government official, the school's curriculum will have two parts — a basic foundational study component and another on the specialisation, which would entail preparation for National Defence Academy (NDA) and Services Selection Board (SSB) tests and physical readiness.

"Like in the case of SOSES

with other specialisations, we will have knowledge partners for the specialisation module. We had issued a tender calling for a knowledge implementing partner to which we have received some quotations and we are still processing it. One of the tender conditions is that it should have people on board with an armed forces background and experience with these processes," said a government official.

In this first round of admissions, 100 students will be admitted each in class IX and XI — 60 seats are for boys and 40 for girls in each grade. The admission process will be in two stages with an aptitude test first, followed by a physical fitness test.

The campus will be fully residential over a 14-acre area, though admissions are only open for residents of Delhi.

"The idea is that a residential school is better for developing discipline. Since it's both for boys and girls, there will be separate residential blocks for both," said the official.

GK hit and run: Businessman still unconscious, says family

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 20

OVER A week after businessman Anant Mandelia (37) was hit by a car and dragged for nearly 100 metres on its bonnet in South Delhi's Greater Kailash I, his family said his condition remains critical and he is yet to regain consciousness.

On February 8, Mandelia was outside his house when a Volkswagen T-Roc allegedly being driven by law student Raj Sunderam allegedly hit him. He sustained severe head injuries and was rushed to Max Hospital, Saket, by his family. He remains in the ICU. Police arrested Raj on February 11 and charged him with rash driving and attempt to murder. His father, Pandyan Kalyan Sunderam, a retired bureaucrat, was booked for allegedly harbouring his son.

It was the family's driver, Rampal Singh Negi, who had rushed Mandelia to the hospital after the accident. In the FIR filed in the case based on his complaint, he claimed: "Anant... stepped out of his house and was walking on the main road. We saw a yellow



The incident took place on Feb 8 at Greater Kailash I

car coming from Ikhyaya Hotel. It was speeding... the man was driving rashly... The car hit Anant... and he fell on the bonnet. However, the driver didn't stop and dragged him for nearly 100 metres. He then (driver) braked suddenly and Anant fell on the road."

Anant's uncle, who did not wish to be named, said, "The matter is sub-judice. We want strict action against the student and his father. We are in touch with our lawyers. Anant is an honest and hardworking businessman... We want him to recover quickly."

Anant runs a hydroponics business. His friends and neighbours, some of whom are his childhood friends from Modern School, Barakhamba Road, posted videos of the incident and called

for justice. "The road in front of the house is wide and a lot of youngsters are found speeding there. We raised the issue before, but the police didn't do anything. We have known Anant since school... we are helping his family as much as possible," said a friend.

However, a police officer said they had not received any complaints of rash driving or speeding from locals.

Former cricketer Virender Sehwag also shared a video of the incident and tweeted: "Horrible. Inhumans like this person who rammed into Anant, who was requesting the car driver to slow down because children were walking on the road. The accused, driving an SUV, instead turned around the car and hit Anant dragging him a few blocks down. Severest action needed."

DCP (South) Benita Mary Jaiker responded that the accused had been arrested. Meanwhile, the investigating officer at Greater Kailash police station said Raj was allegedly speeding and the father-son duo fled after the accident. "They were hiding in Gurgaon's Le Meridien Hotel when we detained them," he said.

Haryana govt to hold board exam for class 8: Parents, students protest

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
GURGAON, FEBRUARY 20

PARENTS AND students in Gurgaon staged a protest against the Haryana government's proposed decision to hold board exams for class VIII in government and private schools, irrespective of the board they are affiliated to, near Leisure Valley on Sunday. Parents said this would create unnecessary stress for students, who are struggling to overcome learning gaps after repeated school closures and online classes due to the pandemic for two years.

Sudhir Sachdeva, whose son is studying at an ICSE-board private school in Class VIII, said, "... My son's final exams are going on at the moment. Now, after final exams, the government is imposing a new exam of the board, whose curriculum is entirely different. The BSEH syllabus differs from syllabi being taught in other boards in several schools. Our children are not familiar with this, it's unfair to expect them to prepare in a little over a month."

In October 2021, the Haryana

government had given directions to re-introduce board exams for classes V and VIII in all schools to be conducted by the Board of School Education Haryana (BSEH) for a standardised assessment of learning outcomes. It was withdrawn after some associations of CBSE-affiliated private schools had moved the Punjab and Haryana HC challenging the order.

On January 18, the government brought out a notification to amend the RTE Act and appointed the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) in Haryana to conduct exams for classes V and VIII. On January 28, the SCERT entrusted BSEH with the same. In February, the BSEH in a letter to district education officers had directed that all schools must register with the Haryana board by February 20 for holding exams for class VIII in March. It decided not to hold exams for Class V this year. Some school associations have filed another plea in court seeking a stay on the order.

A senior officer of Haryana government said, "We are examining the issue as the matter is pending with the High Court."

BRIEFLY

Cop's daughter strangled: Accused apprehended

New Delhi: Days after a Delhi Police personnel's daughter was strangled to death, allegedly by her friend's husband, in North Delhi, police apprehended the 26-year-old accused. DCP (North) Sagor Singh Kalsi said, "We apprehended him from Jaipur. He was planning to flee to a safer location like Nepal or a northern state in the country."

55-year-old woman killed

New Delhi: A 55-year-old woman was allegedly killed by her daughter and her friend after she threatened to disown her daughter, police said Sunday. Police also said the accused, who have been arrested, claimed the woman was killed while resisting a robbery. **ENS**

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– Arvind Kejriwal



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6 DECISION 2022

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Bhagwant Mann; Capt Amarinder Singh; CM Charanjit Singh Channi; and the Badals in Punjab on Sunday. According to the Election Commission, the state recorded a voter turnout of 64% till 5 pm. PTI

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MOVABLE ASSETS:
Self: ₹1.24 lakh
Dependents: ₹6.81 lakh

IMMOVABLE ASSETS:
Self: ₹4 lakh
Dependents (5): ₹5 lakh

LOANS: Nil
CRIMINAL CASES: 2
SOURCES OF EARNING:
Self: Agriculture
EDUCATION:
Unlettered



ASHUTOSH TANDON
'GOPALJI'
BJP, Lucknow
East

TOTAL ASSETS:
₹8.67 crore

MOVABLE ASSETS:
Self: ₹85.21 lakh
Wife: ₹1.12 crore
IMMOVABLE ASSETS:
Self: ₹5 crore
Wife: ₹1.7 crore

LOANS: Nil
CRIMINAL CASES: Nil
SOURCES OF EARNING:
Self: Business, agriculture, rent & MLA salary
Wife: Business
EDUCATION:
Graduate (1980)

LAKHIMPUR KHERI: VOTING ON FEB 23

Where farmers run over, BJP faces hiccups, but incident a pale memory

ASAD REHMAN

LAKHIMPUR KHERI, PILIBHIT, FEBRUARY 20

AT THE designated place for protests in Lakhimpur Kheri which the locals call 'Bilobhi Gate', three youths are waiting for their order of noodles. While Rahul Singh (28), a bank employee, says it is time for change as "this government knows only how to invoke emotions in the name of religion and caste", friends Vaibhav Gupta (27) and Pushpendra Verma (28) are not sure whom to vote for.

One thing they agree on: that the killing of farmers in Tikunia in Lakhimpur Kheri, in which the son of Union MoS Ajay Mishra's son is an accused, was "never our issue". Says Verma: "Most of those who were killed were outsiders. It was a big event for the media, but it didn't affect us, and neither will it affect the voting pattern here."

'Bilobhi' is a distortion of the name of British officer and Deputy Commissioner of Kheri Robert William Douglas Willoughby, who was killed by freedom fighters. If the 1920s event is now a forgotten memory, it's not just the three friends who believe that the farmer deaths are also in the past.

Last week, the main accused, Ashish Mishra, came out on bail. Vaibhav Verma (28), a farmer



CM Yogi campaigns in Gola, Lakhimpur Kheri, Sunday. PTI

visiting the city from his village to buy some equipment, says his vote is for the BJP despite issues. "They are building a nation. Can't we make a few sacrifices for them?" says Verma, a Kurmi.

The Tikunia deaths was "about Sikhs and those who protested against the farm laws", he adds. "When the farmers in this area didn't take part in the agitation, why should we be bothered by what happened in Tikunia? It seemed like a conspiracy anyway."

However, even if father and son Mishra remain popular despite the incident, the Samajwadi Party has been gaining ground. BJP leaders also admit that the party will not repeat its 2017 success of winning all the eight seats in the district. In Jagsar village, with mostly

Kurmies and Dalits, a row has broken out at a Kurmi house out which are flags of both the SP and BJP. Finally, an elder, Deshbandu Gautam, who is a Dalit, intervenes to get the SP flag removed. Everyone is fighting over the two parties and seems to have forgotten the "experienced" BSP chief Mayawati, he rues. "My vote is for Behenji, no matter how many times I hear that it is a two-sided fight."

Gautam is among the few who remembers the Tikunia incident with a shudder — "I am also a farmer, and it could have been me" — but that won't be a factor on how he votes on February 23.

For those like Sirajuddin (28), who works at a motorcycle repair shop, the choice is simple. Complaining of no work for days, the new father says his vote is for



the cycle (the SP symbol).

The farmers' killing is a faint memory even at the site of the incident, Tikunia, around 100 km from Jagsar. At Banveerpur, Mishra's home village nearby, there is vocal support for "Monu bhaiyya (Ashish)" and that same hint at a "conspiracy".

One fallout is that Ashish, once the frontrunner for a ticket from the Nighasan Assembly seat, has had to sit this one out. The BJP has fielded sitting MLA Shashank Verma, whose father, the late Patel Ramkumar Verma, earlier represented the seat. The SP and BSP's candidates are both senior leaders who were once in the other party.

Even the Sikhs in Banveerpur are mum about Mishra. Settled here after Partition, Sikhs make up substantial numbers in Lakhimpur Kheri, and are 20,000 to 40,000 in seats.

Driving a tractor on his farm, Upkar Singh (40) says, "My children go to a school owned by Tenji (Mishra)... the Tikunia issue

was never our issue. Our issues are floods, pending payments for sugarcane, and diesel, petrol prices. The biggest issue is stray cattle."

However, Pradeep Mishra (42) believes the Sikhs may not be vocal as they are "scared of Teni Maharaj". "Every Sikh house in the village sent at least one person for the farmer agitation... You must understand that they have to live here," says Mishra, who runs an electronics shop.

Harjeet Singh (40), a Sikh lawyer who grew up in Banveerpur and is associated with the SP, says Sikhs of the village will "definitely" vote against the BJP even if they don't say so.

In Sikh "jhaalas" or neighbourhoods further away, like in Nighasan and Palia, the anger is more palpable. In Pilibhit district next to Lakhimpur Kheri, where Sikhs are in larger numbers, all the four seats were won by the BJP in 2017. Here the unhappiness with the BJP goes beyond the Tikunia incident to unemployment, inflation, farm distress, stray cattle and loss of business.

In Purnapur, Ayurvedic doctor Harpreet Singh (48) says the BJP has failed "on all fronts". "My son wanted to join the Army. No new recruitments happened and now he has passed the age... And Ashish Mishra got bail the same day polling finished in western UP, where the anger over the farm laws was the highest. They have made lives of farmers a joke."

In poll bout, BJP leaders throw terror jibe at SP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LAKHIMPUR KHERI, SHRAVASTI, GORAKHPUR, FEBRUARY 20

STARTING FROM Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, BJP leaders linked the Samajwadi Party to the Ahmedabad blasts for which the verdict came out recently, in speeches after speeches on Sunday. This was a day after BJP leader Anurag Thakur made the same allegation at a press conference.

Adityanath said the "abba jaan" (father) of one of the convicts had links with the Samajwadi Party. In back-to-back five rallies in Lakhimpur Kheri, Adityanath did not talk about the incident where the farmers were run over.

Referring to the Ahmedabad blasts, Adityanath said one of the convicts belonged to Azamgarh's Sanjarpur area, and alleged that his father had links with the SP and had been campaigning for the party. "Why does the SP have sympathy towards these terrorists? Will the people support those who play with the security of the nation?" the Chief Minister said, urging people to vote for the BJP for a riot-free state.

In almost all rallies, Adityanath claimed that during the SP rule, while uninterrupted electricity was provided during Eid and Muharram, the same

was not available on Holi and Diwali. "Earlier, curfew used to be promulgated for months during Hindu festivals and criminals used to explode bombs in the market to scare people," he said.

BJP president J P Nadda said while he took oath to protect the Constitution, SP chief Akhilesh Yadav had instead tried to protect terrorists by withdrawing cases against them. He was addressing an election rally in the Shravasti constituency. He also claimed that the father of one of those convicted was campaigning for the SP.

"The ATS (Anti-Terrorism Squad) Centre in Deoband along with those (coming up at) Meerut, Bahraich, Rampur, Azamgarh and Kanpur will make UP fear-free under the leadership of Yogi Adityanath," Nadda said.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan accused the Samajwadi Party of having a nexus with terrorists and said it should tell people about its relations with the father of a convict in the Ahmedabad case. Chouhan was addressing an election rally in Rampur Karkhana's Bairiyapur in Deoria district.

"Akhilesh should answer whether a terrorist's father is an SP leader or not? He needs to answer why his party is found having ties with mafia, rioters and terrorists," Chouhan told the rally.

Two-horse Cong and BJP race now has an emerging dark horse: NPP

TORA AGARWALA
IMPHAL, FEBRUARY 20

VETERAN MANIPUR politician and sitting MLA from Wankhei, Y Erabot Singh, seems to have got tired of being spurned by national parties. Ahead of the 2017 state Assembly polls, the then Ibobi Singh-led Congress dispensation's "high-handedness" had forced him to switch to the BJP, he says. Now, for the upcoming Assembly elections, the BJP has denied him ticket, fielding instead Ibobi's nephew and Congress turncoat, Okram Henry Singh, from his constituency, forcing him to join the National People's Party (NPP).

"I have lost faith in the big national parties. The NPP is secular, represents the Northeast voice, and it will give BJP competition, that's why I joined it," Erabot, 82, says.

The Manipur polls may essentially be a contest between the ruling BJP and the principal Opposition Congress, but the regional party NPP — which leads a coalition government under Conrad Sangma in neighbouring Meghalaya — is emerging as a notable contender in the fray.

In 2017, the NPP had played the role of a "kingmaker" as the party helped the BJP form its first government in Manipur by joining its coalition. The party had then won 4 out of 9 seats it contested. Seeking to expand its base in Manipur, the NPP will contest 39 of the total 60 seats in the current elections. Presenting itself as an alternative to the national parties, the NPP has been

TWO ITBP MEN ON POLL DUTY INJURED IN IED BLAST

Imphal: Two ITBP personnel on election duty were wounded in an IED blast in Kachhing district on Sunday, police said, prompting the authorities to beef up security ahead of the polls.

The blast along the Imphal-Sugnu road in Wangoo area comes days before PM Narendra Modi's scheduled visit to the poll-bound state on February 22.

Militant groups in the state have called for a shutdown "till

the PM remains in the state".

Modi will address a rally at Luwangshangbam sports complex in CM Biren Singh's constituency, BJP's state unit chief A Sharda Devi said.

A conglomerate of militant groups in Manipur, the Coordination Committee (CorCom), has urged people to support the shutdown, saying the PM will be coming "to extend colonial rule of India".

JIMMY LEIVON

projecting itself as an independent, pan-Northeast party (it has some presence in Arunachal Pradesh too), which has taken a stand on issues concerning the region, such as the controversial AFSPA or the CAA.

"BJP or Congress — it's an illusion that there are just two choices, like Pepsi or Coke. Why not try some freshly-squeezed orange juice instead? We are a fresh alternative, a party which is rooted in the region," says Ratika Yumnam, the NPP's youth wing chief, who earlier worked as an indigenous rights activist.

Yumnam might have glossed over the point that the NPP is an ally of the BJP government, led by N Biren Singh, but the fact remains that it has been an uneasy alliance.

In 2020, four NPP MLAs, who are also ministers, were about to pull the plug on the Biren government, with the crisis eventually averted by the BJP central leadership. Biren's rivalry with the NPP's

Manipur face and Deputy CM, Y Joykumar Singh, has also been a sore point between the two sides. These rifts have now widened ahead of the polls, scheduled for February 28 and March 5.

Armed miscreants shot at the father of an NPP candidate L Sanjoy Singh's father L Samjai Singh on 18 February night in Imphal East, who was admitted to a hospital. "This is an act of a coward targeting innocent people. This is not the first time that BJP supporters have targeted us", charged Sanjoy Singh.

In the midst of his Manipur poll campaign, Sangma, while speaking to *The Indian Express* over the phone, says his party can fill a "political vacuum". "With the Congress weakening and anti-incumbency against the BJP, there is a vacuum emerging, and we can fill it," he says.

(With inputs from Jimmy Leivon)
FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

SEAT WATCH

Amid 'parivarvaad' by BJP, mango concerns in the air

AMIL BHATNAGAR
MALIHABAD, MOHANALGANJ, FEBRUARY 20

IN THEIR campaigns for the UP Assembly polls, top BJP leaders, including PM Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, have targeted the Opposition, especially the Samajwadi Party (SP), for indulging in "parivarvaad" (dynasty politics) and giving election tickets to their family members, among other things.

In two of the key constituencies in Lucknow district itself, Malihabad and Mohanlalganj, slated for polls on February 23, the BJP has given tickets to the relatives of its Mohanlalganj MP Kaushal Kishore, the Union minister of state for urban and housing affairs. While Kishore's wife Jai Devi is the BJP candidate from Malihabad, her brother Amresh Kumar is the party's nominee from Mohanlalganj.

Besides the issue of dynasty politics, the questions about mango crop damage and lack of jobs and development reverberate through these constituencies on the outskirts of the UP capital.

Malihabad is popular for its mangoes, which are sent to different states and even exported to various countries. The mango varieties like Dussheri, Langda Chausa are transported from here to several western states of



Akhilesh, wife Dimple cast vote in Saifai, Sunday. PTI

the country. The income of a large section of the Malihabad population, directly or indirectly, is linked to its mango produce. For the past two years, however, their earnings have taken a hit.

A major problem that has emerged for local farmers has been the supply of fake medicines and pesticides for their crop. Malihabad's mango economy had practically halted during the Covid waves over the last couple of years as various restrictions were imposed during its peak trading season. Reeling under such woes and the perennial threat of crop damage, many farmers are even considering razing the thick trees to the ground.

"I have been a BJP supporter all my life. Since the time of Jan Sangh, I have supported this party

from my heart. But in this case, we have been cheated by the government. Mangoes are everything for us," said Raj Kumar, a farmer with four-big-ha land.

The SC-reserved Malihabad seat was won by Jai Devi in the 2017 Assembly polls, when she beat the SP's Rajbala. Her husband Kishore hails from the Pasi community, a major community of Malihabad. He was popular enough to win Malihabad seat in 2002 as an Independent candidate but later lost twice as a Revolutionary Communist Party of India nominee, before joining the BJP and becoming its Mohanlalganj MP.

Jai Devi's current poll campaign is again centred on her husband's name, locals say.

In the SC-reserved Mohanlalganj, the BJP has pitted Devi's brother Amresh against the SP's Saroj Devi, former MP. According to BJP sources, Kishore had also lobbied for his son's ticket, which did not materialise.

For many locals, Amresh is a "parachute candidate". "The truth is, people have not even seen Amresh. If he is with four people, people will not even recognise him. We have been told that Amresh is Kaushal's relative. Irrespective of the family standing, people will vote for development," said Mahesh Kumar, a resident.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

From college to Assembly, via police stations: bloody run of an Ayodhya clash

MANISH SAHU
LUCKNOW, FEBRUARY 20

THE CLASH of one bahubali and the wife of a second one who is in jail came to a head in Ayodhya's Goshainganj Assembly on Friday as their convoys crossed paths at the end of the day's campaign.

They fired at each other, and carried on the clash at the police station. Among the nine arrested and later released on bail, on charges of breach of peace, were Samajwadi Party candidate Abhay Singh and an associate of BJP nominee Aarti Tiwari, who is considered a stand-in for husband Indra Pratap a.k.a Khaboo Tiwari. Seven others were sent to jail on charges including attempt to murder and rioting.

Veterans of three polls and one win each, Abhay Singh and Indra Pratap's rivalry, the story goes, started when they contested against each other.

Abhay Singh, 47: A native of Ayodhya's Maharajganj area, he started with student politics while at Lucknow University. While he never contested any union election, he was known as the king-maker who could make or break others. Along the way he ran up a history-sheet of at least 35 criminal cases, in different districts.

He contested his first election on BSP ticket from Ayodhya seat in 2002 and lost. In 2012, while in jail on an attempt to murder charge, he won on an SP ticket from Goshainganj. He again contested on an SP ticket from



After the clash

Goshainganj seat in 2017.

Indra Pratap Tiwari, 52: A native of City Kotwali area of Ayodhya, Indra Pratap had a similar route to politics. He started his career by winning a student union election at Saket Degree college in Ayodhya. He then got elected twice as zila panchayat chairman from Ayodhya, even as he came to be booked in around two dozen cases, including attempt to murder and rioting.

This is Indra Pratap's fourth Assembly election, if by proxy. In 2007, he contested from Ayodhya on an SP ticket and lost to the BJP's Lallu Singh. Then he switched over to the BSP and contested in 2012 from Goshainganj against Abhay Singh, who was by then in the SP. By 2017, Indra Pratap had moved to the BJP and this time defeated Abhay Singh.

It was after this win that Indra Pratap married Aarti, now the BJP's candidate from Goshainganj. Indra Pratap could not fight the election after a local court in 2021 sentenced him to five years' imprisonment in a 1992 forgery case.

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7 GOVT & POLITICS

DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



SWEET GESTURE

SUPREME COURT judges took a break from work on Saturday to visit the Mughal Gardens at Rashtrapati Bhavan at the invitation of President Ram Nath Kovind and First Lady Savita Kovind. Making their day all the more special was President Kovind's surprise chocolates for the youngest among the guests, Sriya Yarlagadda, who accompanied her grandfather Chief Justice of India NV Ramana and grandmother Sivamala on the trip. At the end of the stroll through the garden, the kindergarten student was visibly tired which was when the President decided to cheer her up with a Dairy Milk bar.

LEFT TURN

IF THE initial dilemma of opposition parties in their efforts to build an alternative to the BJP at the Centre was on whether to bring in the Congress – which is more keen on leading it than just joining – the confusion now appears to be different. The CPI(M) does not seem to be in favour of either West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee or Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao taking the lead. The recent editorial in its mouthpiece People's Democracy took exception to the bids by both Banerjee and Rao. It said the way Banerjee is "seeking to conflate the proposed meeting of chief ministers with the forging of an alternative alliance of regional parties, will only detract from the serious business of protecting the federal principle". It went on to say that talk of a federal front by Rao and Banerjee's attempt to project herself as heading the alternative alliance should not be mixed with the other task. Apparently, the CPI(M) prefers someone like Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin to do the job.

ONLINE PRIORITY

WITH THE third wave of Covid-19 showing signs of abating, the education system is gradually unlocking across the country. In most states and Union Territories, schools and colleges are resuming offline classes in phases. But online learning, foregrounded by the pandemic, will remain among the top agendas of the government. On Monday, the Ministry of Education will hold a webinar on its various budget proposals relating to digital education. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be the inaugural speaker at the event.

