

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | MONDAY 1 | FEBRUARY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 33°C
Min: 18°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Thai 19
Tithi: Chaturthi
Star: Uthiram
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am
Yamagandam: 10.30 am to 12 noon

PRAYERS

Fajar: 5.22 am
Zohar: 12.27 pm
Asar: 3.41 pm
Maghrib: 6.09 pm
Isha: 7.23 pm

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+11,006)	(+106)
1,07,57,878	1,54,513

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+508)
TN: 8,38,340 12,356

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

10,33,50,614

DEATHS

22,33,799

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
219

worldometers.info

GST hits all-time high of

₹1.19 lakh crore in January

New Delhi: GST collections for January touched an all-time high of about Rs 1.20 lakh crore, the Finance Ministry said on Sunday. Its is 8 per cent higher than that in the same month last year. "The gross GST revenue collected in January 2021 till pm on 31.01.2021 is Rs 1,19,847 crore, of which CGST is Rs 21,923 crore, SGST is Rs 29,014 crore, IGST is Rs 60,288 crore and Cess is Rs 8,622 crore" the finance ministry said in a statement.

Delhi Cong passes resolution to make Rahul president

New Delhi: While the elections for Congress president are proposed in June, the Delhi Congress has passed a resolution to make Rahul Gandhi president of the party with immediate effect and in the process become the first state unit to start the campaign "Rahul Returns." AICC Incharge Shakti Singh Gohil passed a resolution in a meeting consisting of the senior leaders.

COUNTER

POINT



Let's hike the prices of placards, banners, flags, tents... to control rallies!

TN colleges to open for all students on Feb 8; classes for 9 and 11 to resume

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 31

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami announced on Sunday that colleges in the state will reopen on February 8 for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. As per the new standard operating procedures, colleges, which have been conducting classes for the final year students since the first week of December 2020, will be thrown open to all students. Students can avail hostel facilities too as hostels will be allowed to open on campuses. Classes 9 and 11 in all schools will also reopen on February 8. Classes 10 and 12 had already opened in the state



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Nadda slams Cong govt in Puducherry over graft



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Nirmala Sitharaman to present Union Budget today

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Shastri says PM's words will boost team's morale



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Country saddened by insult to tricolour: PM

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 31

Breaking his silence on the events that took place at the Red Fort just after the Republic Day parade on January 26, when unruly elements hoisted a flag other than the national tricolour at the iconic venue, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday that the "country was saddened by the insult to the tricolor on January 26 in Delhi".

Delivering his monthly 'Mann ki Baat' address, Mr Modi said, "The country was saddened by the insult to the tricolour on January 26 in Delhi. We have to infuse the times to come with new hope and novelty. Last year, we displayed exemplary patience and courage. This year too, we have to work hard to attain our resolves. We have to take our country forward at a faster pace."

This was the only direct, but brief, reference to the events of that day in his speech, that otherwise focused on India's vaccine programme, the Padma honours for "unsung heroes", innovation, self-reliance and development.

It may be recalled that the events had taken place in Delhi shortly after noon when farmers, mostly from Punjab, Haryana and west-

UP farmers pledge support for protest

SANJAY KAW | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

With more farmers streaming in to the protest sites at Delhi borders, Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait said on Sunday that the farmers' unions were ready for a respectable solution and would never ever agree to anything under pressure.

Thousands of people converged for a 'mahapanchayat' on Sunday in Baghat in western Uttar Pradesh, the third such congregation in the region in as many days. BKU leader Rajendra Chaudhary told the crowd,

ern UP, had taken out a tractor rally as part of their protests against the three farm laws. The government had backed the rationale behind the farm laws but their implementation has already been stayed by the Supreme Court.

On India's Covid vaccination drive, Mr Modi said: "Our vaccination programme too is turning out

"the movement has to be continued with full strength."

Mahapanchayats held in Muzaffarnagar and Mathura earlier had resolved to support the ongoing BKU-led protest at the Ghazipur border against the three new farm laws. In Punjab, Chief Minister Amarinder Singh has called an all-party meeting on Tuesday to show unity with the protesters and evolve a consensus on the way forward on the three contentious farm laws. As the stream of farmers heading for Delhi's borders remained incessant on the 67th day of the massive agitation. ■ **P4**

to be exemplary to the world. Today, India is undertaking the world's biggest Covid vaccine programme... We are (also) vaccinating our citizens faster than anywhere in the world. In just 15 days, India has vaccinated over 30 lakh corona warriors, whereas an advanced country such as America took 18 days to get the same done; Britain 36 days!"

CHENNAI TEST

TNCA IN TALKS WITH BCCI ON SPECTATOR ENTRY

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN. 31

In an effort to allow spectators for the second Test between India and England to be held at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium from February 13, the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association (TNCA) has initiated talks with the officials of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). The opening Test, starting on February 5, will be held behind closed doors.

TNCA officials are optimistic about letting fans in after the new guidelines issued by the home ministry on Saturday. The Central government's fresh Covid-19 guidelines permit crowds at fifty per cent capacity at sporting venues.

A TNCA official said the ball is in the BCCI's court. "There is not much time to make arrangements for the first Test. So we have asked BCCI to chalk out the modalities. We will get to know in a couple of days," the official said.

The last time Chennai hosted a Test match was in December 2016 when India beat England in a high-scoring game.

On a clean-up mission



Prime Minister Narendra Modi today praised Kottayam native Rajappan, who engages in cleaning the Vembanad Lake despite his physical challenges, during his 'Mann ki Baat'. — PTI

Dr Kafeel Khan named in list of Gorakhpur history-sheeters

Gorakhpur (UP), Jan. 31: Dr Kafeel Khan and 80 others have been included in the list of history-sheeters in Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh and they will be on the radar of police, officials said.

The 81 people have been included in the list on the instruction of senior superintendent of police Jogendra Kumar, they said.

The district now has a total of 1,543 history-sheeters, or persons with a criminal record.

Dr Khan's brother Adeel Khan, however, said that the history-sheet against the doctor was opened on June 18, 2020, but the information was given to the media on Friday.

In a video message on Saturday, Dr Khan said, "The UP government has opened my history-sheet.

They say that they will monitor me for life. Good, give two security guards who will keep an eye on me for 24 hours. At least I will be able to save myself from fake cases."

Dr Khan was arrested in January 2020 after a speech he had delivered at the Aligarh Muslim University on December 10, 2019 during the anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) protests. PTI

INDIA'S COVID TALLY RISES BY 13,052; FATALITY RATE 1.44 P.C.

New Delhi, Jan. 31: With 13,052 new coronavirus cases, India's Covid-19 tally has climbed to 1,07,46,183, while the number of people who have recuperated from the disease has surged to 1,04,23,125, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Sunday.

The national recovery rate has climbed to 96.99 per cent.

The death toll increased to 1,54,274 with 127 new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,04,23,125. The Covid-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.44 per cent.

The total Covid-19 active cases remained below 2 lakh for the 12th consecutive day.

There are 1,68,784 active cases of coronavirus infections in the country which comprises 1.57 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated.

The 127 new fatalities include 42 from Maharashtra, 18 from Kerala, 9 each from Chhattisgarh and West Bengal, 8 each from Delhi and Punjab. PTI

CENTRE ALLOWS 100 P.C. CAPACITY IN THEATRES



February, people can watch and enjoy films in theatres as we are allowing full occupancy in all cinema halls. Cinema halls can now open at 100 per cent capacity. We encourage as much online booking (of tickets) as possible," Mr Javadekar told

reporters here. "Staggered show timings will be encouraged so that the entry and exit of the crowd can be managed better. Sanitisation and all Covid-19 reopening guidelines, to be effective from February 1.

Mr Javadekar said he hopes people will "wel-

days after the ministry of home affairs (MHA) allowed cinema halls and theatres to operate with more people as per fresh Covid-19 reopening guidelines, to be effective from February 1.

Mr Javadekar said he hopes people will "wel-

come" this move as the government is working towards relaxing several restrictions imposed due to the abnormal challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic.

"Customers can also buy food and beverage from the stalls at the theatres and can carry it with them inside (the auditorium). These are all normal things but when the situation became abnormal due to Covid-19, we had to put these restrictions. These restrictions are on the verge of be relaxed," the

minister added.