West Bengal minister Sadhan Pande dies

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, FEBRUARY 20

WEST BENGAL Cabinet minister Sadhan Pande died in Mumbai on Sunday morning after prolonged illness. He was 71 and is survived by his daughter Shreya. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee announced the death of her Cabinet colleague in a tweet.

"Our senior colleague, party leader and Cabinet Minister Sadhan Pande has passed away today morning in Mumbai. Had a wonderful relation for long. Deeply pained at this loss. My heartfelt condolences to his family, friends, followers," said Banerjee.

Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar also condoled Pande's death. "Sad news- Deeply pained at the passing away of Senior Cabinet Minister Sadhan Pande today morning at Mumbai. Shared a wonderful relationship and personal rapport with him beyond politics. Heartfelt condolences to his family, friends and followers. RIP! Om Shanti Om," he said in a tweet. Leader of Opposition in



Sadhan Pande was 71 years old

West Bengal Assembly Suwendu Adhikari also expressed his condolences. "Saddened by the passing away of West Bengal Minister Shri Sadhan Pande ji. My thoughts are with his bereaved family, friends & followers. Prayers for the departed soul. Om Shanti," he said in a tweet.

Pande was a five-time MLA from Burtola constituency in North Kolkata till 2011 when TMC came to power in the state. He was later elected as an MLA from Maniktala constituency for three consecutive terms.

The veteran TMC leader was suffering from kidney ailments for the past one year.

He was retained as a Cabinet minister after TMC came to power for the third consecutive term in 2021. However, he was not allocated any portfolio due to his ill health.

MEN IN POLICE UNIFORM PUSHED HIM TO DEATH, ALLEGES FATHER

Bengal: Family of dead student wants CBI probe

SWEETY KUMARI
KOLKATA, FEBRUARY 20

THE FAMILY of 28-year-old student leader Anis Khan, who died late Friday night after he was allegedly pushed from the second floor of his house in Howrah by a group of men dressed in police uniform, has demanded a CBI probe, accusing police of negligence.

Claiming that the "murder" of Anis has left many "unanswered questions", his family accused police of being lackadaisical in its probe and said they did not take any step after Anis complained about threat to his life last May.

Recalling the events leading up to Anis's death, his father Salem Khan told *The Indian Express*, "Anis returned home around 12.30 am

from a jalsa (a religious gathering). He went to the terrace with his phone and headphones. Around 1.10 am, four men knocked on our door and asked for Anis. I peeped from my room and told them that Anis was not at home as I didn't know who they were. But, when they said they were from Bagnan Police Station and would like to talk to Anis in connection with an old case lodged against him, I opened the door."

According to Salem, one of the men was in police uniform, while the rest were wearing civic volunteers' clothes. "One of them stood guard beside him, while the others went upstairs. Suddenly, I heard a loud thud. When I looked outside, I saw Anis lying in a pool of blood. By the time I went near his body, the four had left through a narrow lane near our house. They

Modi says new system for stray cattle after results: Will earn from even dung

ASAD REHMAN
LUCKNOW, FEBRUARY 20

WITH STRAY cattle emerging as a major poll issue in Uttar Pradesh, Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday said a new policy will be introduced to tackle it after March 10, when election results will be announced, adding that income can be made from the dung of animals.

Speaking in Unnao Sunday, Modi said: "Entire UP is praising the efforts of Yogiji's government to control floods. *Aap logon ko chutta jaanvaron se jo pareshani hoti hai, ussey dur karne ke liye, 10 March ke baad nayi vyavasthayen banayi jayengi. Aur Unnao ke mere bhai-beheno, mere ye shabd likh kar rakhiye, ye Modi bol raha hai, aur aapke aashirwad ke sath bol raha hai... Jo pashu dhoodh nahin deta hai, uske gobar se bhi aay ho, aisi vyavastha main aapke saamne khadi kar doonga. Aur ek din aisa aayega ki chutta jo pashu hai na, logon ko lagega, yaar, ghar mein isko baandh lo, isse bhi kamai hone wali hai* (The entire UP is praising the efforts made by Yogiji's government to control floods. The problem you face due to stray animals, to get rid of that, new arrangements will be made after March 10. And



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with other BJP leaders at an election rally in Unnao on Sunday. UNI

brothers and sisters of Unnao, please write my words, Modi is saying this, with your blessings. I will set up a new system so that there is income from the dung of animals which have stopped giving milk. The day will come when people will even tie stray animals at their homes because there will be income from that.)"

The problem of stray cattle has been increasing in UP since the Yogi Adityanath government cracked down on cattle slaughter. Farmers complain of animals destroying their crops, expenses borne to keep them away, and deaths and injuries caused by attacks by cattle. The government has raised cowsheds to house the cattle, but by the admission

of own leaders of the BJP, this has proved insufficient.

In his speech, Modi claimed that the BJP had got the blessings of the people in the poll phases already over, and would continue to get the same.

The PM also said that Samajwadi Party patron and founder Mulayam Singh Yadav campaigning for his son Akhilesh showed that the party was not sure about its chances in even its main leader's seat.

In his speech, Mulayam had urged people to ensure Akhilesh's victory with a huge margin, adding that the SP government would work for "nau-jawan, kisan aur vyapari (youths, farmers and traders)".

Over 60% turnout in UP Phase 3 voting

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
LUCKNOW, FEBRUARY 20

MORE THAN 60 per cent voting was recorded till 5 pm on Sunday in the 59 Uttar Pradesh Assembly constituencies that voted in the third phase of the elections in Uttar Pradesh.

According to the Election Commission's Turnout App, the turnout till 5 pm was 60.63 per cent with highest polling recorded in Lalitpur district in Bundelkhand at 69.05 and the lowest in Kanpur Nagar at 56.14 per cent.

Five years ago, in the 2017 state elections, the polling in these 16 districts that voted on Sunday was 62.21 per cent, with Lalitpur turnout at 72.01 per cent and Kanpur Nagar at 57.26 per cent.

In the third phase, Hathras recorded 63.14 per cent turnout,

Firozabad 61.89 per cent, Kasganj 63.04 per cent, Etah 65.7 per cent, Mainpuri 61.51 per cent, Farrukhabad 59.13 per cent, Kannauj 61.93 per cent, Etawah 58.35 per cent, Auraiya 60.62 per cent, Kanpur Dehat 59.87 per cent, Jalaun 59.93 per cent, Jhansi 57.71 per cent, Lalitpur 69.05 per cent, Hamirpur 60.56 per cent, and Mahoba 64.56 per cent.

As many as 627 candidates are in the fray in the third phase of the seven-phase elections to the state Assembly.

Among the prominent contests in this phase were Karhal in the SP-dominated Mainpuri district where BJP has fielded Union minister SPS Baghel against SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, who is contesting the Assembly elections for the first time. His uncle, Shivpal Yadav, is facing Vivek Shukla in Jaswantnagar.



RAEBARELI RALLY

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra during a campaign rally in Raebareli on Sunday. Express

Jaishankar on China debt diplomacy: Make informed decisions

Minister's sharp critique

THIS IS a very sharp critique by Jaishankar on Beijing's debt-trap diplomacy. But it is in line with his sharp remarks in Australia on February 12 — he is usually diplomatic in his choice of words, especially on China, more so while speaking from foreign soil — on Beijing's behaviour ever since the start of the military standoff along

EXPLAINED

the Ladakh frontier in May 2020. With Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne by his side, Jaishankar had then slammed China for "disregarding" the "written agreements" with India on not amassing troops at the border and said it is "an issue of legitimate concern for the entire international community".

was at a panel discussion along with counterparts from

Australia, Japan and France among others.

BJP misusing power, trying to influence postal ballots: Congress to Goa CEO

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
PANAJI, FEBRUARY 20

A DAY after the Congress in Goa alleged that state BJP leaders were "trying to poach their winnable candidates", the party on Sunday wrote to the Goa Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) alleging that the ruling BJP government was misusing state machinery to influence postal ballots.

While Assembly elections in Goa were held in a single phase on February 14, votes through postal ballots are still being cast by various government servants, including those from the state police.

"After the voting date, the state government machinery and candidates of the ruling party have indulged in illegal acts of threatening and intimidating voters who are supposed to cast their votes through postal ballots," Goa Pradesh Congress Committee president, Girish Chodankar wrote in a letter to state CEO on Sunday.

Chodankar said the matter needs to be probed. "It is also brought to the notice of your good office that the candidates of the ruling party have been provided with the list of voters who are going to cast their votes through postal ballots... It is rather strange that how such list has been provided to the ruling party candidate, when none of the opposition parties have been given any such list," Chodankar said in his letter.



Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao with his Maharashtra counterpart Uddhav Thackeray in Mumbai on Sunday. Ganesh Shirsekar

Need to preserve democracy: KCR meets Uddhav, Pawar in Mumbai

VISHWAS WAGHMODE
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 20

AS PART of his outreach to regional parties to form an anti-BJP alliance in the country, Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao met Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Sharad Pawar in Mumbai on Sunday and said that there was a need to preserve democracy and also provide an alternative to the way the country was being run.

"A change in the way the country is being run today is required. We have agreed that a 'parivartan' (change) is required. We want all people to coexist in harmony. We will also hold talks with regional and national parties. I believe that the morcha that starts from Maharashtra leads to success. The country got a lot of inspiration from Shivaji Maharaj, Balasaheb Thackeray and Maratha warriors. We want to follow the same inspiration. We want to fight against injustice, immorality and also preserve democracy," Rao told mediapersons after a meeting with CM Thackeray at the latter's official residence, Varsha. The meeting, which was a result of the Maharashtra CM's invite to his Telangana counterpart, lasted for more than two hours.

Thackeray said the existing political and social environment in the country was worrisome. "The atmosphere in the country is getting turbulent day by day. Vendetta politics is being played... Vendetta politics is not the tradition of our country and this is not our Hindutva at all. If such things con-



Rao (right) with NCP chief Sharad Pawar. Ganesh Shirsekar

tinue, then what is the future of the country? Someone needed to think about it. Hence, we have started thinking about it and a new beginning has started today. But, it will take some time to take shape," Thackeray said.

Rao said he discussed several issues at length with Thackeray, including the country's progress, accelerating the pace of development and bringing structural and policy reforms. "We have agreed on almost all issues and have decided to work together. Because there are many other like-minded people in the country, we are holding talks with them too," he added.

After his meeting with Thackeray, Rao drove down to the residence of Sharad Pawar. Following his meeting with the NCP chief, Rao suggested that a meeting of like-minded parties could be called at Baramati, the hometown of Pawar. "We will start work by bringing together those who want to come with us."

The NCP, however, was guarded, with Pawar saying there was "no political discussion" and that only "developmental issues" were discussed in the meeting. "We will meet again," Pawar said.

EDITORS GUILD ASKS PIB TO REVOKE NEW ACCREDITATION NORMS

New Delhi: The Editors Guild of India has written to the head of the Press Information Bureau (PIB), urging him to withdraw the new accreditation guidelines introduced by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry on February 7. The Guild said many provisions to withdraw the accreditation of a journalist were "arbitrary and without any due process of law".

"We are surprised that the new guidelines have been issued without any consultations with press organisations and media bodies... Under the guidelines, journalists will come under the thumb of the police..." it said. ENS

Momen, in his question, asked the panelists directly by naming China. Appreciating Japan and India for their help, he said, "China comes forward with a basket of money and aggressive proposals, affordable proposals, and then you have a problem. What to do?"

Jaishankar responded, "Look, international relations is competitive, every country will look for opportunities and see what it can do. But while doing so, it is in their own interest to be prudent about what they are getting into, to do the due diligence. We have seen countries, including in our region, being saddled with large debts."

"We have seen projects which are commercially unsustainable. Airports where aircraft don't come. Harbours where a ship doesn't come. So, I think people would be justified in asking themselves — what am I getting into? And, it is obviously in the interest of the country concerned, but it is also in the interest of the international community because bad, unsustainable projects don't end there... debt becomes equity, and that becomes something else. So there are real concerns out there. So I think it is very important that all of us make informed decisions, but of course, very competitive decisions," he said. FULL REPORT ON www.indianexpress.com

In Kerala college, student in hijab scores poll win

SHAJU PHILIP
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEBRUARY 20

AT A time when the hijab controversy is raging in coastal Karnataka, a Muslim woman from Kerala's Kasaragod district has been elected as general secretary of her college union as a candidate of SFI, the student wing of CPI(M).

Ayshath Mahsoona, 21, a practising Muslim who wears hijab, was in a close contest against BJP's student wing ABVP and the MSF of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML). She is the first Muslim woman to win the college union election as an SFI candidate in the 64-year-long history of Government College in Kasaragod which is not far from the city of Mangaluru in Karnataka.



Ayshath Mahsoona with other SFI students. Express

Of the 1,700-odd students at the college, 500 are from the Muslim community, most of them being women.

"I faced opposition from the Muslim community and the MSF

for working with the SFI. The IUML and its outfits campaigned that the Communists are against religion and every Muslims girl should stay with MSF. However, nearly three dozen Muslim girls

in the college have now become part of the SFI, daring the orthodox elements," said Ayshath, whose father is a trader.

Ayshath said she was always chary of getting involved in Left politics.

"I haven't so far taken part in any SFI event outside the campus. There is immense pressure from the community against joining hands with the SFI. I wanted to change that mindset and many of my friends are ready to come out of the community's diktats over political choices," she said.

Her parents, she said, were really scared of the community despite their Left leanings. "When I was a class 12 student, I had attended a camp of National Service Scheme, which angered a local Muslim cleric who said no Muslim girl should take part in such events," she recalled.



WORDLY WISE
SPEAK SOFTLY AND CARRY A BIG STICK;
YOU WILL GO FAR.
— THEODORE ROOSEVELT

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA
BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

RIDING TRADE WINDS

UAE treaty could give a fillip to Indian exports to the Gulf and Africa, benefit pharma and MSME sector

WITH THE SWIFT conclusion of an early harvest Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between India and the United Arab Emirates, Delhi appears to be signalling to the world that while it walked out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), one of the world's biggest Free Trade Area agreements, that does not make it protectionist, or averse to free trade agreements. Worried about market exposure to China, the government had then defended its exit from RCEP by dubbing it an "FTA by stealth" and pointed to underperforming FTAs with most individual countries in the regional trade group. But now the focus seems to have shifted back to signing bilateral FTAs, where Delhi is apparently more confident of controlling its market exposure. Last year, India and Mauritius signed a Comprehensive Economic Co-operation and Partnership Agreement. Interim trade agreements with the UK, Canada and Australia are in the pipeline. The negotiations for the CEPA with the UAE were concluded in three to four months. It aims to take bilateral trade to over \$1 billion within five years, including in services. The FTA covers 80 per cent of Indian exports to the UAE and is expected to stimulate export-oriented industries in India, especially in the MSME sector, because of a zero-tariff welcome by the UAE. Officials are also hoping that Indian investments in the UAE, spurred by the FTA, will see more remittances flowing into the country. The jewellery sector is also expected to receive a fillip with a concessional import duty. The agreement also speaks about expediting work on a special investment zone for UAE companies and joint ventures, and a dedicated India Mart in the Jebel Ali free zone. Relations between India and the UAE have improved significantly over the last few years. The UAE is India's third-largest trading partner and second-largest export destination, oil being the main import from the Gulf country. The two countries signed a strategic partnership agreement in 2017. The CEPA may serve to deepen the partnership. India and UAE are also now part of an economic relations focussed, informally named "Middle East Quad", in which the United States and Israel area also members.

The government hopes that the pact with the UAE will revive a long-shelved FTA with the Gulf Co-operation Council, a six-nation grouping of the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman, and pave the way to markets in Africa, especially for India's pharmaceuticals sector. With the UAE an important transit point for goods and people, this is not an unreasonable expectation, provided Indian industry, especially the ailing MSME sector, can live up to the potential offered by the FTA, and exports match imports.

AFTER THE HARVEST

India's foodgrains production has been rising consistently since 2017. The challenge now is to transfer benefits to farmers

INDIA'S AGRICULTURE SECTOR is all set to create an all-time high production record this year. According to the Second Advance Estimates of Production of Foodgrains for 2021-22, released by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare last week, India's total foodgrains production will cross 316 million tonnes. This is 1.7 per cent higher than the total production the year before. But what truly captures the remarkable growth in India's farm production is the stark trend in the past six years: Foodgrains production has gone up from 252 million tonnes in 2015-16 to 316 million tonnes now; rising every single year. Contrast this with the performance in the six years preceding 2016-17 — production fluctuated between 244 and 265 million tonnes.

While overall farm production has increased there are diverging trends. Among cereals, coarse grains such as jowar, bajra and ragi are expected to see a decline in output while maize is expected to buck the trend. Thanks to good monsoons, rice production, both in kharif and rabi seasons, is expected to increase by almost 3 per cent. Wheat production, too, is expected to go up by 2 per cent. Pulses are expected to see their output grow by almost 6 per cent with the exception of tur, which is likely to dip by 7 per cent. Oilseeds are expected to see a production growth of 3.3 per cent, thanks to significant increases in mustard and soybean, making up for the fall in groundnut production. Among the key cash crops, sugarcane is expected to see a jump of over 4 per cent while cotton production may decline by over 3 per cent.

There are two policy concerns emerging from this data. One, what happens to food inflation. For instance, wholesale inflation has been 10.5 per cent in wheat, 14.5 per cent in maize, over 23 per cent in oilseeds and 45 per cent in cotton. While domestic production is one big factor in influencing prices, the minimum support prices announced by the government (pulses) as well as the international prices (oilseeds) of these commodities also impact them. The combination of these factors will play out in the year ahead. For example, lower production in cotton when prices are already high will raise the raw material costs of the domestic textile industry, weakening its competitiveness. The other concern would be to ensure improved remuneration for farmers. The ironic — and troublesome — aspect of India's sustained increase in farm production in the past 5-6 years has been the concurrent rise in farmers' distress as the terms of trade have worsened.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



SUHAS PALSHIKAR

SOME TIME BACK, when pictures of a burqa-clad woman taking her child attired as Lord Krishna to school on the occasion of Janmashtami were circulated approvingly, a vocal section of Hindutva made an interesting argument. It was said this was reducing Hindu tradition to a fancy dress event and that such (mis)appropriation of Hindu tradition should be called out. Clearly, it is not enough that non-Hindus should behave like Hindus or participate in Hindu cultural-religious festivities.

Now, in the case of Karnataka, the argument is that non-Hindus cannot have their own practices (whether these are good or bad practices is beside the point). In the case of beef eating, the argument rests on the point that since the cow is sacred for Hindus, non-Hindus should ensure that Hindu sentiment is not hurt by killing the cow and consuming its meat. In the present case, there is no such "hurt" caused to Hindus and yet, non-Hindus are not left alone to follow their (supposedly) religious practice.

Three dimensions of Hindutva emerge through the Karnataka complication. The first is a political dimension, not just in the limited sense of consolidating the Hindu vote, which surely is happening. But the more critical political dimension is about issues such as what constitutes the nation and who are entitled to be India's citizens. At a fundamental level, the citizenship of those who do not follow authorised Hindu practices is being denied. Increasingly, governments are ensuring that deviations from such practices as approved by Hindutva are formally discouraged and disallowed. So, the concept of an Indian citizen is being equated with adopting the Hindutva way of life and thinking. The rest will be marginalised and criminalised.

Another dimension is cultural. It speaks to the ideologically fed century-old anxieties of some Hindus. These anxieties have produced a hankering for uniformity. The Karnataka developments give a wrong impression that it is only about Muslims. At a more immediate level, these are indeed aimed at Muslims: Muslims cannot have the freedom of being slow in modernisation because in this particular instance, a certain meaning of moderni-

Criminalisation of hijab has to be seen as part of a larger narrative, a restructuring India's culture and society



The drivers of Hindutva are beyond the pale of many ideas of the Hindu religion. They are also quite far from popular cultural practices and that is why it has taken so long and so much violence for Hindutva to gain traction. The drivers of Hindutva — the othering of Muslims, influence of Christianity and an elite idea of purity — are also away from the moral or spiritual ideas of religion. These factors constitute the ideological base and work as the political weapons of Hindutva.

sation suits the Hindutva agenda. But let us not make a mistake of summarising this only as between Hindus and Muslims. More than that, this issue is literally and metaphorically, about the idea of "uniform".

A cursory glance at the history of Hindutva shows its understanding of an ideal society is premised on everyone being similar, differences being only nominal, bringing about homogeneity in every respect. While in politics, this is reflected in the emphasis on "common" or national language, in the religious sphere it is reflected in searching for a foundational scripture either in the Gita or in the Vedas. In the sphere of popularly practiced religion, this obsession has found two expressions. On the one hand, one deity is raised at the all-India level both as a symbol of religious pride and also as a basis of national identity; on the other hand, regionally celebrated deities are promoted elsewhere to ensure that they do not remain identities of regions but assume pan-Hindu status.

In every sphere, this homogenisation of the idea of being Hindu is at the core of Hindutva. That is why diversity of practices about food consumption is discouraged and delegitimised as being against the Hindu religion. Besides beef, debates around inclusion/exclusion of eggs from school mid-day meals is being characterised by this search for true and pure Hindu.

This takes us to the third dimension of Hindutva — the search for the pure as the original. Besides the obsession with uniformity, cultural practices of Hindutva are also based on another ambition. It is about formulating a "pure", unadulterated Hindu religio-cultural existence at the mass level. While a bikini can be easily condemned as western debasement, we are not far from de-claiming Khajuraho; recently, a book shop was vandalised for selling *Kamasutra*. So, a masculine yet pure (preferably celibate) identity and a feminine but de-sexualised identity are upheld as role models. Through these exercises, a pure religiosity as true Hindu religion contests the rich diversity of religiosities among the so-called Hindus. In a sense, this search for purity dovetails with both uniformity and nationalism.

At the most superficial but very loud

retorical level, hate and suspicion of Muslims (both from India and elsewhere generally) constitute the immediate driver of Hindutva. But Hindutva cannot be explained only in terms of Islamophobia. In many instances, Islamophobia is a convenient tool given the widespread misunderstanding about Muslims and the intransigence of Muslim clergy and elite to steer internal reform. Beyond that, in matters of religious books, the emphasis on celibacy and simplicity, institutionalisation of *seva* as a "missionary" activity demanding long years of sacrifice and a search for unified religious order, the Hindutva project resembles traits of Christianity.

Finally, caste-based ideas of purity combined with the European obsession with pure blood as represented in the Nazi idea of Aryan race has informed the Hindutva project. Critics of Hindutva often draw attention to its "Brahmanical" character in this regard. While that has a certain validity, it must be squarely accepted that most castes (and the idea of caste itself) draw sustenance from the idea of barricading one community from others by restricting marriage practices. The violent opposition to inter-caste marriages, particularly when the male partner is from a "lower" caste, is testimony to this caste-based search for purity.