Post lockdown, the Centre had allowed reopening of theatres and multiplexes in several regions, including Delhi, parts of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat on October 15, 2020 with 50 per cent occupancy, functioning with stringent dos and don'ts, keeping in view the new normal. Theatres in Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh opened last November, whereas cinema halls in Tamil Nadu and Kerala resumed operation in early January. — PTI

IN BRIEF

Hospital organises health camp for journo

Chennai, Jan 31: A private hospital in Chennai organised a health camp for journalists in the city.

Popular actor Vijay Sethupathy took part in the event organised by Soorya Hospital on the occasion of 12th meeting of Tamil Nadu Media and Journalists Welfare Association. More than 200 journalists attended.

Dr C.P. Sreekumar, MD, Sooriya Hospital, said, "We strongly believe that service to mankind is service to God, as a health partner we are here to ensure good health of all the journalists present here even during this pandemic. Oxygen saturation tests to monitor Covid presence is also prescribed to keep the media and journalists' community safe and healthy".

Sasikala's return would only put AIADMK in cleft stick

From P1

If the AIADMK leaders resist her taking charge, there is every possibility of many functionalities within the party gravitating towards her, creating differences and rifts in the otherwise monolithic party, benefiting the rivals in the elections. It looks like Ms Sasikala's return to Chennai would only put the AIADMK in a cleft stick for she had implicitly stated that she is not going into a sulk or hibernation or oblivion but continuing from where she left four years ago.

It does not matter that she would not be able to contest elections for another six years. For even during her heyday, she was only calling the shots from behind the screens as a confidante of Jayalalithaa and earning the support of many party functionaries. The only question, however, is if the AIADMK will be able to pull it up in the elections as it used to then without the charisma and magnetism of Jayalalithaa.

Nadda slams Cong govt in Puducherry over graft

Puducherry, Jan. 31: BJP president J P Nadda on Sunday asserted his party would sweep the coming Puducherry assembly elections and assured people of the union territory a corruption-free and development-oriented government.

Alleging that corruption was rampant under the Congress government led by Chief Minister V Narayanasamy, he said the BJP would win 23 of the 30 seats in the union territory assembly in the polls, likely in the next few months.

The BJP in the UT has received a shot in the arm with former minister A Namasiyayam joining the party along with a former

MLA recently. "...for the last 35 years under the Congress rule, 52 per cent of the population in the UT is below the poverty line," Nadda claimed, adding corruption extended to admissions in colleges offering professional courses as well.

Addressing a grand first election public meeting here, Nadda said the Congress government did not conduct local body elections for a long time and Central seats in colleges were not allotted to Puducherry students "due to corruption".

While 70 per cent was the grant in aid to Puducherry from the Centre during former Prime Minister A B Vajpayee's tenure, it was

cut to 30 per cent when Narayanasamy became a Minister at the Centre, he claimed.

Puducherry went into a debt trap while 76 per cent of youth were unemployed and employees belonging to the cooperative sector like Khadi Cooperative Federation have not been paid salary for over four years, he claimed.

"When Narayanasamy was a Central minister, he waived Rs 5,000 crore loan of Jharkhand, but did not waive the loan of Puducherry," Nadda said adding this was the type of 'justice' the present Chief Minister did meted out to the UT.

Senior leaders were leaving the Congress, he said

and welcomed them into the Saffron party's fold, expressing confidence that the 'lotus' was set to bloom in Puducherry and capture power.

"Kalamam is going to grow, Kamalam is going to blossom here in Puducherry... we will win 23 plus seats and will form a government..." the BJP national chief said. "When we are talking about one nation, one ration card, we find that the ration shops are closed in Puducherry," he added.

While the Centre was for opening more industries to nurture growth, textile mills and industrial units in Puducherry were being closed down in view of 'mismanagement' and 'corruption.'

—PTI

AIADMK must not delay alliance talks: Premalatha

A ARUL PALANI | DC CHENNAI, JAN. 31

Without wasting time, the AIADMK should immediately initiate talks on its alliance as the Assembly election is around the corner, said Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK) treasurer, Premalatha Vijaykanth, here on Sunday.

Speaking to reporters after a party meeting here on Sunday, Premalatha, wife of 'Captain' Vijaykanth, founder of DMDK, said the AIADMK, a major ally in the alliance, should soon begin poll alliance talks, and delaying it will not be in any way helpful for the parties.

Premalatha said, "We are ready for the assembly elections. We have appointed zonal and district func-

tionaries in all the 234 constituencies to oversee preparatory work. Booth-committee work is also going on in full swing. We will launch our campaign after the general committee meeting." She said the DMDK still remains in the AIADMK-led front, which comprises the BJP, TMC, PMK, DMDK and other parties.

A final decision on the alliance would be taken at the party's executive and general council. 'Captain' will take a decision on whether to face the polls as an ally of the AIADMK, or to go it alone, based on the party cadre's opinion. Asked if she would contest the poll, she said, "If cadres and Captain desire that, my voice will definitely be heard in the Legislative Assembly."

Talking about Pattali Makkal Katchi's (PMK) demand for internal reservation for Vanniyars in jobs and education within Most Backward Classes quota, she said "If people from every caste demand reservation, you (reporters) should know what will happen in society."

"Captain works for the welfare of all sections of people cutting across caste and communal barriers," she added. Premalatha had recently said that the party wants to contest 41 seats as it did during the 2011 assembly polls, as part of the AIADMK alliance. The DMDK, however, came out from the alliance later.

During the last polls, the DMK spewed a number of false promises to get votes, she added.

Gold paste in capsules recovered from passengers' stomachs

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, JAN. 31

Customs officers at the Chennai Airport busted smuggling with a new modus operandi in which they had swallowed capsules of gold paste. The officers seized 4.15 kg gold worth ₹2.17 crores.

Based on information, 8 passengers - Ganakavalli (56) Nishanthi (30) Kala PeradeepKumar (53) and Jayaraj (55) all from Tiruchirappalli, Jegatheesh (37) and Ghabar Khan (52) of Pudukkottai and Mohammed Hikkam (25) and Thasleem Fathima (34) from Ramanathapuram - who had arrived from Dubai and Sharjah by an Emirates flight and an Air Arabia flight on January 22 were intercepted at the exit by officers on suspicion they were carrying gold.

On questioning, they admitted to concealing gold paste capsules in their stomach which they had swallowed before flying. They also voluntarily

requested in writing that action be taken under the Customs Act to recover the capsules with gold paste. Accordingly, they were admitted to Stanley Government hospital to recover the capsules under expert medical supervision.

They were fed with a heavy diet for eight days to facilitate natural ejection of the capsules. Customs officers said that each capsule was 1.1-1.7 cm in diameter and weighing in the range of 15-24 grams. A total 161 capsules weighing 2.88 kg and valued at ₹1.28 crore was recovered from the stomach of the 8 passengers.

Further, 8 bundles containing 61 capsules weighing 1.18 kg gold and valued at ₹51.36 lakhs were also recovered. In addition, 3 gold chains, 8 gold bits, 8 gold rings, 2 bundles of gold paste totally valued at ₹30.64 lakhs were recovered from their handbags and trouser pockets. In all, 4.15 kg gold valued at ₹2.17 crore was seized under the Customs Act.

Elderly man found murdered in bus stand

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, JAN. 31

Residents of Perungulathur on Saturday night found the body of an unidentified man in the bus stand. It was found in a pool of blood when the police reached the spot. The deceased was later identified by the police as John Jayasingh (67), a resident of Padappai in Tambaram. He was running a scrap shop in the neighbourhood, police sources said.

Sources said that John had reserved a bus ticket to Thoothukudi on Saturday from Perungulathur bus stand. John's employee Kovil Raj is said to have dropped him at the bus stand on Saturday night. However, he went missing and his body was found with injuries a few hours later.

Peerkankaranai police sent the body to Chromepet government hospital for post-mortem. Police registered a case regarding the matter and have also launched a search for Kovil Raj who is absconding. Further investigations are underway.