In this sense, the drivers of Hindutva are beyond the pale of many ideas of the Hindu religion. They are also quite far from popular cultural practices and that is why it has taken so long and so much violence for Hindutva to gain traction. The drivers of Hindutva — the othering of Muslims, influence of Christianity and an elite idea of purity — are also away from the moral or spiritual ideas of religion. These factors constitute the ideological base and work as the political weapons of Hindutva. If this broader context of what is happening in Karnataka is missed, we are likely to be waylaid by the "secular" argument that the hijab controversy is more a matter of reform than being a part of a larger narrative or restructuring of India's culture and society.

The writer, based at Pune, taught political science and is chief editor of Studies in Indian Politics

MY GOOD FRIEND AND GUIDE

Ravish could challenge and provoke, with respect, and a smile



LIZ MATHEW

RAVISH TIWARI ENTERED journalism almost a decade after I became a reporter but, for us, that gap never mattered. He was a political animal, I see myself as one too. Even though we were good friends since 2006, he was also a reporter with whom I competed and when he came as chief of bureau in *The Indian Express*, I was apprehensive. But Ravish proved me wrong, taught me lessons that no one else did, and made me realise that two political reporters could learn from each other.

Nothing, neither the ordeal of cancer, the tubes and needles piercing his body nor the strong drugs pumped into him, doused his passion for reporting, or blunted the sharpness of his political instinct. Here is an example. On February 12, the BJP released a list of nine candidates for the election in Uttar Pradesh. I shared it on a Whatsapp group and within minutes came Ravish's message from the hospital bed: "Zahoorabad becomes an interesting constituency to profile. Om Prakash Rajbhar contesting from SP-SBSP alliance, old SP hand Shadab Fatima (from Rahi Masoom Raza family) rebels and contests from BSP, and BJP fields a Rajbhar. The area is in Ansari influence zone too." When it came to understanding the nuances of politics and making a report interesting for readers, Ravish was unique.

Ravish was never satisfied with the logic given by netas for their acts and decisions. He always looked for the why, and at how ordinary folk looked at it. In Parliament corri-

dors, one could see Ravish engrossed in intense conversation with the most unfamiliar faces and back benchers. He would argue with the most articulate leader, too. I never heard him talk ill of anyone, he had friends from across parties, but he was no one's friend when it came to news.

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These are times when criticism against the political establishment can get you stamped as "anti-national" or "radical", and embedded reporting can be the easy way out. But Ravish continued to ask leaders the most difficult questions with a smile. No one could get away without responding to him.

Ravish could challenge and provoke, with respect, without being rude. I used to envy his fearlessness and the felicity with which he carried out a conversation with leaders who might snub me for my faltering Hindi. The questions I would be hesitant to ask, or fail in putting across, Ravish would shoot effortlessly.

Ravish was an avid reader, he would read at least one or two books before writing about anything other than politics. In the newsroom, we were all entertained by Ravish the storyteller: When narrating an incident, he peppered it with mimicry of the main characters.

He was unenthused by money, he didn't accumulate things. He did not bother to buy a new car saying the old one he had was running but finally gave in to his family's persuasion to purchase a home. Long hair and the muffler casually hanging from his neck

during winters marked his don't-care attitude. About his disease, he would say: "It's all about science. One has to rely on science to come out of this."

I have lost a good friend, and a guide who helped me hone my understanding of the layers and nuances of north Indian politics. The mentor in him awakened whenever I mentioned my twin daughters to him. He got excited about their small achievements, chided me for putting the pressure of my own expectations on them — a baseless allegation, I would retort. When I was down with mild Covid, he, who was going through multiple sessions of chemotherapy and radiation, would call me three times a day to check on my temperature and oxygen levels. He was lucky to have a partner like Poojya, who stood by him through the tumult and pain of the last two years.

As I write this, it's been more than 24 hours since he left us. Whose appraisal will I seek when I write next, who will I call now for help in framing the intro for stories? Who will I call for confirming a tip I got from the beat? Ravish the journalist, earned the respect of many. As a colleague, he earned a cherished place in the hearts of all who worked with him. I can find solace in that old adage: "Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal". But he has left all of us who loved and admired him with a sorrow that can't be healed.

liz.mathew@expressindia.com

FEBRUARY 21, 1982, FORTY YEARS AGO

ANDHRA CM IMPASSE

IN AN UNPRECEDENTED move, the AP Congress-I Legislature Party turned down the parliamentary board's directive to elect its leader by a secret ballot and instead asked Indira Gandhi to name the new leader. The person so named will be deemed to have been elected by the CLP-I said a resolution adopted at the end of a four-hour meeting, which was deadlocked over the modalities of election. The authorisation was unconditional negating any consensus that might have been reached on the candidate during the two-day exercise of "opinion gathering" conducted by party observers.

SOUTH-SOUTH MEET

THE THREE-DAY CONSULTATIONS beginning in New Delhi on February 22 to consider informal steps to break the deadlock in the North-South global negotiations and to regenerate South-South cooperation is unlikely to yield any breakthrough, despite host India's "gratification" at 43 of the 44 proposals received.

MAHARASHTRA CURFEW

THE QUIET PILGRIM city of Pandharpur became the third city in Maharashtra to come under curfew in less than a week. Meanwhile

the situation in Pune and Sholapur, under curfew since February 15, was reported to be under control by official sources in the wake of Vishwa Hindu Parishad's Janagran Abhilyan processions.

CLASH IN UN

INDIA AND PAKISTAN clashed at a meeting in Geneva of the United Nations Human Rights Commission. The dispute between the two countries was reportedly over the Kashmir issue. Agha Hilaly, brother of the outgoing Pakistan foreign minister Agha Shahi, raked up the issue while discussing colonial domination.

The compassion lesson

As children return to classrooms, governments, schools, teachers and parents must give them a vocabulary to talk about their emotions and experience of pandemic loss, find ways to repair and heal



NIVIDA CHANDRA

SINCE SCHOOLS CLOSED, students have been through a lot of changes. Not only have they aged, they have become different people, having lived through a pandemic at such a young age. So, what should schools expect when children return, and how can they prepare to support their emotional adjustment and safeguard their development beyond academic achievement?

As a society, we have always struggled to accept that school is about more than academic achievement. School is where children make friends, encounter bullies, face anxieties, experiment with identities, have secret adventures, live independent lives, and learn who they are away from their parents. If their home environment is unstable for any reason, they have the chance to live a different life where they can feel like they have a higher degree of freedom and control. That this is essential to their psychosocial development is beyond debate.

Being home for the larger part of two years has denied them these necessary developmental opportunities. Undoubtedly, children will have missed their friends, and the routine of going to school can have induced grief and listlessness. Beyond this, though, several children will have experienced Covid-induced health anxieties, the loss of loved ones, varying textures of violence, financial crises and several other issues.

The symptom grabbing everyone's attention seems to be an increase in screen time. Less attention has been paid to "nuisance" symptoms such as disrupted sleep or eating patterns, lack of focus and motivation to study, sullen behaviour and temper tantrums. Older children have been taken to doctors for anything from mild mood and anxiety disorders to instances of addiction and self-harm. Despite our intention to support our children, it seems we have instead decided to "manage" them and place the burden of coping — academically and emotionally — on them alone. It is one of the great privileges of adulthood to develop an amnesia about how we would have liked to be treated when we were children and adolescents.

Children do not always communicate directly, and often go unheard when they try. Nor do they have (read: are not given) an emotional vocabulary to explain the complexity of emotions they might be going through (neither do adults, if I'm being honest). Instead, they withdraw, get angry, stop studying or lose focus. Our instinct, unthinkingly, is to respond by telling them to engage, stop feeling angry, study harder and focus more. Unsurprisingly, such advice never works. These are expressions of their feelings. Withdrawing into their phones, for instance, can well be an expression of loneliness, despair and a feeling of being unmoored. Children are alive to everything around them. Holding it inside, trying to make sense of it, can be a lot to carry. Shutting down — receding into technology — might be a protective response that offers stimulation and engagement on their terms. Other responses to this felt helplessness, no less extreme, could be addictions of various kinds and attempts at self-harm.

It is, therefore, unreasonable to expect children to return to "normal" just by virtue of them attending school again. Students may struggle to reacquaint with friends, while others may not know how to study in



CR Sasikumar

a classroom. Schools need to be prepared for hundreds of students, each carrying the burden of the past two years, coming together under one roof. This is a moment to think beyond labelling students as those "falling behind" or "depressed" or exhibiting "conduct disorders" and sending them for behavioural interventions or calling their parents to reprimand them. It is an opportunity to move from a punitive to a compassionate, supportive stance. The aim, now, is not to graduate them from one class to the next but to help them mourn what was lost, recover and feel safe again.

This is an appeal to the administrations — governments, schools and PTAs.

Be proactive in addressing psychological and behavioural concerns. Help parents understand the "symptoms" as responses to the difficulties their children have been through. Give parents and children a vocabulary to talk about their concerns. Use age-appropriate language and creative ways to help children express their feelings and challenges. Make an effort to know which children may have faced death and other identifiable crises in these times. Reach out to them personally; let them know you care. Don't ask why someone didn't attend a class; ask what's going on within. Look out for the really quiet or obedient child. Look out for behavioural signs that are completely discordant from the child you knew. Don't be afraid to ask children what's going on with them — often, they are hoping someone will notice them and ask. You don't have to have all the answers — just hear them out.

Create professional systems that involve all manner of mental health professionals

Students may struggle to reacquaint with friends, while others may not know how to study in a classroom. Schools need to be prepared for hundreds of students, each carrying the burden of the past two years, coming together under one roof. This is a moment to think beyond labelling students as those 'falling behind' or 'depressed' or exhibiting 'conduct disorders' and sending them for behavioural interventions or calling their parents to reprimand them. The aim, now, is not to graduate them from one class to the next but to help them mourn what was lost, recover and feel safe again.

who can help you navigate these problems. Offer school counselling services. Create informed and capable systems that can truly be relied on by the students (not as bodies that report to the teachers and principals in the "best interest of the child"). These can include psychotherapists, counsellors, parents, teachers and even some older students who, with basic training, can become the first line of therapeutic relief and instil a sense of community. These efforts can also take the form of team activities, sports, theatre and the like, which can be seamlessly incorporated into the daily calendar without additional budgetary or personnel stressors.

The time for gradually assimilating such changes into our systems is gone. This is a call for a pendulous shift in the approach to studenthood. Even so, the idea is not to attend to mental health as the flavour du jour; it is to demonstrate a sustained attention to it. This is imminently doable without disruption to other school activities and schedules.

We have not even begun to understand the long-term impact of this time on the lives of children. Short-term repair, at the very least, will require an additional commitment to the psychosocial development of the children. This is, then, also a good time to examine what education really means, and the place schools hold in the lives of our children.

These ideas were developed in conversations with Nupur Dhingra Paiva, child and adolescent psychotherapist and author of Love & Rage: Inner World of Children. Chandra is a psychologist and founder of KindSpace Center for Mental Health

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"It can easily be assumed that the naval exercise is part of a series of soft steps by the US and our Arab allies to push Pakistan closer to recognising Israel. This prospect should only be considered if the Palestinians are on board." —DAWN, PAKISTAN

The voice of Bengali romance

Sandhya Mukherjee brought a memorable classical blend to film music. For generations, she became the soundtrack to their romantic journeys



MAITREYEE B CHOWDHURY

In the early 2000s, I was doing research for my book on Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen. As a part of this journey, I not only watched many of the duo's films but also spoke to people for whom the Uttam-Suchitra films had been a part of their growing years. Almost every one of these people also mentioned the songs in these films, and how important a part they had played in the overall impact of the film. Most of these immensely popular songs had been sung by two famous singers from Bengal, Sandhya Mukherjee and Hemanta Mukherjee.

Sandhya Mukherjee's career as a singer began when she was a young girl. She started by singing for the radio, during and after which she received extensive training in classical music. Mukherjee's voice soon became well-known, especially in Bengal, and this resulted in Sachin Dev Burman requesting her to sing for Hindi films. She shifted to Bombay in the 1950s to sing for the Hindi film *Tarana*, which was released in 1951, and where for the first time she sang with the by-now famous Lata Mangeshkar. The combination of Lata Mangeshkar and Sandhya Mukherjee in the hit song *Bol papihe bol* led to many more films and songs for Mukherjee. But in spite of having a flourishing career in Hindi playback singing, she opted to return to Bengal to continue her career there.

In Bengal, Mukherjee worked with many filmmakers but, undeniably, her best work happened with Robin Chatterji, who exploited her classical singing skills. A Patiala Gharana singer, Mukherjee brought a unique classical blend to film music. The timbre of her voice was fresh and unlike what audiences had heard before. While Sandhya Mukherjee was a known name, it was her pairing with Hemanta Mukherjee that became most memorable. In film after film, the duo began singing for the romantic hit pairing of Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen.

Suchitra Sen on screen became synonymous with Sandhya Mukherjee's voice. Indeed, many would say they nourished each other's artistic journeys. Soon it came to be that almost every other film of Sen, with a hit song, had a playback by Mukherjee. Apparently, they even altered their respective voices and mannerisms

to suit the other while the songs were filmed. One of the earliest films where she sang playback for Suchitra Sen was *Agni Pariksha* (1954). The film was a huge hit and took both their careers on an upswing. Songs like *Gaane mor kon Indradhonu* or *Ke tumi amare dako alokhe lukaye thako*, became a rage. The songs, which were played again and again in public domains, from coffee shops to puja pandals, catapulted both the star cast and Mukherjee into immense fame. Other songs like the popular *Ghum ghum chand jhikimiki tara* (*Harano Sur*, 1957), or the semiclassical *Kaun tarha se tum* (*Uttar Phalguni*, 1963) followed one after the other in quick succession, and cemented Mukherjee's reputation in the Bengali music industry.

In 1961, Sandhya Mukherjee sang *Ei poth jodi na sesh hoy*, a fun romantic song for the film *Saptapadi*, along with Hemanta Mukherjee. It was pictured on Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen, a song about lovers taking off on a journey of togetherness. The song caught the imagination of the youth of the time and went on to gain cult status, eventually becoming one of Bengali cinema's most loved and iconic songs, hummed till date, and still known to resonate with young lovers. An octogenarian I had interviewed for my book spoke about the songs laughingly, "Suchitra Sen and Uttam Kumar with their good looks, and the voice of Sandhya Mukherjee and Hemanta — can you imagine what a potent combination it was? It was sublime, we fell in love!"

To her credit, Mukherjee's career wasn't limited to film music. She never let her training in classical music go to waste. She continued to perform in classical music soirées throughout her life with as much skill and gusto, as she sang in other Bengali music genres like *Najrulgeeti* and folk. In keeping with the tradition of creative artists, Mukherjee has always lent her voice to important issues that she felt strongly about, whether it was standing in support of the Bangladesh liberation fight in 1971, or her recent decision to return the Padma Shri award by the Government of India, which she felt had belittled her talent.

There are many singers who have sung before and after Sandhya Mukherjee — beautiful voices all of them, no doubt, but the ability to make people dream, to be able to take them to some far-away magical land where they become one with music, is a special talent that few possess. In that sense, Sandhya Mukherjee will always be remembered, for she enabled an entire generation to fall in love.

The writer is a poet and the author of Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen: Bengali Cinema's First Couple

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

JOBS IGNORED

This refers to the article, 'There are jobs, discover them' (IE, Feb 20). P Chidambaram rightly highlights the fact that despite endless opportunities across fields, the government's focus is more on regional politics and religious issues rather than channelling the youth's energy towards productive activities. On top of that, taxing future areas like digital assets which other countries are eagerly adopting further reduces any potential of exponential growth for India. If only the government could rise above political and ideological hate.

Gaurav Gupta, Gurugram

DIVIDED ON POLLS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Picking the wrong battle' (IE, February 19). The writers have rightly questioned the temerity of some farm union leaders to fight assembly elections in Punjab when all the farm unions camping on the Delhi borders to protest against the NDA government's farm laws had decided that the movement would remain non-political. Unity among various unions is still needed because some demands of farmers are yet to be accepted.

Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur

FAILING PREAMBLE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Who we are' (IE, February 19). The Preamble endows Indians with the "liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship". However, the freedom of choice does not guarantee with it the "inherent ability" to make that choice. The ability to choose is intrinsic and cannot be endowed on a person by mere writing of words. It takes confidence to showcase your own beliefs

to the people around and it takes much more than strength to break free of the social stratification and embrace the beliefs and culture of others. The present state of affairs — the polarisation, religious manipulations, etc — show that even the young and blooming minds aren't taking the Preamble's prerogative seriously and lack the strength to set things right.

Kirat Singh, Mohali

HEED CRITICS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Being thick-skinned' (IE, February 19). It is a well-known fact that almost half the MPs in Parliament may not be on the right side of the law. There is no point in the Indian government frowning at the Singapore PM's speech, when he referred to this bitter truth. While our government spokespersons have developed a habit of boasting that the world praises the "achievements" of the government of the day, they should also be mature enough to take (global) criticism in the right spirit.

SS Paul, Nadia

TECH BENEFITS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Working with blockchain' (IE, February 19). When there is a lack of clarity regarding the prospects of blockchain technology, it isn't the right time to bring another aspect regarding its climate impacts and create a hurdle in exploring the associated benefits. There are several research papers that evince that this nascent technology can be effectively utilised to measure, track and report the carbon footprint across the process through smart contracts. It is a better idea to exploit the technology than indulge in criticism.

Aerika Singh, Chandigarh

EU in the Indo-Pacific

Paris is hosting a ministerial Indo-Pacific Forum to convert strategy into actions



EMMANUEL LENAIN

EUROPE AND ITS key Indo-Pacific partners are joining forces to deliver a positive agenda for the region at the ministerial Forum taking place tomorrow in Paris under France's ongoing presidency of the EU. This first-of-its-kind event brings together the foreign affairs ministers from EU member states and 30 Indo-Pacific countries, including India's Foreign Minister Jaishankar, with France and the EU as co-chairs.

The issues at stake in this crucial region, including security challenges, are of concern to all EU countries. Europe's answer is a comprehensive and positive agenda of solutions, rather than a logic of military confrontation. This is also the guiding principle of the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, unveiled in September 2021. Europe can offer the countries of the region a sustainable, transparent model for preserving their sovereignty, and an alternative to other models, such as China's.

Tomorrow's Forum is France's contribution to translating this strategy into actions. We are working on concrete projects in three priority areas — security and defence, connectivity and common goods. On each

of these issues, we believe that India has a central role to play.

France, itself a nation of the Indo-Pacific, has a long-standing commitment to upholding the law of the sea in the region, particularly through our permanent naval presence and joint exercises, such as our annual "Varuna" drills with India. Other EU countries are increasingly present at the national level. We believe that stronger European engagement will help to better respond to the security challenges of this vast region. That is why we are working on a coordinated EU maritime presence in the Indian Ocean, a key item of tomorrow's discussions. This would be a significant step, that demonstrates the EU's role as a provider of stability in the region.

There are immense connectivity and infrastructure needs in the Indo-Pacific. But these needs should not force the countries of the region into unsustainable dependencies. Alternative options are required. The EU's Global Gateway initiative unveiled in December 2021 hopes to address this by pooling the resources of the EU's institutions and its 27 member states to raise 300 billion euros to build sustainable links. Tomorrow's

Forum will focus on strengthening connections between Europe and the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the air and digital domains. The EU and India have already concluded a Connectivity Partnership (last May in Porto), which can be a pillar of this wider initiative.

The Indo-Pacific is a crucial region for tackling global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity protection and health resilience. These challenges call for collective action. At the Forum, the EU will present the support it can provide to countries of the region, including in terms of green finance, to achieve their ecological transitions in a just manner. This is significant for India's efforts to meet the goals set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at COP26. Moreover, in the fields of biodiversity protection and plastic pollution, France and India can act together to spur multilateral action, as exemplified by India's decision to join the France-initiated international coalition to protect 30 per cent of the land and seas by 2030 (High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People).

Cooperation between France and India on protected areas and national parks can also be expanded at the Indo-Pacific scale.

Finally, the ministers will discuss concrete steps to strengthen health sovereignty and promote the "One Health" approach to the pandemic response. France will propose the creation of an Indo-Pacific health campus, to be established in India, to bring together India's pharmaceutical prowess and Europe's technological capacity for the benefit of the region.

In a world of growing tensions, the core goal of France's EU Presidency is to strengthen Europe's sovereignty and its ability to decide its own fate. This endeavour matches India's fundamental aspiration for strategic autonomy. That is why France believes that the EU can be India's natural partner to reshape the post-pandemic world and promote a multipolar order. We can leverage our excellent bilateral ties and the momentum from the May 2021 EU-India Summit to bring about this vision. At tomorrow's Forum, France and India will work together to place a truly strategic EU-India partnership at the centre of a new deal for the Indo-Pacific.

The writer is Ambassador of France to India

2008 AHMEDABAD SERIAL BLASTS VERDICT

‘Keeping accused in society like setting loose man-eating leopard’

SOHINI GHOSH
AHMEDABAD, FEBRUARY 20

IN THE order awarding death penalty to 38 accused in the 2008 serial blasts in Ahmedabad, the special designated judge said keeping them in society was “equivalent (to) setting loose a man-eating leopard”.

In the 7,015-page order made public on Saturday, Additional Sessions Judge A R Patel said: “These accused have no respect for constitutionally elected government... One or two accused during hearing of the sentence said that they do not believe in the government, its laws or courts, and only believe in Allah and there is no one greater than Allah in this world. That Allah will give true justice... If such accused are kept in society, it will be equivalent of setting loose a man-eating leopard... and such man-eating leopards eat innocent people without seeing if they are children, women, men, or regardless of people’s caste, creed intellect etc. For such accused who spread fear in society, even permitting the shadow of such accused... can be dangerous.”

On their motive, the verdict said the accused were affiliated to prohibited organisations like SIMI and had established the Indian Mujahideen. “To take re-



Fifty-six people were killed in the serial blasts that rocked Ahmedabad on July 26, 2008. Bhupendra Rana/ File

venge (for the) 2002 Godhra riots, they believed falsely that Narendra Modi’s Gujarat government was an anti-Muslim government and wanted to overthrow the government... Islamic rule can be established was the motive of the accused”.

Seeking a separate department to assist their victims, the order said: “The accused pursued education in jails at the cost of the government, hospital treatment at the cost of the government, meals in jails at the government’s cost, visits to their families at the cost of jail... One does not know if such kind of government support was extended to the families of those who were killed or injured

in the blasts.”

The court relied on the confessional statements by some accused that political leaders, including Modi, were targeted, using it to justify charges under the UAPA and IPC section 121A of “war on State”. Four of the accused had given confessional statements, with one of them, Imran Ibrahim Sheikh, now sentenced to death, saying that in December 2007, speeches were given at Vagamon in Kerala, where Safdar Nagori (now on death row) talked about “jihad”, “going to Afghanistan for ‘hizrat’ (exodus), “mass killing” and that “political leader Narendra Modi was to be targeted”.

Special judge Patel said:

“Death sentence is the only and ultimate punishment for such terror-minded accused... All can be called youths and can be considered to be capable of taking terror training, making bombs and knowing other things related to bombs. They have several cases pending against them and in many verdict has come. Keeping this in mind, it is clear that they are criminal minded.”

Notably, during cross-examination, several investigators said they had not looked into the links of the accused to other blasts across the country, particularly to blasts linked to Hindutva groups. They also admitted that no computer or hard disks were seized with respect to the terror emails said to have been sent out by the IM.