Cyclathon adds energy to fuel awareness campaign

Chennai, Jan. 31: As part of mega events in a month-long fuel awareness rally, a 'Saksham Cycle Day' was organised at Manali. More than 500 people participated in the 7.7 km long rally that started and ended at CPCL polytechnic college. Mr S.N. Pandey, MD, CPCL Centre in the picture) inaugurated the rally. A message from Mr Dharmendra Pradhan, Minister Petroleum & Natural gas read "The consumption of fossil fuels also shows a steady growth and it is imperative that adequate emphasis is laid on switching to a cleaner form of energy and subsequently work on measures to enhance energy efficiency." Actor Ganesh Venkatraman (Red T-shirt) also participated.

—DC

COFFEE-BREAK

Your day today By Dr C.V.B. Subrahmanyam

Aries: Your selfish attitude could harm family. Communications will increase. A solution to a complex problem is likely. There will be some increase in income from extra effort.

Taurus: Material things may dominate. Control your words to avoid negative influences. Reflection and prayer will provide positive outcomes.

Gemini: Consolidate and maximise professional and personal gains. Balance assertiveness with diplomacy. Networking and being proactive will help at work.

Cancer: Don't take on too many commitments. Discussing issues with your partner and objectively tackling problems will minimise complications later.

Leo: Your intellect will lead to recognition. You may take up a self-improvement project. Time management and innovative thinking will help you get through difficult tasks.

Virgo: Tension and differences with relatives are possible. You will get noticed at work and this will result in better career options soon. A time for words and actions rather than contemplation.

You share your b'day with

Harry Styles is an English singer and songwriter. He is one of the member of the boy band named One Direction which is one of the best selling bands of all times.

Libra: Focus on neglected areas of life. Take loved ones' views into account. A change of mind is likely. Be careful in accepting new responsibilities.

Scorpio: Be proactive about your ideas and market them well. Romantic relationships could be stressed. You can get through a testing time if you adjust.

Sagittarius: Work could keep you busy. Romantic relationships may be tense. High energy levels and self-confidence will help you deal with difficult associates and assignments.

Capricorn: Spend some time by yourself to regain peace. An excellent time to restructure finances. Create harmony with the outside world. Emotions are intense at work and at home.

Aquarius: Team work will produce desired results. Negotiations could get derailed if you are uncompromising. People may need tangible information to foresee end results.

Pisces: You might find it difficult to focus. Ideas may need to be fine-tuned before sharing with others. Don't discard impulses or creative ideas. Unexpected expenses are possible. You may get time to socialise.

bridge PHILLIP ALDER

IT TAKES IMAGINATION TO FIND A FALSECARD

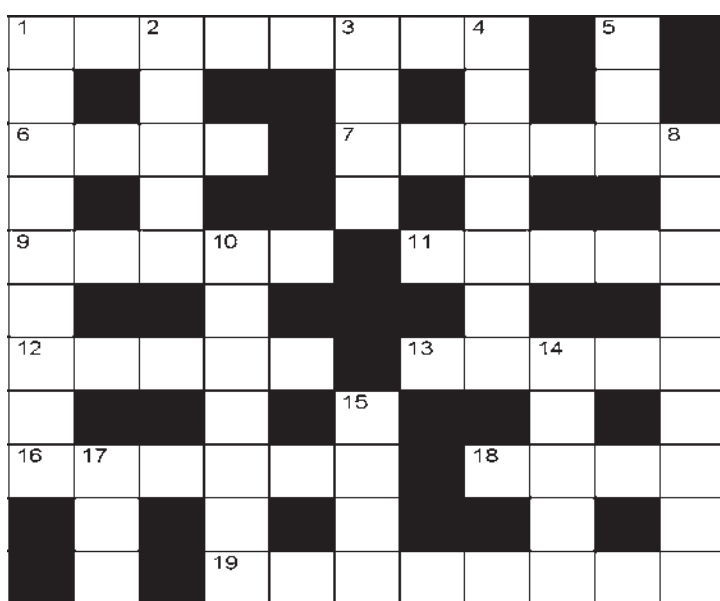
Tom Stoppard, in his play 'Artist Descending a Staircase,' wrote, "Skill without imagination is craftsmanship and gives us many useful objects, such as wickerwork picnic baskets. Imagination without skill gives us modern art." Imagination with skill gives us bridge magicians. See if you can spot an imaginative piece of sorcery in today's deal. What happens in the four-heart contract after West leads the spade

queen?

North made a negative double, which promised four hearts, length in the unbid major. If he had fewer than 10 high-card points, he might have had five or six hearts. Note that North did well to look for a 4-4 heart fit and not plunge straight into three no-trump, a contract that would have gone down two.

If we have an unimaginative player sitting West, the play goes like this: spade to

QUICK CROSSWORD



Across
1. Drink (8)
6. Circle (4)
7. Rod user (6)
9. Delete (5)
11. Bus station (5)
12. Chemically unreactive (5)
13. Perfect (5)
16. Mental giant (6)
18. Prima donna (4)
19. Make empty (8)

Down
1. Accepting as true (9)
2. Stringed instrument (5)
3. Absent (4)
4. Very academic person (7)
5. Small (3)
8. Strike back (9)
10. Misuser (anag) (7)
14. Heath plant (5)
15. Continent (4)
17. Unit of work, energy (3)

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER
Across: 1. Ironed, 3. Brig, 7. Team, 8. Kitten, 10. Blocked, 13. Congeal, 16. Sprint, 17. Agog, 18. Idea, 19. Letter.
Down: 1. Iota, 2. Orally, 4. Rota, 5. Gentle, 6. Lineage, 9. Account, 11. Muesli, 12. Caught, 14. True, 15. Agar.

Word Mine

C
T
O
N
B
T
M
A
A

TODAY'S RATINGS: 7 AVERAGE; 8 GOOD; 10 OUTSTANDING

How many words of four or more letters can you make from the letters shown in today's puzzle? In making a word, each letter may be used once only. Each word must contain the letter at the top of the pyramid. There should be at least one nine letter word. Plurals, foreign words and proper names are not allowed.

West
♠ A K Q
♥ 7 5 4
♦ A 7
♣ A 7
South
♠ 2 10 9 8
♥ A J 4
♦ A J 4
♣ 10 9 8
Declarer: South
Vulnerable: Both
1st 1st 1st 1st
2nd 2nd 2nd 2nd
3rd 3rd 3rd 3rd
4th 4th 4th 4th
Opening lead ♠ 4

Jumble

OVFRA
BBIER
MLINEB
SWDAOH

Answers tomorrow
Jumbles: PLANK, LXCCL, GLOSL, CHROMAL
Answer: The increasingly forgetful which used software on her computer that had a — SPELL CHECKER

the king, heart to the queen, spade to the ace, club ace, club queen overtaken by the king, and club jack, discarding the spade four from the board. Declarer ruffs his last spade and plays another trump. He loses only two hearts and one diamond. A sneaky West, though, wins the first round of trumps with his ace, not the queen! Then, when South wins the next trick with dummy's spade ace, he may think that he can afford to



take another heart finesse and, if trumps are 3-2, draw trumps. Then he would be able to drive out the diamond ace and claim an overtrick. Here, though, West produces the heart queen out of his wickerwork picnic basket. Then he cashes the spade 10 and diamond ace for down one.

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CALVIN AND HOBBS | Bill Watterson



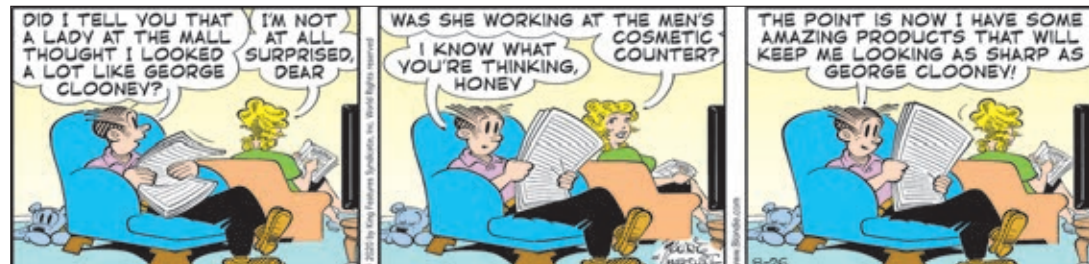
THE WIZARD OF ID | Parker and Hartsd



ARCHIE | Bill Henry Scarpelli & craig boldman



BLONDIE | Dean Young and John Marshall



ANDY CAPP | Reg Smythe



TARZAN | Edgar Rice Burroughs



OTHER STORY

Pondy logs 21 new cases, 1 death takes toll to 648

Puducherry, Jan 31: Puducherry reported 21 new coronavirus cases while a 78-year old patient succumbed to the infection pushing the toll to 648, a top Health department official said on Sunday. The 21 fresh cases were identified at the end of the examination of 2,352 samples, Director of Health and Family Welfare services S Mohan said in a release.