On the fact that no explosives or weapons were recovered from the accused at the time of their arrest, the court said, “The accused were arrested long after the event, which is why no weapon or explosives were recovered.”

On investigators’ admission that they did not ask the sellers of cycles on which the bombs were planted for the descriptions or names of the buyers, the judge said a seller could not provide such details given his number of customers. The serial blasts had killed 56 people and left over 200 injured. Apart from the 38 given death, 11 were convicted to life, and 28 acquitted.

How car thieves led Mumbai cop to Indian Mujahideen

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 20



Retired Mumbai Police Inspector Ashok Chavan

TWO DAYS ago, a court in Gujarat sentenced 38 convicts to death for planning and perpetrating the 2008 Ahmedabad serial blasts. The explosions were allegedly carried out by Indian Mujahideen (IM), which was mostly a shadowy entity at the time — so much so that even central agencies such as Intelligence Bureau (IB), and (Research and Analysis Wing R&AW), had no clue about what it really was.

Until the case was cracked by a Mumbai Police officer, a Crime Branch veteran known for nabbing car thieves.

Now retired, Inspector Ashok Chavan was put on the case by the then Crime Branch chief Rakesh Maria days after the blasts on July 26, 2008, after it came to light that the cars suspected to have been used in the attack had been stolen from Navi Mumbai.

According to sources in Mumbai Police, Chavan apprehended two men who had stolen the vehicles within a month. The two told Chavan they stole the cars on instructions from a man identified as Afzal Usmani, sources said. Chavan nabbed Usmani from UP’s Mau district on August 24 that year.

“Until then, for all practical purposes, we were groping the dark... If it was not for that reaching the logical conclusion. Most big cases are actually solved through small breakthroughs.”

former IB official, who held a senior position at the time and later tracked the new outfit before retiring from service.

In Ahmedabad, 22 blasts took place within 70 minutes at various locations, with explosives placed in buses, on parked bicycles and in cars, killing 56 people. It was the third city to be targeted in this manner that year, after Bengaluru just a day earlier and Jaipur in May.

“In fact, in the four years before the Ahmedabad blasts, when a series of blasts were taking place in different parts of the country, we were chasing Pakistan-backed operative Shahid Bilal. Until then, we believed that IM was just another name for LeT (Lashkar-e-Toiba), and that Bilal had perpetrated the blasts. This was the information that even R&AW had at that time. But we learnt later that Bilal had already died in Pakistan by then,” the retired official said.

When contacted by *The Indian Express*, Chavan said: “I am very happy that the effort we put in has eventually resulted in the case reaching the logical conclusion. Most big cases are actually solved through small breakthroughs.”

STATE BANK OF INDIA
Promises & Estate Dept., Local Head Office,
2nd Floor, III/1, Pt. J.N. Marg, Bhubaneswar-751001,
Ph. No.: 0674-2394637, Email: agm.pre.lhobhu@sbi.co.in

TENDER NOTICE FOR SUPPLY, INSTALLATION, TESTING AND COMMISSIONING OF ON-GRID ROOFTOP SOLAR POWER SYSTEM WITH NET METERING UNDER BHUBANESWAR CIRCLE.

SBI Bhubaneswar Circle invites tenders from interested/eligible solar vendors for the above work. The eligible/interested vendors may visit Bank's website <https://bank.sbi/web/sbi-in-the-news> under "procurement news" for further details to download the tender documents from **21.02.2022, to 14.03.2022**. The last date of submission of **tender is 14.03.2022 up to 4:00 PM**. Further notice/clarifications in this regard will be posted only on the Bank's above mentioned website. Bank reserves its rights to accept and reject any/all tender without assigning any reasons therefor.

Date: 21.02.2022
Place: Bhubaneswar

Sd/-
Asst. General Manager (P&E)

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH
O/o the Chief Engineer, Hydrology
Water Resources Department
e-Procurement Tender Notice
Online Tenders are invited through e-procurement portal for the following works

NIT No.NHP/AFSPW/SCAGW/6/2021-22.
Name of work : Supply, Installation, Testing, Commissioning, Training, Operation and Maintenance of SCADA System (Automation of Gate operations) for Srisaikal Right Bank Canal (SRBC), Kanneli Kadapa Canal (KC Canal) and Telugu Ganga Canal systems in Andhra Pradesh under National Hydrology Project (NHP).
PO&Package No.: 110208 and NHP-2021-2022-4FSPW 157201. Start/Last Date/Time of Tender document schedules available From 21/02/2022, 11.00 Hrs to 23/03/2022, 13.00 Hrs. Interested/authorized/reputed Bidders may obtain the tender schedule from <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app>. For Further details visit: http://nhp.mwr.gov.in/home/Tender_Details.aspx and <http://irrigationap.cgg.gov.in/word/getTenderDigest>. Contact: 8331819653. Email: andhrasw@ap.gov.in

Sd/- TVNAR Kumar, 16/2/2022, Chief Engineer, Hydrology, Vijayawada
DIPR No.690PP/CJ/ABVS/1/1/2021-22. Dt:18/02/2022

NORTH CENTRAL RAILWAY, PRAYAGRAJ

L.No.-C132/PUBLICITY/RD/NIT/22 OPEN TENDER Date:17.02.2022

On behalf of The President of India, Divisional Railway Manager (Commercial) North Central Railway,Jhansi invites open tenders for allotment of licenses of Advertising through digital media rights inside Jhansi Railway stations (i.e. FOB, concourse hall, Platform area excluding circulating Area) of Jhansi division under Single packet system as per following details:-

Tender No.	Name of work	Minimum reserved L/Fee of contract for first year (In Rs.) Exl. GST	Total Advertise area (sq.mt.)	Earnest Money (In Rs.)
215-RDN-VGLB-21	Contract for advertising Rights through Digital Media inside Virangana Laxmibai Railway Station (i.e. FOB, concourse hall, Platform Area excluding circulating Area) of Jhansi Div.	₹ 1700136.00	28.40	₹ 180600.00
216-RDN-GWL-21	Contract for advertising Rights through Digital Media inside Gwalior Railway Station (i.e. FOB, concourse hall, Platform Area excluding circulating Area) of Jhansi Div.	₹ 1605018.00	26.84	₹ 170500.00

All Tenders Period of Contract-05 years, All tenders cost of tender form (In Rs.) Inc. GST-₹5900.00, All Tenders closing date and time-21.03.2022 At 15:00 hrs. On line tenders will only be accepted. Manual/Postal/e-mail, FAX by hand tenders will not be accepted. Bidders are advised to obtain class III digital signature certificate with company name & register the same with www.ireps.gov.in. Tender document cost & Earnest money can be paid only through online e-payment gateway as provided in www.ireps.gov.in. For further details please visit the website www.ireps.gov.in. 18/02/2022 V

North Central Railways www.ncr.indianrailways.gov.in@CPRONCR

NORTH CENTRAL RAILWAY, PRAYAGRAJ

Tender Notice No.: T_21-22_AB_ICF_NOTICE Date : 18.02.2022

E-TENDER NOTICE

Chief Workshop Manager, Coach MLR Workshop, Jhansi for and on behalf of the President of India invites open e-tender from reputed contractors for following work:-

Tender No.	T_21-22_AB_ICF
Description of work	Re-fitment of Bogie mounted Air Brake system during POH, Stripping, Dropping, Cleaning, overhauling & repairing of Draft gear arrangement of CBC, Screw Coupling and draft gear during POH of BG Coaches as per given schedule at CMLR Workshop Jhansi
Qty.	One work
Tender cost	Rs. 56,78,210.00 (Rs. Fifty six lakhs seventy eight thousand two hundred ten only)
Completion period	24 months
Earnest money	Rs. 1,13,600/-
Tender doc. cost	Rs. 0/-

1. Tender will be closed at 15:00 Hrs on 21.03.2022 and is available on Indian Railway E-Tendering website www.ireps.gov.in. 2. For detailed information please visit Indian Railway E-Tendering website www.ireps.gov.in. 3. Tenderers should watch the website for the corrigendum/addendum to the NIT/e-tender document, if any as there will not be any separate communication for the same. 19/2/22 (SP)

North central railways www.ncr.indianrailways.gov.in@CPRONCR

7 escape from juvenile home Khandwa (MP): Seven inmates, out of the total eight undertrials lodged in a juvenile home in Madhya Pradesh's Khandwa city escaped by breaking the wall of a toilet and jumping over the compound wall on Sunday, police said. PTI

Classifieds

PERSONAL

NAME CHANGE

I, Mirza Iftikhar Hussain S/o Ahmad Hussain R/o E-231 Shaheen Bagh, Jamia Nagar, Delhi-110025 have changed my name to Mohd Iftikhar Hussain for all future purposes. 0050192531-1

I Navye Madan S/O, Nitin Madan R/o House No 4 Road No 60 West Punjabi Bagh New Delhi-110026 have changed my name to Navhye Madan for all purposes. 0040603662-1

I, Sumitra W/O Fateh Singh R/O of U45,UG Floor, Gautam Colony, Narela, Delhi have changed my name from Sumitra to Sumitira Devi vide affidavit dated 18.2.22 at Narela, Delhi 0050192475-1

I, Arvind Kumar Pandey S/o Sh. Tej Narain Pandey R/o U/78, Plot No.15/16, DLF-3, Gurugram, Haryana, Have change my name to Arvind Pandey for all purposes . 0040603618-1

LOST & FOUND

I, Smt Usha Sehgal D/o Chiranjiv Lal Datta, R/o H.NO.32 Deshbandhu Apartment, Kalkaji, South Delhi-110019 have lost Original Allotment Letter and Original Lease Deed of my Flat 32 Deshbandhu Apartment, Kalkaji, South Delhi-110019 vide LR No: 143495/2022. If anyone finds it kindly return at the above address. 0040603602-1

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is for general information that I, KUNJUMOL RAJAN W/o RAJAN THOMAS residing at 14-B, D.D. Flats, Boulevard Road, Opposite to St. Stephens Hospital, Tis Hazari, Delhi 110054 declare that name of mine is wrongly written as KUNJUMOL RAJAN THOMAS in my previous passport E4073809 and current passport K9504031. The actual name of mine is KUNJUMOL RAJAN, which may be amended accordingly. It is certified that I have complied with other legal requirements in this connection.

Vide Affidavit No: IN-DL92637341953982U

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RAJASTHAN'S KOTA DISTRICT

Groom among 9 killed in accident on wedding day

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
JAIPUR, FEBRUARY 20

NINE PEOPLE, including a 23-year-old groom, died after their car fell into a river in Rajasthan's Kota district while they were on their way to the wedding venue in Madhya Pradesh on Sunday.

According to the police, the incident took place early on Sunday morning as the group was heading towards Ujjain, where the wedding ceremony was to be held in the evening.

"The wedding party was coming from Chauth ka Barwara in Sawai Madhopur and it was heading towards Ujjain. Nine people



Heading towards Ujjain, the car fell into Chambal river in Rajasthan's Kota. ANI/Twitter

were in the car. There is an old bridge over the Chambal river in Nayapura area of Kota. It appears that the driver lost control of the

car and it fell into the river while crossing the bridge," Kota City SP Keshar Singh Shekhawat said.

The groom was identified as Avinash Maliya from Sawai Madhopur district. His younger brother Sachin said Avinash got engaged late last year and the family was excited about the wedding. "Today, after the accident, the bride broke down when I told her that my brother has passed away," he said.

Sachin was travelling in another bus that had left for Ujjain a little ahead of the car in which Avinash was travelling. The victims' bodies were retrieved after the vehicle was seen floating in the river.

FACT
THE FERTILISERS AND CHEMICALS TRAVANCORE LIMITED
(A Government of India Enterprise) Regd. Office: Floor Corporate Materials, FACT-PD Administrative Building, Udyogamandal Kochi, Kerala - 683 501, India. Tel: 0484-2568674 / 2568123
E-mail: anand.s@factcd.com / jayakumar@factcd.com, website: <http://www.fact.co.in>

NOTICE INVITING e-TENDER

Online competitive two bid tender is invited for the following works through www.eprocure.gov.in
Construction of 2 nos. Caustic Effluent storage tanks (2x1000 m3) and associated facilities at Petrochemical Plants-FACT Udyogamandal Complex.
Tender No:03102/2021-2022/E24935, e-tender ID:2022_FACT_674628_1
Last date & time for submission of bids: 22.03.2022 at 11.00 hrs.
The complete bidding process will be online (e-tendering) only. All the notifications, Time extension, Corrigendum, Addendum etc. if any, regarding this tenders hereafter will be hosted in the CPP and FACT website only and will not be published in newspapers.

DIPR/687/Tender/2022

SuperIntending Engineer (H),
NABARD and Rural Roads Circle, Trichy.

GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU
HIGHWAYS DEPARTMENT
Trichy (H) NABARD and Rural Road, Circle
TENDER NOTICE

Tender Notice No.20/2021-22/SDO/Dated: 17.02.2022

For and on behalf of the Governor of Tamil Nadu, **Percentage tender (Two Cover System)** will be received by the Superintending Engineer (H) NABARD & Rural Roads Circle Trichy for Upgradation of Panchayat / Panchayat Union Roads (**Seven Road Works**) in respect of **Trichy, Thanjavur and Pudukkottai** (H) NABARD & Rural Roads Divisions upto **14.00 hours on 28.03.2022** through online only.

Details of works, approximate value of work, EMD, availability of tender documents and all other details are available from **04.03.2022** onwards in the Government website <http://tntenders.gov.in>. If any Changes/Corrections in the tender, it will be published in the above website only.

DIPR/687/Tender/2022

SuperIntending Engineer (H),
NABARD and Rural Roads Circle, Trichy.

Karnataka Cooperative Milk Producers' Federation Limited

KMF Complex: Dr. M. H. Marigowda Road, DRC Post, Bangalore-560 029.
Tel: 080-25536625 / 25536789 fax: 080-25536105.

IFTNo.KMF/ENGG/CFP-Dharwad/01403/2021-22 Date: 18.02.2022

TENDER NOTIFICATION
[TWO COVER SYSTEM] [THROUGH E-PROCUREMENT PORTAL ONLY]

Karnataka Milk Federation Ltd; Bangalore invites tender from the eligible suppliers / manufacturers / reputed eligible firms through E-procurement for the work mentioned in the table below. The interested and reputed suppliers / manufacturers / firms who have handled similar kind of works may participate in the tender as indicated below, by logging on to website gov.in and also contact Help desk E-mail; hphelpdesk.blr@intarvo.com and helpline no. 080-25501227/25501216.

SI No.	Name of the work	Qty	EMD (Rs)	Period of completion
1	Design, Supply, Installation, Testing & Commissioning of 35-40 TPH Capacity raw material Chain Conveyor (02 Nos) & 35-40 TPH Capacity Elevators (02 Nos) with accessories for Cattle Feed Plant at Dharwad.	1 JOB	1,66,560/-	06 months

1. Tender schedules may be downloaded from dated: 21.02.2022 to 11.03.2022 up to 4.00 PM.
2. Last date for Tender submission date 11.03.2022 up to 4.00 PM.
3. Tender [Part 1] to be opened on date: 14.03.2022 at 11.30 AM.

Hence forth changes / modification in the tender, It will be uploaded on e-procurement portal only.

For Karnataka Co-Opp. Milk Federation Ltd.,

Sd/-

Director [Engineering]

Sources said Chavan's catch, Usmani, revealed during interrogation the names of other IM operatives, such as Riyaz Bhatkal, Sadiq Sheikh and Arif Badr. Once taken into custody by IB, sources said, he also gave information on a group of IM terrorists holed up in Delhi. "This led to the Batla House encounter in which IM operative Atif Amin and Delhi Police officer Mohan Chand Sharma were killed," sources said.

"At first, Mumbai Police did not give Usmani to us. But when they were warned that there could be consequences as it was a matter of national security, they relented. When Usmani was being brought to Delhi, he gave us a number that was traced to Batla House," the former IB official said.

After the first breakthrough, central agencies found that IM had been executing terror attacks since the early 2000s, and that their first major attack was the 2005 Sarojini Nagar blasts in Delhi. After the 2007 Varanasi blasts, the group started sending emails identifying themselves as IM. This was followed by the blasts in Jaipur and Ahmedabad.

"The intelligence set-up was so obsessed with Bilal and LeT at the time that even the Sarojini Nagar blasts were thought to be the handiwork of his network. Later, following the 2006 Mumbai train bombings, a set of LeT suspects was rounded up... Only after the IM operative was caught by Mumbai Police that it was revealed even those blasts were executed by them," another IB official said.

Tripura set to get direct flights to Dhaka, Chittagong under UDAN

DEBRAJ DEB
AGARTALA, FEBRUARY 20

TRIPURA IS set to get international flight services connecting it with Bangladeshi cities Dhaka and Chittagong, with the Ministry of Civil Aviation giving its nod to the routes under the Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik (UDAN) scheme, a regional airport development programme of the Central government.

"Finally, MBB (Maharaja Bir Bikram) Airport in Agartala is now set to have international flight service with Dhaka and Chittagong. My heartfelt thanks to Hon'ble PM Shri @narendramodi (Narendra Modi) ji and Civil Aviation Minister Shri @JM_Scindia (Jyotiraditya Scindia) ji for this initiative to fulfil the dream of the people of Tripura," Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb said in a post on Twitter on Saturday.

Apart from these two, Guwahati-Bangkok, Guwahati-Dhaka, Guwahati-Kathmandu, Guwahati-Yangon, Guwahati-Hanoi, Imphal-Mandalay, Imphal-Bangkok, Imphal-Kunming, Bhubaneswar-Bangkok, Bhubaneswar-Abu Dhabi and Bhubaneswar-Singapore are some of the other routes proposed from various eastern and north-eastern airports in India under the UDAN scheme.

Karnataka: Trekker falls into 200-ft gorge, rescued

Chikkaballapura (Karnataka): A 19-year-old trekker who fell at least 200 feet into a gorge at Nandi Hill, about 60 km from Bengaluru, was on Sunday rescued by the Indian Air Force and the national and State disaster response forces, a police said.

The victim from Delhi studying in an engineering college in Bengaluru fell into the gorge and got trapped, Chikkaballapura SP, G K Mithun Kumar told PTI. "Nishank had come alone for trekking and fell into the gorge. After slipping, he fortunately got stuck," he said. He said the youth messaged the police control room and shared his location. Soon, a police team, along with the SDRF and NDRF, went to the rescue but none could help. "Then, we contacted the IAF which rushed to the rescue." PTI

Row after Rajasthan Governor halts university meetings

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
JAIPUR, FEBRUARY 20

THE RAJASTHAN governor's order to halt two management meetings of a journalism institute has

set off a political controversy, with university officials alleging interference by the Raj Bhavan and the Opposition BJP warning against the institute becoming the "JNU of Jaipur". Vice-Chancellor of the Haridev Joshi University

of Journalism and Mass Communication, Om Thanvi, said Governor Kalraj Mishra's move to halt scheduled meetings of the institute's Board of Management (BoM) and the advisory committee was "arbitrary". Others aligned to the Ashok Gehlot-led government in Congress echoed his views. BJP leaders, however, opposed the meetings saying, that the procedure was not being followed and the institute risked turning into Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) with the presence of "tukde tukde gang".

Over the last few years, JNU has been at the centre of protests against the central government over several issues.

On February 18, Raj Bhavan cited a circular by the state's Higher Education Department, saying that meetings in universities should not be held during the ongoing Assembly Session as some MLAs were members of the BoM.

The order, signed by principal secretary to Governor Subir Kumar, also cited a letter of opposition by BJP MLA Dhammarayan Joshi, who has demanded that no policy decisions should be taken in the meetings as only a few weeks were left in the V-C's tenure. Thanvi's tenure as V-C ends on March 8.

The BoM meeting was scheduled for February 21, and the advisory committee meeting on February 25.

"Many violations of procedure

and rules are being committed at the Haridev Joshi University of Journalism and Mass Communication. If this goes on, then the university will become Jaipur's JNU with the presence of the tukde tukde gang. That is why I had written a letter to the Governor so that the VC doesn't take any such policy decisions towards the end of his tenure," Joshi said on Sunday. Later, Joshi alleged on Twitter that Thanvi, at the BoM meeting, wanted the recommendation to extend his tenure and secure access to SUVs for his own private use.

V-C Thanvi dismissed the BJP leader's accusations and said it will be "our good fortune" if HJU can match up to the "reputation of the JNU in academics"... "(The term) Tukde-tukde gang is just used to defame JNU," he said.

On the claim that Thanvi wanted to extend his tenure, he said: "How can I demand such unrealistic things...? The V-C termed the cancellation of the meetings by the Governor as 'arbitrary'."

Independent MLA Sirohi Sanyam Lodha – who backs the Congress government and is a member of the university's BoM -- said in a series of tweets on Saturday: "The workings of the university should go on unhindered. It is not constitutional if the Raj Bhawan hinders it."

When asked about the criticism, the Governor's office on Sunday reiterated its stand.

Kerala: Family of 4 found dead at home, suicide suspected

Thiruvananthapuram: Four members of a family were found dead at their house in Kodungallur of Thrissur district on Sunday.

The police have recovered a suicide note from the spot that said they were ending life due to financial liability.

The deceased have been identified as Ashique, 41, an engineer, his wife Abheera, 34, and their two minor children. The doors and

windows of the house were found to be sealed. The police said prima facie they seemed to have inhaled some toxic gas to end life.

Local municipal councillor TK Geetha said the family had limited social contacts in the region. "They were well off, but we don't know about their financial liability. Ashique, who had been working from home for the past several years for a US firm, had rarely contacted local residents." ENS



@ieExplained

#ExpressExplained

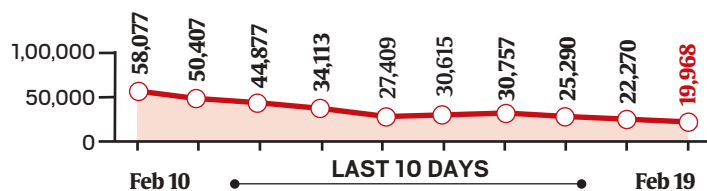
If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

TRACKING INDIA'S COVID CURVE

DASHBOARD, AS ON FEB 19

719 DAYS SINCE PANDEMIC BEGAN	New cases 19,968	Active cases 2,24,187	Deaths 673
Weekly CFR: 0.30% Overall CFR: 1.21% Total deaths: 5,11,903			

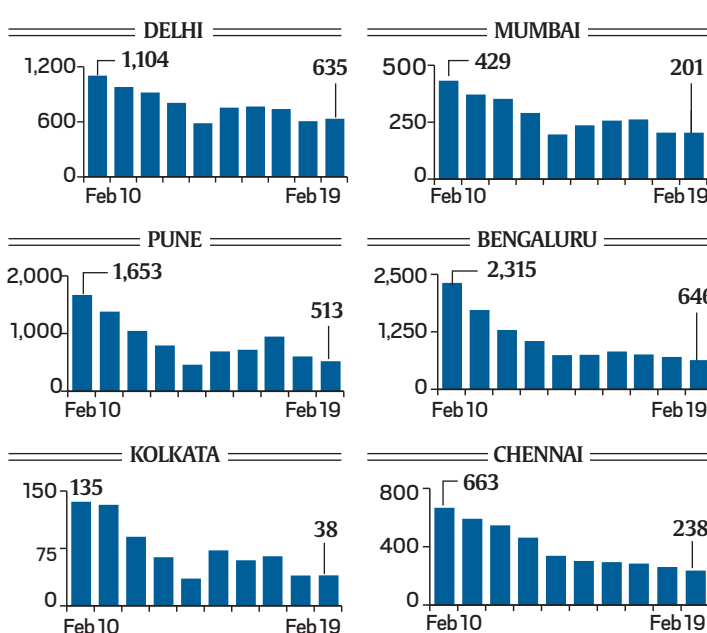
NEW CASES, DAILY



SURGE IN THE STATES

State	ON FEBRUARY 16			Weekly positivity
	New cases	Active cases	Deaths	
Kerala	6,757	75,813	524	14.71%
Maharashtra	1,635	18,368	32	2.12%
Mizoram	1,326	10,071	1	28.50%
Karnataka	1,137	13,468	20	1.89%
Rajasthan	1,075	10,967	9	4.21%

CASES IN THE CITIES, LAST 10 DAYS



TOTAL TESTS

75,93,15,246

TESTS ON FEB 19

11,87,766

WEEKLY POSITIVITY

2.23%

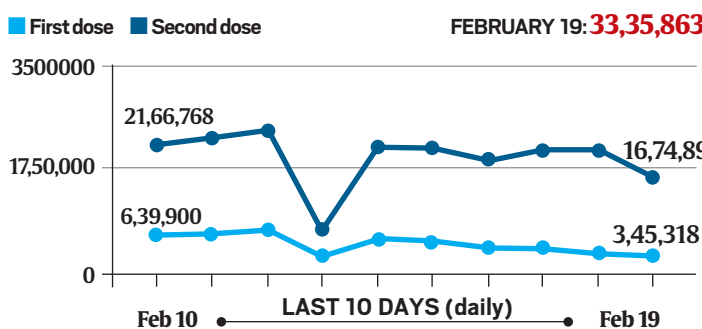
OVERALL POSITIVITY

5.64%

INDIA TOTAL DOSES

175,37,22,697

(Adults 1st dose: **90,73,33,421**; 2nd: **75,22,60,637**; 15-18 age group 1st dose: **5,36,25,069**; 2nd: **2,15,57,154**; precautionary: **1,89,46,416**)



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EXPLAINED GLOBAL

China's revisionism on 1962

Amid the Galwan standoff, the Chinese have claimed their 1962 aggression was a 'counter attack'. This is not borne out by facts or logic — but the opportunities India lost to settle the border issue are well documented.



EXPERT EXPLAINS

A S BHASIN

From The Indian Express panel of specialists, exclusive insight

THE CHINESE website Guancha has published an 8,000-word revised history of the 1962 War after six decades to justify the propaganda line of "Never Attack; Never Invade Another Country", and to present China as a peace-loving nation. The story, written by Zhang Xiaokang, daughter of the former military commander in Tibet General Zhang Gouhua, comes in the wake of the conflict in the western sector in the Galwan valley.

In recent years, China has evoked strong reactions from major countries for its claims on superpower status through the aggressive use of economic and military sinews — with the UK on Hong Kong, with Australia on trade, with Japan over the ownership of the Senkaku Islands in the East China sea, with the US on its projection of military power, and with Southeast Asian countries over control of the South China Sea despite the verdict of the world court under the UNCLOS agreement. The recent attempts by China to stir up trouble on the India-China border in the Galwan river valley has added to the worries of not only India but the international community generally.

History on its head

One can understand Madam Zhang's desire to glorify her father, but to portray the 1962 War as a "self-defence counter attack" is a poor attempt to make history stand on its head.

There is a contradiction in her story. A "counter attack" does not allow the attacked country the luxury of elaborate planning over a long period, as she herself points out quoting Mao:

"Over the years we have taken many measures to seek a peaceful solution to the Sino-Indian border problem, but India has refused to do so and deliberately provoked an armed conflict which has become more and more intense. Since Nehru must fight, we have no choice but to go along with it."

She recalls that Mao had called a meeting of his political and military brass and asked them, "perhaps if we counterattack, the border can be settled and a peaceful resolution of the border issue can be achieved?", and Gen



Indian troops near Pangong lake in Ladakh during the 1962 war with China. Express Archive

Zhang Guohua had assured him, "yes we can, please rest assured, Chairman, we can definitely win".

Facing an attack, the attacked party counterattacks with whatever force is available, win or lose. It cannot wait for a leisurely meeting to be called by the head of the government and plan for a counterattack after getting an assurance of victory.

In this context, a 2019 article by Chaowu Dai, distinguished professor at Yunnan University and director of the YNU Institute for Indian Studies in Kunming, China, is more honest. He has little hesitation in admitting that from 1960 to October 1962, judging that India was unwilling to negotiate a solution, China "made preparations for deployment of its military", creating interlocking positions "for long-term armed coexistence on the border issue ultimately proceeding to the border conflict". ("China's Strategy for Sino-Indian Boundary Disputes, 1950-1962", Asian Perspective, Johns Hopkins University Press) This statement is nearest to the truth.

Analysing the circumstances, one has to see if India was actually prepared for an attack.

On September 8, 1962, Nehru left for London to attend the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference. He returned on October 2, after visiting Paris, Lagos and Accra, and then left for Colombo on October 12, returning to New Delhi on October 16. Defence Minister V K Krishna Menon was in New York from September 17-30 for the UNGA session. On October 2, the Chief of General Staff, Lt Gen B M Kaul, was holidaying in Kashmir.

No country that is preparing for an attack

would allow its Prime Minister or senior generals responsible for war planning to be away from its capital.

Nehru's mistakes

The culprit was an avoidable statement of the Prime Minister to journalists on October 12 while leaving for Colombo that "he had instructed the Army to clear the Indian territory of Chinese intrusions and the date had been left to the army to decide".

He was perhaps referring to a decision

taken in the Defence Ministry to clear the recent intrusion in the Kemong Division of NEFA, a limited action. People's Daily, the Chinese communist party mouthpiece, taking advantage of Nehru's remarks, said on October 14, "so it seems Nehru had made up his mind to attack China on an even bigger scale".

The above unfortunate statement of Nehru has been used by Madam Zhang to fabricate the theory of "self-defence counter attack". While we can fault the Chinese for this fabrication, India cannot escape blame for not being serious in settling the border question, despite repeated Chinese pleas. Whatever the Indian stand, it had certain fissures that do not stand scrutiny.

Prime Minister Nehru, in explaining his reluctance to discuss the border question, had said in Rajya Sabha on December 8, 1959, that since we're "sure of our borders the question was why invite discussions about a thing on which we had no doubt".

Even this statement had problems. The western border, which created the major dispute, was "undefined" in the Survey of India maps that India inherited in 1947, and which

were later reprinted. Similarly, Nehru was not unaware that China in the past had never accepted the McMahon Line in the eastern sector, the outcome of the Simla Convention of 1914, and it was unlikely to accept it — and yet insisted this was non-negotiable.

Opportunities lost

In 1954, at the time of talks on Tibet, India had taken the stand that the border question would not be discussed. An opportunity to settle the border was allowed to slip. After the Tibet Agreement was signed on April 29, 1954, Nehru ordered in July that a line should be drawn to demarcate the Ladakh-Aksai Chin border, which would not be open for discussion — ignoring that this was an international border, and required consultations and agreement of the other stakeholder.

Having changed the status of the border unilaterally, he created a vacuum by not establishing a check post, or even unfurling a flag.

The area was neglected to the extent that India was unaware that China had constructed a 120-km highway through it. In his letter of January 23, 1959, the Chinese Premier had suggested talks since, as he said, historically no agreement on the boundary had ever been concluded, and the absence of formal delimitation created discrepancies which often led to "minor border incidents which are probably difficult to avoid".

On March 22, Nehru noted that the sector from the trijunction of the Nepal, India, and Tibet boundary up to Ladakh (Ladakh-Aksai Chin sector) was traditional and known by custom, usage, by the application of the principle of watershed and old revenue records and maps, etc. These facts are important inputs when negotiating an agreement, but by themselves could not constitute an agreement.

Despite suffering from doubts, Nehru insisted in Rajya Sabha on December 9, 1959 that India should hold its position, hoping that "lapse of time and events would confirm it, and by the time challenge came, we would be in a much stronger position to face it". There was an opportunity to clear the doubts at the summit talks in April 1960, but that too was allowed to slip because India insisted on China accepting its maximalist position — not realising that in a dispute, both sides have to make compromises to come to a settlement.

Even after the 1960 talks, China tried to bring India to the negotiable table many times, but Nehru's rigidity did not help. Yet he did accept in Parliament the undemarcated status of the border.

China continued to insist on the need for a well-defined demarcation of borders on scientific lines. Unfortunately, India remained in denial. The result was 1962.

Bicycles in bombings: A short history

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 20

DURING AN election speech in UP on Sunday, PM Narendra Modi appeared to suggest a connection between the 2008 Ahmedabad blasts and the Samajwadi Party (SP), wondering why the terrorists had chosen to plant bombs on bicycles, which is the SP's election symbol.

The Election Commission allotted the bicycle symbol to the SP after Mulayam Singh Yadav split from the Janata Dal to form his own party in October 1992. Under the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968, the EC is empowered to recognise political parties and to allot them symbols.

From 2006 to 2013

Bicycles were first used as carriers of

bombs in the 2006 Malegaon blasts, in which a Hindutva group led by former RSS pracharak Sunil Joshi was accused of targeting the Muslim-dominated town in Maharashtra. According to the National Investigation Agency's (NIA) chargesheet, the perpetrators strapped two bombs on bicycles and placed them in the town on September 8, 2006.

On November 23, 2007, a series of blasts occurred between 1 pm and 1.30 pm near courts in Varanasi, Lucknow, and Faizabad. The five bombs in these blasts that killed 15 people, were strapped to bicycles. Investigators later claimed the the Indian Mujahideen (IM) was behind the attacks.

Earlier that year, on May 22, 2007, three bombs kept on bicycles had gone off in Gorakhpur, injuring three persons. In December 2020, a local court convicted alleged

Hujl operative Mohammad Tariq Qasmi and sentenced him to life in prison for the attacks.

On May 13, 2008, nine bombs strapped to bicycles went off at eight locations in Jaipur, killing 71 people. This was the first blast where the IM took responsibility by sending emails to various media houses.

On July 26, 2008, 22 bombs killed 56 people in Ahmedabad. Several of these bombs were found to have been fitted on bicycles. The IM claimed responsibility, and its alleged members were sentenced to death by a trial court on Friday.

On August 1, 2012, bicycles were used as bomb carriers in Pune. One person was injured in the four low-intensity blasts, and suspected IM operatives were arrested.

Less than a year later, the IM used two cycles to plant bombs at Hyderabad's Dilsukhnagar market on February 21, 2013.

Eighteen people were killed.

Around the world

Terrorist groups have long used bicycles to plant bombs. They are easy and cheap to procure anywhere in the world, and increase the impact of the blast by adding jagged metal splinters to the shrapnel from the explosion.

The first recorded case of a bicycle bomb goes back to 1939, when the Irish Republican Army left a bomb in the basket of a bicycle that exploded, killing five people in Coventry in the United Kingdom.

Thereafter, bicycle bombs were used in the 1970s, 1980s and the 1990s in the UK, and Germany, and throughout the 21st century in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Iraq, Russia and Spain, among other countries.

(WITH MANISH SAHU & ANISHA DUTTA)

Presidential Fleet Review: what Navy displays, and why it is significant

KRISHN KAUSHIK

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 20

ON MONDAY, President Ram Nath Kovind will take part in the Indian Navy's 12th Presidential Fleet Review.

What is the President's Fleet Review?

In simplest terms, it is the country's President taking stock of the Navy's capability. It showcases all types of ships and capabilities the Navy has. It takes place once under every President, who is the supreme commander of the armed forces.

The President is taken on one of the Naval ships, which is called the President's Yacht, to look at all the ships docked at one of the Naval ports. According to a statement by the Navy, the President's Yacht this year "is an indigenously built Naval Offshore Patrol Vessel, INS Sumitra, which will lead the Presidential Column. The yacht will be distinguished by the Ashoka Emblem on her side and will fly the President's Standard

on the Mast".

The President will be given a 21-gun salute before embarking on the yacht.

Do all naval ships participate?

No. The idea is to showcase not all the Navy's ships, but every type of ship — and the kind of capabilities it has at that time. In Monday's fleet review, which will take place in Vishakhapatnam, Kovind will review over 60 ships and submarines, and 55 aircraft, from the Navy and the Coast Guard.

His yacht will sail past 44 ships lined up at anchorage off Visakhapatnam, and there will be a combination of ships from the Indian Navy as well as the Coast Guard, along with some vessels from the Shipping Corporation of India and the Ministry of Earth Sciences.

The President's Fleet Review also includes merchant ships.

What else happens in the fleet review?

"In this most formal of naval ceremonies, each ship dressed in full regalia will



Vessels at sea during the President's Fleet Review of 2016. Indian Navy

salute the President as he passes. The President will also be reviewing the Indian Naval Air Arm in a display of spectacular fly-past by several helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft. In the final stage of the review, a mobile column of warships and submarines will steam past the Presidential Yacht." The Navy said.

The vessels will include the Navy's latest acquisitions, and the events will include water-front activities such as Parade of Sails, Search and Rescue Demonstration at Sea,

Aerobatics by Hawk aircraft, and Water Para Jumps by the elite Marine Commandos.

All ships at anchorage will be dressed ceremoniously with various naval flags in full regalia. The ships have been illuminated from sunset to midnight on February 19 and 20.

As part of the Sail Parade activities, six ocean-going Indian Naval Sailing Vessels arrived at Visakhapatnam from Goa. These are part of Ocean Sailing Node at INS Mandovi at Goa.

How many of these reviews have been held so far?

There have been 11 President's Fleet Reviews since Independence. The first was conducted in 1953, under Dr Rajendra Prasad. The next one was done not by the President but by the then Defence Minister, Y B Chavan, in 1964. Since then, it has been the President reviewing the fleet.

The longest gap between reviews was of 12 years — between 1989 (President R Venkatraman) and 2001 (President K R Narayanan). The last one was done in 2016, under President Pranab Mukherjee.

The reviews in 2001 and 2016 were International Fleet Reviews, in which some vessels from other countries also participated. The Indian Navy too has participated in international fleet reviews in other countries, including Australia, America, Malaysia, Indonesia, South Korea, and the UK.

In 1953, 25 warships, seven yard craft and one merchant ship had participated. In 1964, the number rose to 31 warships, nine merchant ships and 12 yard craft. Two years

later, under President S Radhakrishnan, India's first aircraft carrier *INS Vikrant* was part of the review.

What is its significance?

It is one of the most important events for the Navy, which is essentially showing its allegiance and commitment to defending the country. It is a long-standing tradition followed by navies across the world, and according to Navy officials it is a strong bond that links seafarers of the world.

"Historically, a Fleet Review is an assembly of ships at a pre-designated place for the purpose of displaying loyalty and allegiance to the Sovereign and the state. In turn, the Sovereign, by reviewing the ships, reaffirms his faith in the fleet and its ability to defend the nation's maritime interest," a senior Navy official said.

The official said the review "was perhaps conceived as a show of naval might. Though it still has the same connotation, assembling of warships without any belligerent intentions is now the norm in modern times".

12

IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

NAUSHAD FORBES, CO-CHAIRMAN, FORBES MARSHALL

“The first step for recovery is to create more jobs and put enough money into people’s hands”

Industry leader and author Naushad Forbes analyses the Budget, argues for more Government spending in the social sector, zero-tariff trade and explains why corporates don’t speak up as much as they should. The session was moderated by National Business Editor ANIL SASI

Shyamal Majumdar: Just before the Budget, you had said that it must deliver on economic inclusion, incentivise job creation and increase investment in education and skilling. Has it lived up to your expectations?

It has done a reasonable job of ensuring job creation by increasing spends on public infrastructure by over 30 per cent. It also incentivises States to spend on infrastructure by providing loan guarantees on borrowings from the Centre. My expectation on investment in health and education was low and predictably nothing much happened there. The education budget did go up by around 12 per cent but I’m yet to figure out exactly where the increases are reflected. In fact, the percentage of the GDP that is being spent for health and education is lesser if you factor in the cess that has been introduced in recent years. So, when it comes to education and health, the cess has replaced spending in the regular Budget. This has happened in the previous as well as the present government. That’s unfortunate because we need to incrementally grow our spending on these two vital ways of including people in our growth story.

I agree there are limits to what the Union Budget can do because health and education are State subjects. But several Central schemes can always incentivise States to do the right thing. I hope that next month we will see something systematically coming through to incentivise States to take the right steps for education in particular. The New Education Policy (NEP) is a sensible document, it has many of the right ‘whats’. I’m more concerned about the ‘how’: how will we actually implement the new education policy when it comes to schooling and higher education? I think it needs a lot more attention from both the Union and State Governments.

Shyamal Majumdar: The recent SEBI decision, making the separation of roles between chairman and MD at listed companies voluntary instead of mandatory, came almost two years after the Uday Kotak Committee’s recommendation for a strict split in roles. Do you think corporate India’s decision to lobby against it was correct?

First, do we need such guidelines in terms of governance, separation of powers, oversight and so on? Second, the regulator should have decided earlier on the guidelines. Otherwise, you have the classic moral hazard where the regulator has no choice but to relent simply because nobody follows the recommendations in the first place. There is a weakening of both regulatory standards and power. But the bigger point that I’d like to make is on these guidelines themselves. To give you an example, the commitment of two per cent of company revenue for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) began as a voluntary guideline. If a company did not spend that amount, it needed to explain why in its annual report. There was moral pressure on companies and you could see them falling in line. Two years ago, we made non-compliance a criminal offence and it had to be withdrawn too. To me, guidelines are a way of ensuring good behaviour. Otherwise, we try to be very prescriptive. I’m much more in favour of actually saying what’s the spirit behind the regulation and hold companies accountable for not adhering to it rather than checking a box.

Anil Sasi: The Budget seems to be making this almost impassioned plea to the industry to invest in the capex programme. The Centre has done the heavy lifting in terms of spending for the last four years. Industry is yet to come on board. Do you see something changing this year?

At the end of the day, new capital stock will get created when the capacity is close to being exhausted. At what level does exhaustion kick in? My sense is that it kicks in somewhere between 70 and 80 per cent capacity utilisation. If animal spirits are high, then it’s closer to 70 per cent. If animal spirits are low, then closer to 80 per cent. But if you look at total capacity utilisation, you know that consumption will be back to 97 per cent of what it was two years ago. So, if it’s still only at 97 per cent, you don’t need more capacity. That’s the fundamental problem. That’s why the first step is to create more jobs and put enough money into people’s hands so that they can spend. I hope the service sector bounces back, urban trades power the en-



WHY
NAUSHAD
FORBES

Industry leader Naushad Forbes has laid a practical roadmap for India to crest its economic potential in his new book, *The Struggle And The Promise: Restoring India’s Potential*. He argues for striking the right balance between industry, institutions and policy

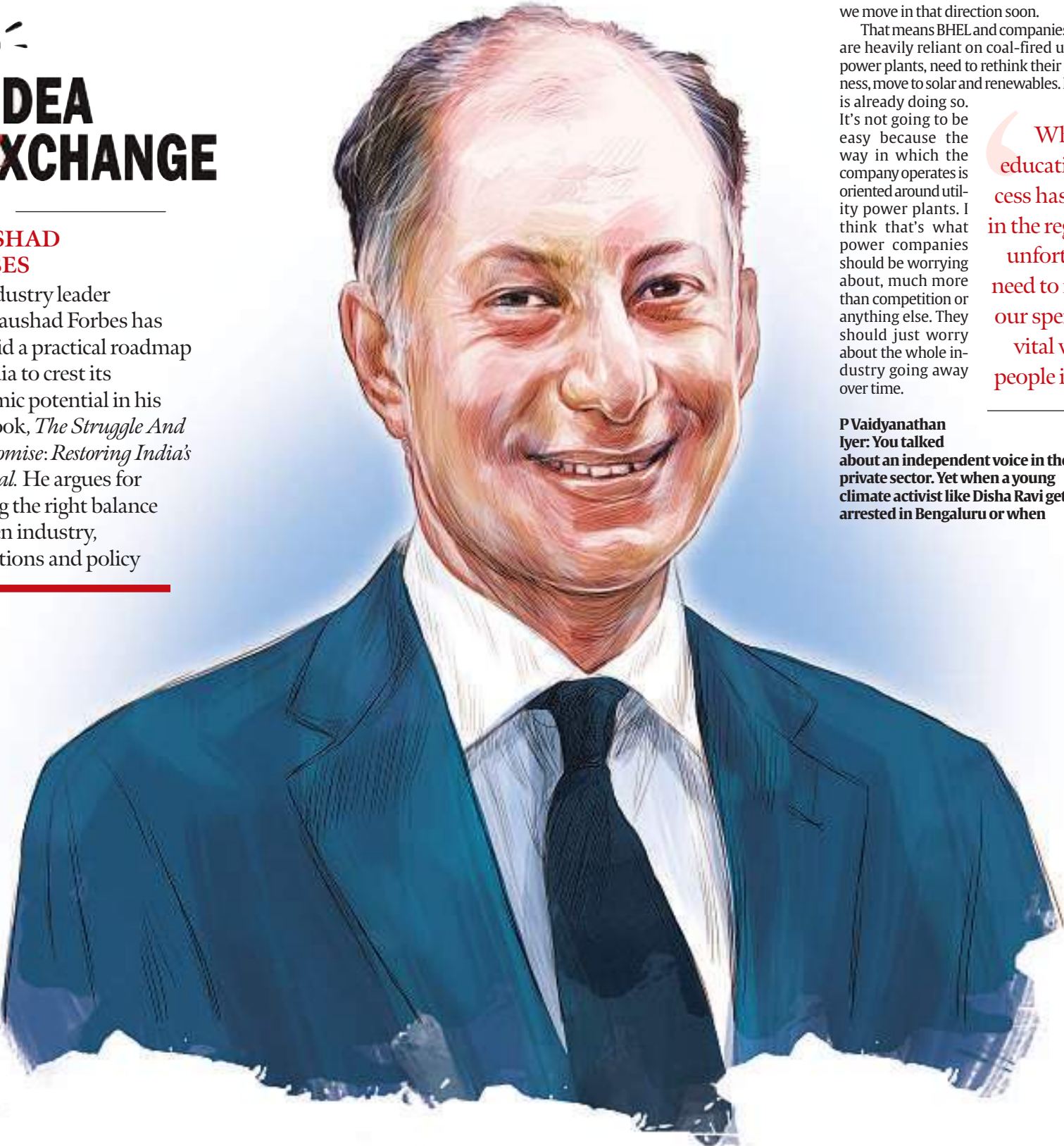


Illustration: Suvajit Dey

gine of informal employment and the travel and tourism sectors pick up because they are employment-intensive.

When that starts to happen, it will create that much more consuming power. When you get well above 100 per cent, then you need to invest in more capacity. I read about how public investment in infrastructure creation would spur private investment and so on. I don’t understand how. Yes, in certain sectors, it might, but how does one actually lead to the other? It seems to me that the most fundamental requirement is that consumption needs to grow, and consumption will grow if more people have more money to spend.