The overall tally of COVID-19 in the union territory rose to 39,068, he added. Of the new infections, the Puducherry region reported 17, followed by Mahe (3) and Karaikal (1) while Yanam did not report any fresh case, the Health department Director said. —PTI

Vaccine hesitancy: Govt to rope in private hospitals

T. SUDHEESH | DC CHENNAI, JAN. 31

At a time when the Covid19 vaccination drive has crossed the one lakh mark in the state, the government has decided to rope in more private hospitals to step up the work.

Health secretary J Radhakrishnan told DC that the deputy director of health was directed to provide assent to all private hospitals having manpower of at least 150 staff members, to start the vaccination sessions.

“Yes, we lagged behind, mainly because six back-to-back public holidays came to the state, stalling the vaccination drive. Now,

we have already roped in a few private hospitals. With more private hospitals joining the drive, there will definitely be improvement. The directorate of public health (DPH) has already decided to increase the number of vaccination centres. We are also seeking support from organisations like the Indian Medical Association (IMA), to build confidence among people,” he said.

Dr C.N. Raja, president, IMA, Tamil Nadu state branch, hailed the decision of the government to get private hospitals involved in the process. “Private hospitals have manpower and resources to effectively collect and analyse data. In

the process of alleviating hesitancy among people, data is paramount. Hence, private hospitals can help the government get rid of the ‘hesitancy challenge’ it faces today,” he said.

Dr Raja, who is one among the early receivers of the vaccine in the state, also pointed out that it was time that politicians and celebrities came forward to take vaccines, which in turn would build public confidence. “We are seeing a lot of mis-information on social media and newspapers. The government should step in to deal with fake news with an effective awareness campaign,” he said.

Dr Rex Sargunam, presi-

dent, TN Health Development Association, demanded an effective vaccination strategy to improve the situation. First of all, experts who are holding key positions in scientific institutions should come forward voluntarily to take the vaccine. It will build a lot of trust among common people. Now, many are hesitant and the government is unwilling to make all trial details public. This has triggered the spread of rumours,” he said.

The state has planned to vaccinate 16 million people by this year with nearly 0.6 million health workers to be vaccinated in the first phase.

Depressed, man ends life

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, JAN. 31

A 24-year-old newly married man ended his life in Chengalpatt’s Olalur. He was reportedly depressed after learning about his wife’s previous marriage on Saturday night. The deceased has been identified as P. Yuvaraj (24), a resident of Olalur who was working in a private company in the district.

According to the police, Yuvaraj was married to Sangeetha (30), head constable at Chengalpatt All Women Police station four months back. Meanwhile, a few days ago, Yuvaraj learnt about Sangeetha’s first marriage and her eight-year-old daughter. This caused frequent quarrels between the couple. Upset over this, Yuvaraj left Sangeetha to live with his relatives in the city.

On Saturday night while he was alone at home, he allegedly consumed poison. He was rushed to Chengalpatt government hospital, where he passed away in the early hours of Sunday.

Based on the complaint from the family of the deceased, Chengalpatt Town police registered a case. Police have also recovered a suicide note written by Yuvaraj accusing Sangeetha of his death. Investigations are underway.

Meanwhile, the relatives of the deceased staged a protest outside the Chengalpatt government hospital refusing to accept the body after post-mortem. They later left with the body after police assured immediate action against the woman.

Seeks verifiable, independent functioning of software, hardware

Call to re-design electronic voting

A ARUL PALANI | DC CHENNAI, JAN. 31

Stating that EVMs cannot be assumed to be tamper-proof, the Citizens’ Commission on Elections (CCE) urged the Election Commission of India (ECI) to redesign the electronic voting system (EVS), where the software and hardware has interdependency in functioning, in order to be verifiable or auditable.