Anil Sasi: The post-pandemic recovery seems to have this very deep cleavage in terms of the bigger companies growing and the smaller players being left out of the recovery process. Does this delay demand recovery?

It does. I imagine it’s economically sustainable but I don’t think it’s socially sustainable in the long term. How do you address this? After the first lockdowns and the reverse migration of labour, the industry is getting companies to voluntarily adopt a set of standards for all their contractors to ensure minimal protection like health insurance for labourers, a short-term unemployment insurance and a basic support network. This will give them confidence, security and keep consumption going. The fact that agricultural employment has gone up in these last two years is a dampening development story.

Sunny Verma: In September 2019, the Finance Minister announced a sharp reduction in corporate tax rate, hoping it would kickstart investments. Then the pandemic hit. Do you think that was an error?

I don’t think so. It’s good to remember what the actual logic was, lower tax rates

combined with fewer exemptions. That’s the right direction to go in, including for personal taxes. Three years ago, corporate taxes were around 18 per cent of profits. In other words, the actual collection was 18 per cent of profits. And what we advocated at the time was to reduce the corporate tax rate to 18 per cent and remove all exemptions gradually with no grandfathering. And if you did that, you would, on a like-to-like basis, end up taxing everyone equally. What actually happens is that smaller companies end up paying the full marginal rate of tax while larger companies find ways of taking advantage of exemptions. Then you have a kind of convoluted, reverse progressive, regressive tax system. There’s scope to do something similar in the personal income tax slab; reduce tax rates, exemptions and widen the net so that you can bring more and more people into the actual income tax-paying category. We have a very limited coverage of people in terms of the spread of the income tax collection.

Sunny Verma: We lost Rahul Bajaj, who spoke his mind and truth to power across governments. Can any other industry voice fill that void?

First, the place of Rahul Bajaj will remain vacant forever because it’s very difficult for any one individual to fill his shoes. He was one of a kind. Our best way of paying tribute to him is by behaving and thinking like him and following his ethos. That most certainly includes being more independent, articulate, clearer, franker and forthright.

Harish Damodaran: You are one of the few industrialists who says that Indian industry doesn’t need any protection. You have also made a very strong case for India joining the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and signing up for Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). How are you basing your argument?

I really believe that the best way for Indian industry to thrive in the long run is in an open economy. You end up disincentivising exports when you tax imports. Let me give you an example from our own sector. We’re in the engineering sector and export a reasonable amount of what we make each year, at least 20-25 per cent.

We have struggled this year with steep prices of our principal raw material or steel. The spiral is not only because of an increase in worldwide demand but also because steel carries a tariff in India, between 7.5 and 10 per cent. This ends up spreading inefficiency and costs throughout the economy.

Now let’s take the labour-intensive garment sector. If you have a tariff on fabric, you end up not just affecting garment companies but other things than fabric. You might get advanced licences, duty and drawback. But what about thread, buttons and so on? You’re not going to keep track of what thread you used for export and what thread you used for local sales. The only way we can be a really effective long-term international player is if we keep our tariffs down, and they have to come down over time to zero. I think 10 years are a long enough period for us. Surely, we should be able to compete with the best in the world. And if we can’t, we don’t deserve to exist.

Harish Damodaran: With regard to capital goods, companies like BHEL are really struggling because of a lack of orders. Same is the case with equipment-manufacturing companies. How do you see the next two years?

This year we’ve been very pleasantly surprised with a pick-up in demand. Our boiler business is doing well. For the foreseeable future, it seems pretty solid and we hope that stays for another year or so. Then you’ll see an uptick in broader project activity happening and that will in itself stimulate consumption. For the power sector, the bulk of business comes from setting up coal-fired power plants. Here we need to come back to our sustainability goals. May be we have another couple of years of coal-fired power plants. In Glasgow, there was a lot of pressure on not just India, but other nations as well to actually commit to a zero coal scenario. We finally agreed to phase down instead of phasing out. But if we want to actually deliver on our commitments, I’ve not seen a single credible study that says we can achieve those targets without phasing out, forget phasing down. We will have to phase out coal. The sooner we start, the lower the level where it will peak. I hope

we move in that direction soon.

That means BHEL and companies that are heavily reliant on coal-fired utility power plants, need to rethink their business, move to solar and renewables. BHEL is already doing so. It’s not going to be easy because the way in which the company operates is oriented around utility power plants. I think that’s what power companies should be worrying about, much more than competition or anything else. They should just worry about the whole industry going away over time.

P Vaidyanathan Iyer: You talked about an independent voice in the private sector. Yet when a young climate activist like Disha Ravi gets arrested in Bengaluru or when

ing given to bureaucrats, greater discretion was being provided to their ability to implement the tax code and so on. Against that, there has been a systematic decriminalisation of civil offences. There’s much more to be done. A report came out earlier this month listing 16,000 individual criminal offences in commercial law. That’s a crazy number. I think the authors of the report have done us a huge service by documenting the numbers. I hope that that the report will receive the kind of attention in Government that it deserves.

When it comes to education and health, the cess has replaced spending in the regular Budget. That’s unfortunate because we need to incrementally grow our spending on these two vital ways of including people in our growth story

Sandeep Singh: The RBI recently

decided to hold rates. How much role can interest rates play in pushing growth when the overall economy is inflationary?

What the RBI did was to keep rates unchanged. It’s not like it lowered or raised them. I think it is betting on inflation being temporary and hoping supply chain disruptions will sort themselves out. The RBI is one part of the story. What the Finance Ministry does, by investing in infrastructure to kickstart economic activity, is the other part. It is the right combination but my big concern is investment in social sectors.

Anil Sasi: How complicit is the industry in the Government changing tack and pulling out of the RCEP last minute?

The industry argued in favour of protection as it did in 1991, 2000 and 2010. The Government’s job is to hear the industry out but do what is in national interest. In the last few years, from 2017 to early 2021, there was a trend of increasing tariffs. I think in the last year, there has been some rethinking in the Government on trade. There’s now a much more positive attitude to trade, international engagement and even to FTAs. At present, India is negotiating FTAs with the UK, UAE, Australia and the EU. India is now keener than the US on FTAs. Let’s see what happens. Unfortunately, there’s no movement on RCEP given our current environment with China. Meanwhile, let’s work on the others.

Anil Sasi: Do you see the industry taking advantage of corporate tax rates?

I hope so. There was a cut in the overall rate to 25 per cent for existing companies. And then there was the even deeper cut for new manufacturing companies. The last Budget extended the date for these new companies by another year. That’s a good move. However, to expect widespread capacity creation in the absence of consumption growth is just not realistic.

The Licence Raj bred a culture where we had to go to the Government for incentives or seek protection and favours. Many of those regulations have gone since 1991. But that deferential mindset still continues

Pranav Mukul: Apart from the Licence Raj mindset, do you think corporates keep silent for fear of being targeted? In the Supreme Court, some petitioners said that the Prevention of Money Laundering Act was being used arbitrarily to suppress dissent.

Maybe it does in individual cases. I think you can be independent without being aggressive or attacking. Expressing an independent and alternative viewpoint reasonably won’t get companies or individuals into trouble. I think the Government is open to that. And second, the Government is not a monolith. There are different voices in the Government, be it the bureaucracy or Ministers. I give an example in the book of how, after I wrote a couple of editorials criticising India dropping out of RCEP, I went to meet a particular Minister on a completely different matter. And he said to me, “I read your article on RCEP, I agree with you fully and was going to call you but didn’t because I’m a member of the Government.” You have different views in the Government. When we speak about what needs to be done, we strengthen the hands of reformers who want to move in that direction. It’s not an issue of getting into trouble and fear and so on. We can speak in a manner that’s independent, forthright and polite at the same time.

P Vaidyanathan Iyer: In the book, you also mention how a good government is one which does not lead itself but creates a space for the private sector. How do you see the seven years of the NDA Government in this context?

The first few years of the NDA Government were part of that broader trend. Somewhere in 2017-18, the direction changed and greater power was be-

TOPOF THE
WORLD

Ethiopia's Grand Renaissance Dam. Reuters

ETHIOPIA

Partial power generation from Nile dam begins

Addis Ababa: Ethiopia began producing electricity on Sunday from its Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), a multi-billion-dollar hydropower plant on the River Nile that neighbours Sudan and Egypt have worried will cause water shortages downstream. After flicking a digital switch to turn on the turbines in the first phase of the project, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sought to assure those nations that his country did not wish to harm their interests. "Ethiopia's main interest is to bring light to 60% of the population who is suffering in darkness, to save the labour of our mothers who are carrying wood on their backs in order to get energy," Abiy said. **REUTERS**

PORTUGAL

Fire rages on ship full of luxury cars

Lisbon: Firefighters are struggling to put out a fire that broke out on Wednesday on a vessel carrying thousands of luxury cars, which is adrift off the coast of Portugal's Azores islands, a port official said, adding it was unclear when they would succeed. The Felicity Ace ship, carrying around 4,000 vehicles including Porsches, Audis and Bentleys, some electric with lithium-ion batteries, caught fire in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean on Wednesday. The 22 crew members on board were evacuated on the same day. **REUTERS**

PAKISTAN

31 Indian fishermen held

Islamabad: Pakistan's maritime authorities have arrested 31 Indian fishermen and seized five of their vessels for allegedly fishing in the country's territorial waters, officials said on Sunday. The Pakistan Maritime Security Agency said it apprehended the intruding vessels on Friday during patrolling in the Pakistan Exclusive Economic Zone. The PMSA said one of its "ship apprehended five Indian fishing boats along with 31 crew." The boats were towed to Karachi for further proceedings. **PTI**



Troops take part in the joint military drills of the armed forces of Russia and Belarus at a firing range in the Brest Region, Belarus on Saturday. Reuters

Russia and Belarus extend military drills near Ukraine

Putin and Macron discuss need to step up diplomacy

NYT & REUTERS
FEBRUARY 20

RUSSIA'S LARGE-SCALE military deployment in Belarus, which the US has long warned could be used as a pretext to build an invasion force aimed at Ukraine, will be extended beyond Sunday when joint exercises had been scheduled to conclude, Belarus's defence minister announced.

After repeated assurances from Russia and Belarus that the drills would end this weekend as planned, the Belarusian defence minister said on Sunday that the two countries' militaries would continue to "test" their capabilities because of what they claimed were heightened tensions in eastern Ukraine.

The apparent extension of the exercises — which NATO has said involve 30,000 Russian troops, Moscow's largest deployment on

Belarus territory since the end of the Cold War — put further pressure on Ukraine, which shares a roughly 665-mile border with Belarus that is largely unguarded. Belarus's defence minister, Lt. Gen. Viktor Khrenin, cited an escalation of violence in eastern Ukraine as the reason for continuing the exercises, although Ukrainian officials say Russia-backed separatists are responsible for the increase in tensions.

On Sunday, separatist leaders suspended a wide range of public activities in the eastern region, known as the Donbas, including "leisure, entertainment, entertainment, cultural, exhibition, educational, public and other similar events," according to a statement posted on their Telegram channel.

The statement released by the self-proclaimed government in the region offered no evidence that there was a danger to the public.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin and French President Emmanuel Macron discussed the need to step up the search for diplomatic solutions to the escalating crisis in eastern Ukraine in a phone call on Sunday, the Kremlin said.

"In view of the urgency of the situation, the Presidents acknowledged the need to intensify the search for solutions through diplomatic means via the foreign ministries and political advisers to the leaders of the Normandy format," it added.

"These contacts should facilitate the restoration of the ceasefire regime and ensure progress in the settlement of the conflict in Donbass," the Kremlin added.

In a separate call earlier on Sunday, Macron and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy discussed possible ways to secure immediate de-escalation.

Survivor and body found on Greece burning ferry

Athens: Greek emergency workers rescued a Belarussian truck driver on Sunday from a burning ferry off the island of Corfu and found the body of a Greek truck driver as they combed the wreckage for missing passengers. The discoveries left 10 people still unaccounted for.

The survivor, 21, was able to make his way up to the left rear deck on his own, and told rescue workers he heard other voices below. "The fact that this man succeeded, despite adverse conditions, to exit into the deck and alert the coast guard... gives us hope that there may

be other (survivors)," coast guard spokesman Nikos Alexiou told state broadcaster ERT. The victim was identified as a 58-year-old Greek truck driver by his family.

The Italian-owned Euroferry Olympia, which was carrying more than 290 passengers and crew as well as 153 trucks and 32 cars, caught fire Friday, three hours after it left the northwestern Greek port of Igoumenitsa bound for Brindisi in Italy. The company that operates the ferry said the fire started in a hold where vehicles were parked. **AP**

LASER AIMED AT PATROL PLANE

Australia accuses China of 'act of intimidation'

Melbourne: Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison accused Beijing of an "act of intimidation" after a Chinese navy vessel directed a laser at an Australian military surveillance aircraft last week.

AP-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft was illuminated on Thursday while flying over Australia's northern approaches by a laser from a People's Liberation Army-Navy (PLA-N) vessel, potentially endangering lives, the defence department said.

Morrison said his government will demand answers from Beijing. "I can see it no other way than an act of intimidation, one (...) unprovoked, unwarranted," Morrison said at a briefing.

"Defence Minister Peter Dutton called the incident "a very aggressive act" that took place in Australia's exclusive economic zone. "I think the Chinese government is hoping that nobody talks about these aggressive bullying acts," Dutton added. **REUTERS**

People with Covid in UK won't need to self-isolate

JILL LAWLESS
LONDON, FEBRUARY 20

PEOPLE WITH Covid-19 won't be legally required to self-isolate in England starting next week, the UK government has announced, as part of a plan for "living with Covid" that is also likely to see testing for the coronavirus scaled back.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said ending all of the legal restrictions brought in to curb the spread of the virus will let people in the UK "protect ourselves without restricting our freedoms." He is expected to lay out details of the plan in Parliament on Monday.

"I'm not saying that we should throw caution to the winds, but now is the moment for everybody to get their confidence back," Johnson told the BBC in an

Biden still willing to talk to Putin: Blinken

THE NEW YORK TIMES
WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 20

SECRETARY OF State Antony J. Blinken said on Sunday that President Biden was still willing to talk to President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia despite the United States government's assessment that Putin has already decided to invade Ukraine.

"We believe President Putin has made the decision, but until the tanks are actually rolling, and the planes are flying, we will use every opportunity and every minute we have to see if diplomacy can still dissuade President Putin from carrying this forward," Blinken said on CNN's "State of the Union."

Biden and Putin last spoke for one hour by telephone on Feb. 12. Biden said on Friday that he believed Russia would invade Ukraine within days. In recent weeks, the Russian military deployed more than 150,000 troops around Ukraine, positioning them along the country's western border with Ukraine, on the Crimean Peninsula that Russia seized from Ukraine in



US Secretary of State Antony J Blinken

2014, and in Belarus, which has a pro-Moscow government.

Blinken said on Sunday that Russia was still taking all the steps expected by the United States for what could be a violent and large-scale incursion into Ukraine.

"As we've described it, everything leading up to the actual invasion appears to be taking place," he said, hours after returning from the Munich Security Conference, where he and Vice-President Kamala Harris tried to rally nations to put pressure on Russia to defuse the crisis.

He also criticised Russia's decision to keep troops in Belarus beyond this weekend, when joint military exercises between the allies had been scheduled to end. "Now they're justifying the continuation of exercises — exercises, in quotation marks — that they said would end now," Blinken said.



Demonstrators sing the national anthem during a protest in Odessa, Ukraine, on Sunday. AP

QUEEN, 95, TESTS POSITIVE



Queen Elizabeth II

London: Queen Elizabeth II tested positive for Covid-19 on Sunday and is experiencing mild, cold-like symptoms, Buckingham Palace said, adding the 95-year-old monarch plans to carry on working. The palace said the queen would continue with "light" duties at Windsor Castle over the coming week. "She will continue to receive medical attention and will follow all the appropriate guidelines," the palace said. The queen has received three doses of Covid vaccine. **AP**

interview broadcast Sunday.

"We've reached a stage where we think you can shift the balance away from state mandating, away from banning certain courses of action, compelling certain courses of action, in favor of encouraging personal responsibility."

But some of the government's

scientific advisers said it was a risky move that could bring a surge in infections and weaken the country's defenses against more virulent future strains. Wes Streeting, health spokesman for the main opposition Labour Party, accused Johnson of "declaring victory before the war is over." **AP**

INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

Rohingya genocide case hearings to resume

MIKE CORDER
THE HAGUE, FEBRUARY 20

AN INTERNATIONAL case accusing Myanmar of genocide against the Rohingya ethnic minority returns to the United Nations' highest court on Monday amid questions over whether the country's military rulers should even be allowed to represent the Southeast

Asian nation.

Four days of public hearings at the International Court of Justice start Monday into Myanmar's preliminary objections to the case that was brought by Gambia, an African nation acting on behalf of an organisation of Muslim nations that accuses Myanmar of genocide in its crackdown on the Rohingya. In August 2017, Myanmar's

military launched what it called a clearance campaign in Rakhine state in the country's west in response to an attack by a Rohingya insurgent group. The campaign forced more than 700,000 Rohingya to flee to neighboring Bangladesh and led to accusations that security forces committed mass rapes and killings and burned thousands of homes. Gambia argues that the cam-

\$500 MN GRANT: POLICE USE FORCE TO QUELL STIR



Protesters opposing US grant clash with police in Kathmandu on Sunday. AP

Nepal tables US deal in Parliament amid protests

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, FEBRUARY 20

FACED WITH two difficult choices — either leave the government or support the resolution to have the \$500 million Millennium

Challenge Corporation Nepal compact approved, Maoist Centre and Unified socialists parties chose to support the deal, which was tabled in Parliament on Sunday.

The two parties had opposed the grant saying "it undermines Nepal's sovereignty and its non-aligned foreign policy." Even Speaker Agni Prasad Sapkota, who had firmly stood against it so far, relented. The House of Representatives will meet on February 24 to further discuss on the resolution and its ratification that has been pending for the past four years.

Three members of the Maoist Centre, including its chief whip Deb Gurung, raised their objections in writing after the resolution was tabled, but the Speaker chose not to take any cognisance.

The compact continued to face massive protests outside the Parliament with many parties and

EXPLAINED
What is the MCC deal?

THE MILLENNIUM Challenge Corporation (MCC), a US government aid agency, agreed in 2017 to provide \$500 million in grants to fund a 300-kilometre electricity transmission line and a road improvement project in Nepal.

groups asking government not to accept it as its provisions "undermine national sovereignty." Security forces used rubber bullets and tear gas to quell the mob opposing the tabling of the resolution in the capital.

The government's decision comes at a time when US and China are clashing on US's warning to Nepal that its failure to ratify the compact would be seen as influenced by China, which would lead to "review" of the bilateral relations. While China has accused the US of exercising "coercive" diplomacy in Nepal.

AUSTRALIA TO WELCOME TOURISTS FOR FIRST TIME UNDER COVID

Melbourne: Australia will welcome international tourists on Monday after nearly two years of sealing its borders, relying on high Covid-19 vaccination rates to live with the pandemic as infections decline. "The wait is over," Prime Minister Scott Morrison told a Sunday briefing at the Melbourne International Airport. Australia's opening to tourists is the clearest example yet of the government's shift from a strict zero-Covid approach to living with the virus and vaccinating the public to minimise deaths and severe illness. **REUTERS**

'Pakistan eyes people's gold to raise forex reserves'

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
ISLAMABAD, FEBRUARY 20

PRIME MINISTER Imran Khan-led government is considering a proposal to borrow gold biscuits and bars from the people to increase Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves that remain on a sliding path despite taking over \$5 billion loans in the past three months from bilateral and multilateral creditors, according to a media report on Sunday.

The proposal has been discussed in the Economic Executive Council (EEC) — the body comprising all economic ministers and the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) governor, *The Express Tribune* reported.

According to the proposal, the commercial banks will issue a negotiable discounted instrument to the gold owner and pay an interest rate on the precious metal. The commercial bank will deposit the gold with the SBP that can monetise it to increase the foreign exchange reserves "already largely built by taking expensive foreign loans."

The central bank already has 2.01 million fine troy ounces of gold reserves valued at \$3.8 billion, according to the SBP's reserves position statement of December 31, 2021. **PTI**

SCHEME HONOURS HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE OF BUILDINGS IN LONDON

Raj era home for Indian Ayahs to get Blue Plaque

ADITI KHANNA
LONDON, FEBRUARY 20

A HOME in London for Ayahs or nursemaids brought back by British families from India during the Raj is to be honoured with a Blue Plaque as part of a series to highlight the working-class experiences of the UK capital.

The Blue Plaques scheme, run by the English Heritage charity, honours the historic significance of particular buildings across London. The Ayahs' Home in the Hackney area of east London, which dates back to 1900-1921, housed many maids from India and other colonies in South and South-East Asia.

"The Ayahs' Home in



The Ayahs' Home in Hackney in 1900. File

Hackney provided safety and shelter to the many women who arrived in London with British families only to find that their employers did not honour the

promise of a return journey, or offer the means to survive in the interim," English Heritage notes.

"The Ayahs, thus abandoned, were often forced into common lodging houses or the workhouse," it said. The term "Ayah" was applied to all those women who served the British as nannies and nursemaids in India and other colonies.

The home's Blue Plaque, part of the charity's 2022 cohort, forms part of an effort to celebrate women's experiences in London by English Heritage, with the London home of British Indian spy Noor Inayat Khan among another recent one to be honoured.

"Many of the stories we are telling this year are those of

London's working class," said Anna Eavis, Curatorial Director and Secretary of the English Heritage Blue Plaques Panel.

"I am particularly excited by the Match Girls' plaque. This strike, organised by a group of impoverished young women, mostly between 15 and 20 years old, holds such an important place in the history of unionised labour and the women's movement as a whole," she said.

The famous Match Girls' Strike of 1888 is said to have changed the course of modern British labour history. It involved around 1,400 of the predominantly female workforce walking out of the match factory in the Bow area of east London. **PTI**

GLOBALLY, 70 MILLION PEOPLE STUTTER, INCLUDING PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN

Unravelling biology of stuttering

LAURA UNGAR
FEBRUARY 20

HOLLY NOVER grew up trying to hide her stutter. "I was very self-conscious," said the 40-year-old St. Johns, Florida mom, whose 10-year-old son Colton also has a speech impediment. "So I developed habits to switch my words so it wouldn't be noticed."

For centuries, people have feared being judged for stuttering, a condition often misunderstood as a psychological problem caused by things like bad parenting or emotional trauma. But research presented at a science conference on Saturday explores its biological underpinnings: genetics and brain differences. "By understanding the biology,



Colton Nover works on a report for school with his mother, Holly Nover in St. Johns, Fla. AP

we're going to decrease the stigma. We're going to increase the acceptance," one of the speakers, Gerald Maguire, said in a recent interview with *The AP*. He's a California psy-

chiatrist who is involved in testing potential medications for stuttering based on the science.

Globally, 70 million people stutter, including President Joe Biden, who has spoken publicly about being mocked by classmates and a nun in Catholic school for his speech impediment. He said overcoming it was one of the hardest things he's ever done.

Stuttering has been documented as far back as ancient China, Greece and Rome. But no one really had any idea what caused it until modern genetic science and brain imaging began providing clues.

Researchers identified the first genes strongly linked to stuttering more than a decade ago. Imaging studies peered into the brains of adults and older children. University of Delaware speech

disorder researcher Ho Ming Chow said the imaging shows slight brain differences in young children who keep stuttering, compared with those who recover and those who never stuttered. Past research has also linked stuttering to the basal ganglia, brain structures involved in the coordination of movement.

"We know stuttering has a really strong genetic component," Chow said. Though several genes may be involved and the exact genetic causes may vary by child, "they probably affect the brain in a similar way." Speech therapy is the mainstay of stuttering treatment. But the medicines currently being tested could be approved for stuttering in the next few years, first for adults and later for kids, said Maguire, who has stuttered since childhood. **AP**

14 ECONOMY

SECTOR WATCH RETIREMENT FUND

In 16% jump, EPFO adds 14.6 lakh subscribers in Dec

ENSECONOMICBUREAU
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 20

THE EMPLOYEES' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) added 14.6 lakh subscribers on a net basis in December 2021, an increase of 16.4 per cent compared to the year-ago period, according to the latest payroll data.

The provisional payroll data of Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) released on Sunday showed that the EPFO had added 12.54 lakh net subscribers during December 2020. The net subscriber addition in December has increased by 19.98 per cent as compared to November 2021, a Labour Ministry statement said. The net subscriber addition in November 2021 was revised downwards to 12.17 lakh from 13.95 lakh provisional estimates released in January 2022. Of the total 14.60 lakh net subscribers added in December, 2021, 9.11 lakh new members have been enrolled under EPF & MP Act, 1952 for the first time.

Approximately 5.49 lakh net subscribers exited but rejoined EPFO by opting to continue their membership with EPFO by transferring their PF accumulations from previous to present PF account instead of opting for final withdrawal. Further, it stated that the num-

EXPLAINED
E Highest enrolment

THE AGE-GROUP of 22-25 years registered the highest number of net enrolments with 3.87 lakh additions during December 2021. The age-group of 18-21 also registered a healthy addition of around 2.97 lakh net enrolments

ber of members exiting EPFO has been on a declining trend since July, 2021.

According to the data, the age-group of 22-25 years registered the highest number of net enrolments with 3.87 lakh additions during December 2021. The age-group of 18-21 also registered a healthy addition of around 2.97 lakh net enrolments. The age-groups of 18-25 years have contributed around 46.89 per cent of total net subscriber additions in December, 2021. This indicates that many first-time job seekers are joining the organised sector workforce in large numbers. A state-wise comparison of payroll figures highlighted that the establishments in Maharashtra, Haryana, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka are in lead by adding approximately 8.97 lakh subscribers during the month. **WITHPTI**

Promoting trade strategy: Commerce dept revamp on the cards

ENSECONOMICBUREAU
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 20

THE GOVERNMENT is planning to revamp the commerce department which will have a more coherent trade promotion strategy with clear targets and execution accountabilities, an official statement said on Sunday.

Under the plan, there is a proposal to set up a dedicated trade promotion body and a trade remedies review committee. The Commerce Ministry added there will be a strengthened negotiation ecosystem with right expertise and robust end-to-end processes with clearly defined focus areas and institutions in the revamped department. "It aspires to achieve an optimal mix of talent with specialists and generalists sourced from across private and government sectors. The department will have an agile setup responsive to market opportunities and exporter needs via interlinkages across bodies. There will also be synergized branding for India across all domains highlighting clear priority areas," it said.

It added that the revamping is aimed at further building on its strategic direction and aspirations for the next decade. **WITHPTI**

BRIEFLY

Federal Bank arm

New Delhi: Federal Bank subsidiary Fedbank Financial Services Ltd (FedFina) has filed preliminary papers with Sebi for its initial public offering (IPO). The draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) was filed with the capital markets regulator on February 19, 2022, Federal Bank said in a regulatory filing on Sunday.

Tata Tech hiring

New Delhi: Tata Technologies will hire at least 1,000 more people in FY23 than its planned recruitment of over 3,000 innovators over a 12-month period to fulfil requirements of customers as its growth accelerates, said a top company official. **PTI**

INTERVIEW WITH FINANCE MINISTER, TAMIL NADU

'Power being taken from states to the Union, creating complexity'

TAMIL NADU Finance Minister PALANIVEL THIAGARAJAN said in an interview to SUNNY VERMA that the Centre has, over the past seven years, steadily increased its control over state governments' spending power, which is leading to a lot of inefficiencies. Edited excerpts:

On Centre-state fiscal relations

I'll give you some history... The problem begins with a fundamental, anti-federal, anti-state, authoritarian approach of Delhi. It's an old saying in politics that where you stand depends on where you sit, implying that where you stand on the issues based on whether you sit in Opposition, in the House or out on the street, etc. That saying cannot be more apt, there's a classic example for that saying being true, which is our current Prime Minister (Narendra Modi). As a Chief Minister, he was the greatest champion of states' rights, most vocal, even may be overshadowing Jayalalithaa (former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister) herself. Since he has become Prime Minister, it has gone 180 degrees. It is not possible to change any more dramatically than that. Complete, complete opposite, completely decimating states' rights in every way: in money, management, micro management, Centrally-sponsored schemes, in every way. This is, by far, the most authoritarian power grab in the history of India.

Directly, directly, directly — it couldn't be more directly — in contrast to every word he spoke for states' rights when he was



Palanivel Thiaga Rajan

PTI file

Chief Minister of Gujarat for 13 years. This is the underlying context. See, they do it bit by bit, bit by bit, insidious creeping. So, they started by ramping up the Centrally-sponsored schemes like crazy, up to Rs 4-6 lakh crore of direct benefits and Centrally-sponsored scheme transfers. They have this tendency to do publicity value, they are geniuses at marketing and very, very low moral character. That is, to say, they will start one scheme, they will say subsidy for X. At first, they will give 70 per cent, the state will give 30 per cent, and they will put the Prime Minister's picture and everything. Second year, they will give 50 per cent and say state puts 50 per cent. Third year, they will give 20 per cent, states give 80

per cent. Fourth year, they say state has to continue but we will give zero, right. It will still be called 'PM xyz scheme'. So, this is a kind of my name but your money kind of game.

State subjects

The next point is in the actual administration of things like dams, ports, roads, state boundaries, education, health, exams, cooperatives — all of these are states' subjects, 100 per cent state subjects, some of them concurrent list (of the Constitution) subjects. (They) bring an overarching legislation, ram it through Parliament with no debate, no committee, basically, take control of things that they have no business taking control of, which are completely antithetical to states'

rights. Now comes the really sad part. It is an undeniable tenet of democracy that the closer you are to the people, the more accountability is built into the system.

...So this is a fundamental tenet that if you have power and decision making allocated to the nearby point to the people, then you can get accountability and increase the likelihood of delivery of results. If you take it far away from the people, you inherently have a problem because then be very difficult to have any connectivity between the decision maker and the beneficiaries of the decision. So this is the sad part as they keep taking the power more and more away from states and local bodies to the Union; they are inherently creat-

ing problems of complexity in two or three ways. One, they are reducing accountability of government to the people. Without involving the states and local bodies, they simply cannot effectuate policy. They don't have enough employees, they don't have data, and they don't have enough reach. If you empower yourself you can use it vindictively, you can use it negatively, you can cut off something — it's like a rope, you can use it to choke, strangle or hold somebody, but you cannot push on a rope. You

cannot create something by having a rope... Look at all the audit reports on Swachh Bharat, on *krishi kalyan*, they say the money goes, some toilets are built but there is no water supply. The water supply cannot be continuously monitored from Delhi, right, water supply is a municipal subject. It's not even a state subject.

So you build all this, but if there is no water supply, what happens is you've just wasted the money.

Centre's creative accounting

In the context of all this I say that, therefore, they have taken two accounting tricks, what I called as exquisitely creative accounting. Because of Article 293 (3), the previous AIADMK government, which was a coalition partner of the BJP, never felt like taking it (the Centre's loan) because, at that time, it was very clear that it was just bait, because the amounts were trivial, around Rs 300 crore or 500

crore for Tamil Nadu... in that immediately even the previous regime saw the concern that they would use this to trigger Article 293 (3), because it is not repayable in advance. It locks you for 50 years.

You know, and I know, how to do time value of money. So, if I give you Rs 100 today and, I say, pay it

back to me as two rupees a year for the next 50 years. Effectively, in today's money, you are only paying back about Rs 15 or 20, because 50 years from now two rupees is worth nothing, because of inflation. So at some level, the difference between a 50-year, not interest payable, equal instalment repayment loan and a grant is not that big... But the difference being why should they say not repayable, then we start questioning the intent.

Why should it be in the Union's interest that you cannot prepay? On what logic does it make sense? What purpose is served by not allowing prepayment? If I'm the lender, I should be the happiest if it's prepaid because I'm getting it in advance where it actually means something. Prepayment should have been in the interest of the borrower by a lot, by a margin of thousand, but when it's not allowed the question arises if there is an ulterior motive here.

(When our government came into office) and we had this discussion, it was very clear that the AIADMK had taken that stand, and I thought if even the AIADMK have figured that out, we should follow too. And there is a different issue, a Rs 300 crore loan doesn't do anything much for a state like Tamil Nadu, where annual budget that time was probably Rs 3 lakh crore and capital expenditure well north of Rs 30,000 crore. So, an additional Rs 300 crore is less than 1 per cent of capex.

FULL INTERVIEW ON
www.indianexpress.com

“Why should it be in the Union's interest that you cannot prepay? On what logic does it make sense? what purpose is served by not allowing prepayment?”

Devas recovery suit: AI wins nod to appeal Canada seizure ruling

New Delhi: Air India has won a nod of an appeals court in Quebec to challenge a Canadian court order that allowed foreign investors in Bengaluru-headquartered Devas Multimedia to seize its funds to recover compensation for a failed 2005 satellite deal with Antrix Corporation, a commercial arm of ISRO.

In a February 11 ruling, Judge Christine Baudouin agreed with Air India that the court should take a closer look at the claim brought by three Mauritius investors and the German major Deutsche Telekom to identify the airline as an alternative to Government of India to facilitate recovery of compensations awarded by international tribunals over the failed satellite deal. "Without expressing an opinion on the merits or on the chances of success in appeal, I am satisfied that the present matter is one that should be submitted to the court," Judge Baudouin wrote in a brief order. She set a hearing in the case for May 13.

Earlier this month, a US federal court for the southern district of New York stayed proceedings to identify Air India as an alter ego of India and to find its assets in the US to facilitate recovery of compensation awarded by international tribunals. The shareholders — CC/Devas (Mauritius) Ltd, Devas Employees Mauritius Pvt Ltd and



Earlier this month, a US court stayed proceedings to identify Air India as an alter ego of India. File

Telecom Devas Mauritius Ltd — have been targeting government assets abroad to recover a total of USD 1.3 billion compensation they won in three different arbitrations initiated over the nixed deal to deliver communications services throughout India.

They have got an attachment order from a French court for the Indian government's properties in upmarket Paris. On January 8, 2022, they got a ruling from a Superior Court in the Quebec region of Canada to seize 50 per cent of Air India's funds being held by the International Air Transport Authority, a Montreal-based trade association for the world's airlines that facilitates payment of air navigation charges billed to airlines and countries. **PTI**

'Biz mix tweak will see LIC becoming more competitive'

Amendments to the surplus/profit distribution rules for IPO-bound LIC will pose strong competition to private players, according to a Credit Suisse report



Reuters

SBI LIFE, ICICI Prudential, HDFC Life and Max Life will face the maximum impact of the LIC move

LIC'S MARGIN has gone by up 700 bps to 9.9 percent after government amended LIC's surplus/profit distribution rules which allows it to make a 10 per cent shift in the business mix from participating policies to non-participating policies, which is only 4 per cent now, which can take its margins to 20 per cent

BASED ON the assumption a full transition to new surplus distribution from 100 per cent for non-participating policies now and 10 per cent for participating policies

Source: Credit Suisse/PTI

'Ashok Leyland looking at separate EV plant'

New Delhi: Ashok Leyland plans to set up a new manufacturing facility in the country to roll out electric vehicles, according to a top company official.

The Chennai-based firm has also lined up a Rs 500 crore investment to develop powertrains based on alternative fuels like CNG, hydrogen and electric for its commercial vehicles range.

The company has already announced a USD 200 million (nearly Rs 1,500 crore) investment through its UK-based arm Switch Mobility for electric mobility.

The commercial vehicle company aims to expand its electric vehicle portfolio as well as develop new engines keeping in mind the

"We feel quite comfortable that for the immediate, let's say, 24 months or so. Ashok Leyland would be able to provide electric products that are needed for Switch"

DHEERAJ HINDUJA
EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN, ASHOK LEYLAND

changing market requirements in the domestic as well as international markets.

"In Spain, we are coming up with a manufacturing facility and R&D centre and there are plans to grow this over the next few years. In India, we will be optimising the

facilities that are available with Ashok Leyland.

"But I'm sure very soon we will require an independent facility as well. And that is something that is being looked at by the management team," Ashok Leyland Executive Chairman Dheeraj Hinduja told PTI in an interaction. Asked if the company has set some timeframe for the new plant, he noted that a lot will depend on the volume growth of electric vehicles.

"We are looking at all the opportunities and options available, so that capacity never becomes an issue if the market requires more products. So, I wouldn't put a date to it right now. But we are keeping

all our alternatives and options open," Hinduja stated.

He noted that at the moment, the company feels quite comfortable regarding the production capacity for the next two years.

"We feel quite comfortable that for the immediate, let's say, 24 months or so. Ashok Leyland would be able to provide the electric products that are needed for Switch," Hinduja noted.

On the company's EV product plans, he said Dost and Bada Dost models would be utilised to cater to the domestic and the SAARC markets. "We are looking at Q4 of 2022 to be able to start production of our electric LCV from Switch's perspective," Hinduja stated. **PTI**

INTERVIEW WITH INDIA MANAGING DIRECTOR AND VICE-PRESIDENT, NXP SEMICONDUCTORS

'Chip manufacturing: India needs high capex, political will'



Sanjay Gupta

STANDING ON the cusp of foraying into manufacturing and fabrication of semiconductor chips, the country — apart from the sustained high capital expenditure investment — will also need a strong political will and the right partners globally to ensure that the plan is successful, SANJAY GUPTA, India managing director and a vice-president at NXP Semiconductors, said in an interview with AASHISH ARYAN. Edited excerpts:

What are the three major challenges that lie ahead for India's semiconductor mission?

Semiconductor manufacturing is a near-impossible goal. I say it is near-impossible because, of the 200-odd countries, only a handful have the semiconductor manufacturing capabilities at high level. So, it must be something ex-

tremely difficult, or everyone would have easily done it. The entry barrier to the indus-

try is one of the biggest challenges. No industry matches the kind of investment that is required for semiconductor manufacturing. It is a capital intensive investment and, that too, for a long run. It has to be patiently run for multiple years before any result starts coming in. We are talking a multi-billion dollar investment into the fabrication units. So, you need the right partners who have patience and the right vision for the long term mission.

The second is that being a very niche technology company, there is very limited talent base across the world. If we talk about how many semiconductor experts are there in the country, it will be a handful of people of India who have deep knowledge

of the industry, accumulated over decades.

The story is the same when it comes to finding talent in semiconductor design. Although India is the largest nation for providing semiconductor talent to all the big companies globally, the reality is that the global talent base for this industry is very small. The availability of talent is the second challenge.

Third challenge is scaling up of the plan and putting in the right foundation in place. Skill India and Startup India will be very crucial for India to gain the theoretical and practical knowledge. India has no dearth of talent when it comes to semiconductor design. I cannot think of a country which does not have a design

space in India.

Another challenge, apart from these, is the political will. Such a massive effort requires that involvement of masses and the government has to take that initiative.

Does the government's assurance of providing support for semiconductor talent help when it comes to talent?

If you need to build a toy from 10 Lego blocks and only two are in the right place and nobody is working on the rest of the eight blocks, you work in isolation. Some of the activities in silos would be successful but, by and large, as a project it will fail. That was the case in India in the past. Today, all the stakeholders have a

common goal.

This will result in a big success in time to come.

Would NXP be open to investing in India?

Multi-billion dollar investments are very crucial to any company. The government of India has reached out to us and we are discussing it at various levels. India is one of the largest design centres for NXP globally. We have roughly 3,000 engineers working at our four locations: Noida, Pune, Bangalore and Hyderabad. All the people are working on cutting-edge technologies.

As long as we continue to innovate and deliver, we will continue to grow, both as a design centre and as a country.

Shahbaz, Abhishek script Bengal triumph

PRATYUSH RAJ
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 20

AFTER BEING rolled over for 88 in the first innings, Bengal pulled off a come-from-behind win against Baroda in Cuttack. Chasing 349 on the fourth day, Bengal rode on the duo of Shahbaz Ahmed (71 not out) and debutant wicketkeeper Abhishek Porel (53 not out), who stitched an unbroken 108-run partnership for the seventh wicket to steer their team home.

Bengal's deputy sports minister and former skipper Manoj Tiwary showed his experience with a fighting 37 from 61 balls. Reeling at 242 for 6, Bengal unearthed a future star in the 19-year-old Abhishek, who showed utmost maturity and matched his senior partner, Shahbaz.

The duo sealed the victory in 91.3 overs. Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Bengal head coach Arun Lal said: "Terrific performance, the wicket was extremely difficult to bat on as it was overcast and the wicket stayed moist till lunch."

Lal heaped praise on Shahbaz and Porel. He said, "Shahbaz has an unbelievable cricket brain and remained calm under pressure. Abhishek Porel is a special talent, an out and out match-winner. Now the momentum is with us, and we hope to play good cricket in the tournament."

Bengal skipper Abhimanyu Easwaran praised both the batters and bowlers for the remarkable comeback.

"Every player has contributed to the cause, as the batters have shown character the bowlers have done commendable jobs too," Easwaran said.

"It's about believing in the hard work that we have put in. The best part is even when we had 349 runs to chase, every single member of the team believed that we can do the job."

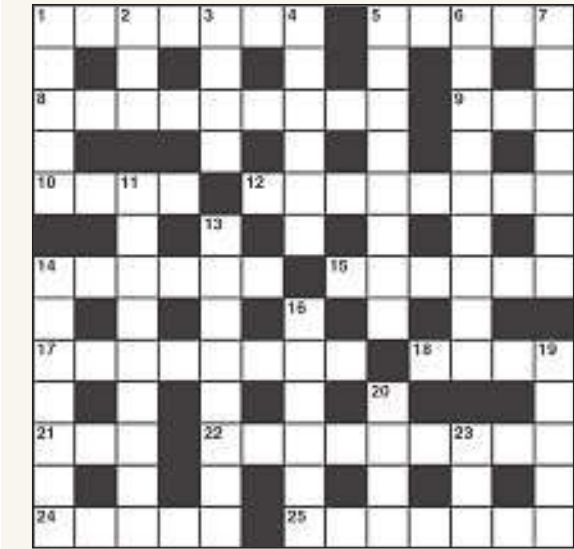
"Shahbaz has batted with a lot of responsibility, special mention to Abhishek Porel- the character he showed, the attitude he was batting with was great to watch," the skipper added.

BRIEF SCORES: Baroda: 181 and 255 lost to Bengal 88 and 350/6 in 91.3 overs (Abhimanyu Easwaran 79, Shahbaz Ahmed 71 not out, Abhishek Porel 53 not out; Abhimanyusingh Rajput 3/73) by 4 wickets

"Every single member of the team believed we can do the job. Shahbaz has batted with a lot of responsibility, special mention to Abhishek Porel- the character he showed, the attitude he was batting with was great to watch,"

ABHIMANYU EASWARAN,
CAPTAIN, BENGAL

CROSSWORD 4669



- ACROSS**

 - 1 Sharing out a bit of parsley perhaps (7)
 - 5 Cook beats a mixture (5)
 - 8 A wildcat rising? (9)
 - 9 A record height to climb (3)
 - 10 But they could be even for the better (4)
 - 12 It's held back in the race to beat one (8)
 - 14 A way to achieve new spirit (6)
 - 15 Neglectful about a single one (6)
 - 17 Mother is composing a line to the weatherman (8)
 - 18 Raw recruit found in ruins of Troy (4)
 - 21 First person Gregory takes to heart (3)
 - 22 Unwilling cattle run amok (9)
 - 24 It may be drawn or sucked up (5)
 - 25 In France medic is ordered to treat such disease (7)
- DOWN**

 - 1 Actress's dress ring (5)
 - 2 Cage component (3)
 - 3 Lied in order to be lazy (4)
 - 4 The full extent of the rise (6)
 - 5 Members of a musical group (8)
 - 6 The property of the firm (9)
 - 7 Quick to speak (7)
 - 11 Not to pay a cheque results in disgrace (9)
 - 13 Recall having a tie (8)
 - 14 Motoring clubs? (7)
 - 16 Metal grating to cook eggs initially (6)
 - 19 Softly in the ear or in the eye (5)
 - 20 Sharp appearance of a police force (4)
 - 23 I am out to gain an objective (3)

Solutions Crossword 4668: Across: 1 Singular, 5 Jack, 9 Error, 10 Oration, 11 Single person, 13 Lights, 14 Jousts, 17 Reading glass, 20 Chianti, 21 Goals, 22 Long, 23 Cretonne. Down: 1 Step, 2 Nursing, 3 Upright piano, 4 Atoned, 6 Amiss, 7 Kindness, 8 Take to flight, 12 Clerical, 15 Sustain, 16 Uglier, 18 Alien, 19 Isle.

JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

...at ...first, before anyone else can - Elsa Maxwell (5..8)

PAEOR

--	--	--	--	--

DLNUUY

--	--	--	--	--

SLILY

--	--	--	--	--

OTUFGH

--	--	--	--	--

Answer: Laugh at yourself first, before anyone else can - Elsa Maxwell



My job is to bail my team out of trouble: Shahrukh

TN & Punjab Kings batsman reflects on maiden first-class ton vs Delhi and call-up to India squad for ODI series against West Indies

PRATYUSH RAJ
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 20

THREE YEARS ago, batting at the nets in Mohali, Shahrukh Khan was hit on the wrist by a rising delivery from T Natarajan. Then Tamil Nadu coach Hrishikesh Kanitkar, assistant coach Lakshminipathy Balaji and senior player Dinesh Karthik, watching from the sidelines, rushed towards the youngster, who seemed in sheer pain.

Later in the evening, Kanitkar told this reporter, "I've never seen anyone hit the cricket ball cleaner than this kid. You will hear a lot about him in the coming years."

Karthik, too, chipped in, "Coach is absolutely right, what a fearless stroke-player, and you should take his interview instead of mine. He is a future star."

Shubman Gill stole the limelight in that match with a sublime 268, while Shahrukh only scored 19 in the first innings and remained unbeaten on 11 in the second.

Both Kanitkar and Karthik were right about Shahrukh's talent. In 33 List A games, his strike rate is 128.62, while in T20s, he scores at 136.40. In the 2021 Indian Premier League auction, Punjab Kings bought him for Rs 5.25 crore, and the franchise bought him back a year later for Rs 9 crore, up from a base price of Rs 40 lakh.

On Saturday, the 26-year-old middle-order batsman showed his prowess in the red-ball format with a magnificent 148-ball 194 that ensured the first innings lead for Tamil Nadu against Delhi in their Ranji Trophy encounter.

It was Shahrukh's maiden first-class century, and the 10 sixes he hit was just a gentle reminder of why so many franchises were bidding fiercely for him during the recent IPL mega auction.

For Shahrukh, personal milestones don't matter as long as he bails his team out of a crisis, regardless of the format of the game.

"In limited-overs cricket, my job is to finish the game for the team, and it is same with the red ball too. We were under pressure, and my job was to bail the team out of the situation," Shahrukh tells *The Indian Express*.

Tamil Nadu was tottering at 162 for 5, when Shahrukh came to bat at No 7. He soaked up the pressure and put on 134 runs for the sixth wicket with Baba Indrajith (117).

Then he added 178 runs with wicket-keeper Narayanswami Jagadeesan, who chipped in with a 50 off 71 balls while enjoying his partner's belligerence from the non-striker's end.

"Personal milestones don't matter to me a lot. My job was to get the team to pass the score of 452. That was the target. I am happy that I could take the team to a first innings



Shahrukh Khan struck some lusty blows but fell six runs short of a double ton. *BCCI*

lead. The more I try and contribute to the team's success, my personal goals will also be achieved in that process," says Shahrukh.

He fell six short of converting his maiden first-class century into a double but put Tamil in front with his imperious knock. Shahrukh controlled his natural instinct initially, taking only calculated risks.

"I don't generally curb my natural instincts. If the ball is there to hit, I will hit it. But when six fielders are on the rope, there is no point in taking on the bowler. I was playing my natural game, hitting the bad balls, but I was calculating at the same time," says Shahrukh.

"Vikas Mishra (6/108) was bowling really well; he had a mid-on and long-off, half-way outside the 30 yards. They were not exactly on the boundary line. I respected the way he bowled, and credit goes to him. But if the field is up, I will go over the top; that's the only way I've played my cricket since my Under-13 days," he adds.

India call-up in good month

It is turning out to be an excellent month for the Tamil Nadu batsman. He was added to the Indian squad for the first ODI against West Indies after a few players were found

Covid-19 positive. It was followed by a million-dollar-plus IPL contract, and now a maiden first-class century.

"All the hard work is slowly paying off," he says. Shahrukh looks back fondly at his time in the India dressing room. "It was special. When the team was announced, and I saw my name was not there, I said, 'it is okay, let's prepare for the Ranji Trophy.' But when the call came up, I was stunned and happy at the same time."

Sharing the dressing room with Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma has changed his approach to the game.

"The energy and vibe in that dressing room is so refreshing. To be among the few selected bunch of players from across the country is pretty special. For a new kid like me, it was refreshing to see the way they go through their processes."

"Virat (Kohli) and Rohit (Sharma) have scored so many runs for India, but they will never skip a net session. The passion remains the same in each session. Their professionalism is a reminder for me that there is no substitute for hard work. It was surreal to see them putting in those hard yards day in and day out. This stint gave me so much confidence," Shahrukh adds.

After two tons on debut, Dhull sets goal: *Play for India in two years*

PRATYUSH RAJ
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 20

AFTER LEADING India to their fifth Under-19 World Cup earlier this month, **Yash Dhull** (r) began his senior career with a century in each innings of his Ranji Trophy debut. The 19-year-old followed his 113 against Tamil Nadu with an unbeaten 113 on Sunday. He is only the third Indian — after Nari Contractor for Gujarat in 1952/53 and Virag Awate for Maharashtra in 2012/13 — to score a hundred in each innings on his Ranji Trophy debut.

Delhi were reeling at 7 for 2 on day one when Dhull, opening for the first time in his career, showed remarkable maturity to bail the team out of trouble and help them to 452. However, his thunder was stolen by Shahrukh Khan, who got Tamil Nadu the first innings lead with a sensational 194 off 148 balls.

Dhull on the final day with Dhruv Shorey (107 off 165) batted for 60.5 overs to take Delhi to 228 for no loss in the second innings. Dhull completed his century with a classical cover drive off Shahrukh Khan and followed it with a four and six before the players shook hands for a draw.

Delhi coach Raj Kumar Sharma feels that the youngster should be fast-tracked into the Indian team. "He is ready to take the next step. He has got the temperament to excel at the senior level," he said.

Assistant coach Gursharan Singh, a former India batter, said: "Both the innings were top notch. On the first day, he showed exceptional maturity and batted according to the team's requirements, but today he displayed the other side of his game. It was a flawless inning."

Unfazed by the adulation, Dhull is already focussing on the next match against Jharkhand, starting from February 24.

"India khelna hai magar filhaal baaki ke dono matches pe focus hai (I want to play for India, but right now, the focus is on the remaining matches)," Dhull told this paper.

"I have set myself a goal that I will play senior India in the next 18 to 24 months. Till now, it has been a dream ride, but hard work will begin now. I will have to score bucket-loads of runs to get there. From tomorrow, I will start training for the match against Jharkhand. The thumb rule of cricket is to take one game at a time," added Dhull, who had scored 229 runs in four innings at an av-



erage of 76.33 and strike rate of 85.44 in the U-19 World Cup.

BRIEF SCORES: Delhi 1st innings: 452 all out and 228 for no loss in 60.5 overs (Yash Dhull 113 not out; Dhruv Shorey 107 not out) vs Tamil Nadu 1st innings 494 all out in 107.5 overs. *Match drawn*

Pujara hits 83 ball-91

Less than 24 hours after being dropped from the India Test squad, Cheteshwar Pujara struck an uncharacteristic 83-ball 91 for Saurashtra in their Ranji Trophy match against Mumbai here on Sunday.

Thematch ended in a draw with Saurashtra making 372 for nine in their second innings on the fourth and final day. Saurashtra were only 48 runs ahead when the stumps were drawn but the lack of time meant Mumbai could not go for an outright victory. So the record 41-time winners settled for three points from the game for taking the first-innings lead while defending champions Saurashtra bagged one.

Bowling his slow left-arm spin to good effect, Shams Mulani returned career-best figures of 7/114, adding to his four wickets in the Saurashtra first innings.

On Saturday, senior batters Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane were dropped from the two-match Test series against Sri Lanka, starting from March 4 in Mohali after an inconsistent run.

The seasoned Pujara has managed just 602 runs at 24.08 in 14 Tests over the last one year. Pujara, who last scored a Test century on the 2018-19 tour of Australia, got out for a duck in the first innings of this match.

PTI

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



Difficulty Level 4s

Instructions

To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Difficulty Level

1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy; 3s = Medium; 4s = Hard; 5s = Very Hard; 6s = Genius

SUDOKU 4752

			7					1
	3				9			7
		3		2				6
		7	5		3	4		
8				1		7		
	9	6	3					
3			4					5
	7				2			

SOLUTION SUDOKU 4751

5	9	2	6	4	8	3	1	7
1	4	6	7	2	3	9	8	5
7	8	3	5	9	1	2	4	6
9	1	5	2	6	4	7	3	8
8	3	7	9	1	5	6	2	4
6	2	4	8	3	7	1	5	9
4	7	9	3	5	2	8	6	1
3	6	1	4	8	9	5	7	2
2	5	8	1	7	6	4	9	3



New Delhi



16 SPORT

TOWNS LOOMS LARGE IN 3-POINT CONTEST

Karl-Anthony Towns made big men proud when he was the winner of the NBA All-Star Weekend's 3-Point Contest on Saturday night at Cleveland. It was a record point total for a final round when Towns, who plays for the Minnesota Timberwolves, posted 29 points. The 7-footer became the first center ever to win the contest.

REUTERS

BRIEFLY

EPL title race back on as Kane sinks City

Manchester: Harry Kane, the striker Manchester City wanted to sign in the offseason last year consigned the leaders to their first league loss in nearly four months by scoring twice for Tottenham in a dramatic 3-2 win on Saturday. His second — the winning goal — came in the fifth minute of stoppage time. Kane celebrating scoring goals at Etihad Stadium was something City fans thought they'd enjoy seeing this season. By Wednesday, City could find its lead over Liverpool down to just three points. Liverpool trimmed the gap to six on Saturday courtesy of a come-from-behind 3-1 victory over Norwich and is also at home to Leeds in four days' time. And Liverpool still has to go to City, in April.

AP

Indian boxers handed tricky draws

Sofia: Indian boxers were handed tricky draws at the Strandja Memorial even as Nikhat Zareen will begin her campaign in the quarterfinals. Sumit and Anjali Tushir are set to face tough opponents in their opening-round bouts. Zareen has received a bye in the 52kg opening round. Apart from Zareen, Nandini (+81kg) is another Indian boxer to feature directly in the last-8 stage. In the 66kg category, Tushir will face a stiff challenge from two-time World Championships medallist Russia's Saadat Dalgatova in the opening round. Among men, the 2021 World Championships bronze medallist Akash Kumar has been given a bye in the 67kg opening round.

PTI

BFC, Odisha face off in must-win game

Bambolim: Bengaluru FC and Odisha FC will lock horns in a must-win game for both the teams in the ISL, here on Monday. Bengaluru are sixth in the points table with 23 points from 17 games, four adrift of fourth-placed Kerala Blasters. Odisha are a spot below them at seventh position having 22 points from 17 encounters. The Blues saw their nine-game unbeaten streak coming to a halt against leaders Hyderabad and then suffered another defeat to lowly NorthEast United FC, derailing their fresh hopes of a semifinal berth to a certain extent. When it comes to open play, Odisha have scored 21 goals from open play, more than half of the goals.

PTI

Paltan to lock horns vs Yoddha in Eliminator

Bengaluru: Puneri Paltan will lock horns with UP Yoddha in the first Eliminator match of Pro Kabaddi League on Monday. Pune clinched the sixth position on the table with a last-day victory against Jaipur Pink Panthers and will be looking to carry that momentum into the Eliminator phase. UP Yoddha won't be pushovers having registered third-place with a flawless end to the league stages. Pardeep Narwal and Surender Gill have led the Yoddha attack and they will be keen on clinching a win that will set up a semi-final date with league-toppers Patna Pirates.

PTI

WI flattened by bench press

India showcase strength in depth to register another 3-0 sweep against hapless tourists



For Rohit Sharma, this was his third successive clean-sweeps of opponents as captain, post taking over the job from Virat Kohli.

PTI

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY

KOLKATA, FEBRUARY 20

Yet again, the penultimate over of the game proved to be the clincher for India, like the second T20I. The West Indies kept losing wickets right from the start but didn't ditch their merry hitting. After 18 overs, they were 154/7, chasing 185 for victory.

Romario Shepherd was keeping the tourists in the game, even after Nicholas Pooran got out for a 47-ball 61. Bhuvneshwar Kumar was sitting out this game as India rotated their pacers and Harshal Patel bowled the 19th over. The first four balls accounted for four runs, including a couple of leg-byes. Then, the medium pacer dismissed Shepherd, deceiving the batsman with change of pace and Rohit Sharma taking a superb diving catch at extra cover. India's catching in the third T20I was brilliant, two dropped chances notwithstanding. Patel's bowling effort was excellent. Just eight runs in his final over saw him return with figures of 3/22 from four overs.

A requirement of 23 in the final over of the game, with two wickets in hand, was beyond the tourists' reach. They finished at 167/9, losing the game by 17 runs and the series by a 0-3 margin. The Caribbeans would take home the disappointment of back-to-back clean sweeps, in the ODIs and T20Is. As for Sharma, after taking over the reins from Virat Kohli post the T20 World Cup, this was his third successive clean-sweeps as captain.

The hosts deserve even more credit for the fact that they became a bowler short in this game very early. Deepak Chahar started off by removing Kyle Mayers and Shai Hope, but while bowling the fifth ball of his second over, the seamer pulled up and hobbled off the field, holding his hip.

“The biggest take away in the ODIs was the middle order making it count. I was impressed with our seam bowling in ODIs. And even here. Harshal is new. Avesh is on debut. Shardul is in and out. So we wanted to see how the guys react and it was a good challenge to defend in both games against a quality West Indies team.”

-ROHIT SHARMA

INDIAN TEAM CAPTAIN

Venkatesh Iyer replaced him and stood up to be counted as a bowler, getting rid of Kieron Pollard and Jason Holder. India revelled in a perfect team performance. Everyone stepped up and raised his game. Shardul Thakur's catch to dismiss Rovman Powell brought the loudest cheer from a 20,000-odd turnout.

SKY's the limit

A club cricket old hand fell for Suryakumar Yadav's lap-swept six off Dominic Drakes, recalling Desmond Haynes during the conversation. Thirty-three years ago, at Eden Gardens, he had seen the former West Indies opener going down on one knee and sweeping Wasim Akram for a six over the fine leg boundary in the Nehru Cup final. To him, Yadav's shot against the West Indies fast bowler on Sunday offered a throwback.

For someone who is not a T20 nerd, not being aware of one of Yadav's signature shots in this format was understandable. Modern-day fans are used to the batsman's 360-degree cricket. In fact, Yadav's first six in T20Is came from a lap-sweep, against England's Jofra Archer.

On a used pitch where a new-look

Indian top order struggled for timing and even Sharma didn't get going. Yadav brought out all his innovations, in company of Venkatesh, to take the game away from the West Indies. From 93/4 after 14 overs, India went on a rampage at the back-end of their innings, posting 184/5.

The real transition, and challenge, for the Indian team would come in a few years from now, when their batting royalty, Sharma and Virat Kohli, walk into a golden sunset.

By then, though, Yadav should be at the forefront to take over the mantle. His 31-ball 65, including seven sixes, was resplendent in his audacity. Even more eye-catching was his leadership qualities in the middle, the way he guided Venkatesh during an unbroken 91-run fifth wicket partnership off 37 balls. Yadav's command unnerved the West Indies bowlers, as they lost the plot and played into the batsmen's hands.

Talking about Yadav's innovations, the lap-sweep was a starter. He took a six off Drakes over third man despite losing the bottom hand, opening the bat-face very late and timing the ball sweetly.

Mumbai Indians retained the 31-year-old for Rs 6 crore. They bought Ishan Kishan for Rs 15.25 crore at the auction. No disrespect to the latter, but IPL auctions sometimes can make a mockery of cricketing logic.

Yadav was adjudged the Man-of-the-Match and Man-of-the-Series. He can build the innings and at the same time, go ballistic.

“It was important to stay till the end when Rohit got out. We had a chat in our team meetings as well as to how we are going to react in such situations. I try to stay there till the end. Be a little harsh on yourself in the nets, that's it,” he said at the post-match presentation.

Impressive Iyer

Spare a thought for Venkatesh whose performance has been steady and effective in this series.

An upright stance and a clean swing of the bat serve well for the youngster in the shortest format, especially on pitches that have a bit of bounce. He scored 35 not out off 19 balls, hitting four fours and two sixes. The West Indies bowlers offered him several hit-me deliveries but those still had to be put away. The way he picked up a slower delivery from Shepherd, sat deep in the crease and walloped it over the deep square leg fence attested intelligence.

Venkatesh embellished his batting performance with 2/23 from 2.1 overs, the type of all-round show his team has been searching for.

With the series already in the bag, the hosts made four changes to their playing eleven. Rituraj Gaikwad, Shreyas Iyer and Thakur came in, while Avesh Khan made his debut. The decision to open with Gaikwad and Kishan followed by Iyer at No. 3 was top-class leadership from Sharma. The skipper gave the youngsters the best positions to prosper, dropping himself down the order.

Gaikwad's four off Holder showcased his talent, but he perished soon after, closing the bat-face a little early. Kishan and Iyer got out after getting in. India's bench strength has been well documented. But the team management would take heart from the fact that India successfully defended totals in consecutive matches. A relatively inexperienced batting line-up responding positively to pressure situations was a big takeaway.

BRIEF SCORES: India 184 for 5 in 20 overs (Suryakumar Yadav 65, Venkatesh Iyer 35 not out; Roston Chase 1/23) defeated West Indies 167 for 9 in 20 overs (Nicholas Pooran 61; Harshal Patel 3/22) by 17 runs.

Rustam Akramov, coach who gave int'l debut to Bhaichung, passes away

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 20

FORMER INDIAN football team coach Rustam Akramov, who introduced the legendary Bhaichung Bhutia to the international game in 1995 and took the Blue Tigers to their highest-ever FIFA ranking, has died at his native place in Uzbekistan.

He was 73.

The legendary Uzbek coach died on February 15, according to the official website of the National Olympic Committee of Uzbekistan.

“The National Olympic Committee of Uzbekistan, the Council of Sports Veterans of Uzbekistan express their condolences to the family and friends of Rustam Akramov in connection with his death,” the Uzbekistan Olympic body said.

During his career, he made a huge contribution to the development of Uzbek and former Soviet football.

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) condoned the death of Akramov who was in charge of the national team from 1995 to 1997.

“We mourn the passing away of former India National Team head coach Rustam Akramov. May his soul rest in peace,” the AIFF's official Twitter handle said.

Akramov did not have any major trophy to show for during his short tenure with the Indian team but it was he who gave then Sikkimese teenager — Bhaichung Bhutia — his debut in a Nehru Cup match against Thailand in March 1995.

Akramov helped Bhutia to shape up as a striker instead of playing as an attacking midfielder at club level. The Indian team under Akramov was full of great players like IM Vijayan, Carlton Chapman and Bruno Coutinho, besides a young Bhutia.

No wonder the Akramov-coached Indian team rose to 94th in the February 1996 FIFA rankings — its highest ever. The team came close to this achievement in 2017 and 2018 when it rose to 96th.

Born in 1948 at a place near Tashkent, Akramov was a legend in his country as he was the first coach of the Uzbek national team after independence. During his two-year tenure from 1992-1994, the Uzbek national team won the Hiroshima Asian Games (1994) and the Central Asian Championship.

For his great contribution to the development of Uzbek football, he was awarded the Shukhrat medal and the title of Honoured Coach of the Republic of Uzbekistan by the government. In 1970, he graduated from the football department of the Uzbek State Institute of Physical Culture as a coach. He also completed postgraduate studies at the Moscow Institute of Physical Culture.

He had coached clubs in Algeria and was on the coaching staff of the national team of that country. He was also the coach of the Tashkent Pakhtakor and youth team of Moscow CSKA. He later worked as AFC technical director and FIFA instructor.

Akramov helped Bhutia to shape up as a striker instead of playing as an attacking midfielder at club level. The Akramov-coached Indian team rose to 94th in the February 1996 FIFA rankings, its highest ever.

CLOSING CEREMONY

Beijing pulls off a safe Winter Olympics in the midst of global pandemic

TED ANTHONY

BEIJING, FEBRUARY 20

A PILE of figure-skating rubble created by Russian misbehavior. A new Chinese champion — from California. An ace American skier who faltered and went home empty-handed. The end of the Olympic line for the world's most renowned snowboarder. All inside an anti-COVID “closed loop” enforced by China's authoritarian government.

The terrarium of a Winter Games that has been Beijing 2022 came to its end Sunday, capping an unprecedented Asian Olympic trifecta and sending the planet's most global sporting event off to the West for the foreseeable future, with no chance of returning to this corner of the world until at least 2030.

It was weird. It was messy and, at the same time, somehow sterile. It was controlled and calibrated in ways only Xi Jinping's China could pull off. And it was sequestered in a “bubble” that kept participants and the city around them — and, by extension, the sporadically watching world — at arm's length.

On Sunday night, Xi and International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach stood together as Beijing handed off to Milan-Cortina, site of the 2026 Winter Games. “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” kicked off a no-

tably Western-flavored show with Chinese characteristics as dancers with tiny, fiery snowflakes glided across the stadium in a ceremony that, like the opening, was headed by Chinese director Zhang Yimou.

Unlike the first pandemic Olympics in Tokyo last summer, which featured all but empty seats at the opening and closing, a modest but energetic crowd populated the seats of Beijing's “Bird's Nest” stadium. It felt somewhat incongruous — a show bursting with color and energy and enthusiasm and even joy, the very things that couldn't assert themselves inside authorities' COVID bubble.

By many mechanical measures, these Games were a success. They were, in fact, quite safe — albeit in the carefully modulated, dress-up-for-company way that authoritarian governments always do best. The local volunteers, as is usually the case, were delightful, helpful and engaging, and they received high-profile accolades at the closing.

“The Chinese people embraced these Games. Even in the closed loop, we could make this experience of excitement, of warmth, of hospitality and of friendliness,” Bach said Friday. There was snow — most of it fake, some of it real. The venues — many of them, like the Bird's Nest and the Aquatic Center, harvested from the 2008 edition of the Beijing Olympics — performed to expectations. One new locale,



The Olympic Rings are illuminated at the closing ceremony.

AP

Big Air Shougang, carved from a repurposed steel mill, was an appealingly edgy mashup of winter wonderland and rust-belt industrial landscape. TV ratings were down, but streaming viewership was up: By Saturday, NBC had streamed 3.5 billion minutes from Beijing,

compared to 2.2 billion in South Korea in 2018.

There were no major unexpected logistical problems, only the ones created deliberately to stem the spread of COVID in the country where the coronavirus first emerged more than two years ago.

And stemmed it seemed to be. As of Saturday, the segregated system that effectively turned Beijing into two cities — one sequestered, one proceeding very much as normal — had produced only 463 positive tests among thousands of visitors entering the bubble since Jan. 23. Not surprisingly, the state-controlled media loved this.

“The success in insulating the event from the virus and keeping disruption to sports events to a minimum also reflected the effectiveness and flexibility of China's overall zero-COVID policies,” the pro-government Global Times newspaper said, citing epidemiologists who say “the COVID-19 prevention experience accumulated from this Olympics can also inspire Chinese cities to adjust their policies.”

Look deeper, though, and a different story emerges about these Games.

Internationally, many critiqued them as the “authoritarian Olympics” and denounced the IOC for holding them in concert with a government accused of gross human rights violations against ethnic Uyghurs and Tibetans in its far west and harsh policies against Hong Kong democracy activists off its southeastern coast. Several Western governments boycotted by not sending any official delegations, though they sent athletes. For its part, China denied such allegations, as it typically does, and featured a Uyghur as part of its slate of Olympic

torch-carriers for the opening ceremony Feb. 4.

And then, of course, there were the Russians. And doping. Again. The 15-year-old Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva tested positive for using a banned heart medication. The result wasn't announced by anti-doping officials until after she'd won gold as part of the team competition, even though the sample was taken weeks earlier.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport cleared her to compete in the individual discipline, ruling that as a minor she had protected status. But Valieva, although heavily favored to win, fell several times during her free skate routine, landing her fourth place and prompting a cold reception from her embattled coach, Eteri Tutberidze. Valieva's Russian teammates took gold and silver, but on a night of drama, even the winners were in tears. The affair produced one possible legacy for Beijing: Valieva's ordeal has inspired talk of raising the minimum age for Olympic skaters from 15 to 17 or 18.

American skier Mikaela Shiffrin also came to Beijing with high expectations, only to see them dashed when she failed to finish three races. She left without any medal at all. In an image to remember, the TV cameras captured Shiffrin sitting dejectedly on the snow, head in hands, for several minutes.

AP