This does not imply that the software or hardware cannot be used, but the correctness of the election outcome cannot be entirely dependent on their working correctly. Pre-determined and pre-set test patterns are known to be inadequate for verification of the integrity of an EVM. The present EVM system is not verifiable, and is therefore unfit for democratic elections. To ensure independence between software and hardware, end-to-end verifiable systems with provable guarantees of correctness must be introduced, and the ECI must declare its publicly verifiable guarantees against spurious vote injections.

The CCE said that if the correctness of an EVM cannot be established, then it is practically impossible to state whether an EVM can be hacked or not. For reasons that an EVM has not yet been found to have been hacked, provides no guarantee that it cannot be hacked. Thus, elections must be conducted assuming that the

EVMs may possibly be tampered.

There must be a post-election audit of the EVM counts against manual counting of the VVPAT slips. In fact, it may be sufficient to tamper only a few EVMs to swing an election if a contest is close. Thus, in practice, it may be necessary to test more EVMs than even what the civil society and political parties may demand (30 percent and 50 percent respectively), to verify and ascertain the results.

The VVPAT system should be re-designed to be fully voter-verified. The voter should be able to approve the VVPAT printout before the vote is finally cast, and be able to cancel it if there is an error.

The integrity of VVPAT slips and EVMs during the time after polling and before counting and auditing must be ensured in a manner that is verifiable by all (and especially the candidates). There should be no trust requirement on the custody chain.

There must be a stringent audit of the electronic vote count before the results are declared. The audit should not be based on ad hoc methods, but by counting a statistically significant sample of the VVPAT slips, according to rigorous and well established statistical audit techniques. The audit may in some cases - depending on the margin of victory - require a full manual counting of VVPAT slips.

Legislation must be enacted to decide what is to be

done if the audits reveal a problem. Such legislation should ideally be based on well established statistical procedures, and not on subjective decisions of a few officials.

The voting system design should be subjected to independent (of the government and ECI) review, and the integrity of the election process should be subjected to independent audit. The findings should be made public. In particular, all design details should be transparent and publicly available.

Pre-determined and pre-set test patterns are known to be inadequate for verification of the integrity of an EVM. The present EVM system is not verifiable and therefore is unfit for democratic elections. To ensure independence between software and hardware, end-to-end verifiable systems with provable guarantees of correctness must be introduced, and the ECI must declare its publicly verifiable guarantees against spurious vote injections.

The CCE, which is headed by former Supreme Court Judge Justice Madan Lokur, comprises former Judge, Madras High court, Justice Hari Paranthaman, Prof. Arun Kumar, economist, Dr John Dayal, Civil Society activist, Dr Subhashis Banerjee, Professor, Computer Science, IIT, Delhi, computer experts and other activists.



TN Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami greets a child after giving him polio drops in Madurai airport on Sunday.

—DC

Now, UTS mobile app for Chennai commuters

A ARUL PALANI | DC CHENNAI, JAN. 31

For the benefit of suburban passengers, booking of unreserved tickets through ‘mobile unreserved ticketing system’ (UTS - on - Mobile Application) will be resumed and enabled in Chennai from Monday.

A Southern Railway release stated that tickets for suburban trains can be booked through UTS Mobile app only in suburban sections of Chennai suburban terminus - Tiruvallur, Royapuram - Gummidipoondi, Chennai Beach - Chengalpattu and Chennai

Beach - Velachery (MRTS).

In view of the pandemic, mobile ticketing facility will be available round-the-clock, except between 6:30 am and 9:30 am, and 4 pm and 7 pm. For now, season tickets and platform tickets will not be issued through the App. The journey should commence within one hour of ticket booking through the mobile App.

UTS Mobile App can be downloaded from Google play store and Apple store. The UTS on Mobile provides multiple e-payment options for topping up of ‘Rail Wallet’ (R-Wallet). Recharge of R-Wallet can be done online

through IRCTC website (www.irctc.co.in) as well as in station ticket counters.

Exclusive counters for Mobile App recharge will be opened at suburban counters at Dr MGR Chennai Central, Chennai Egmore, Chennai Beach, Mambalam, Tambaram, Perambur, Avadi, Tiruvotiyur and at Chennai Park Town and Velachery (MRTS), during non-peak hours based on requirement.

For the time being, the facility of UTS on Mobile App will be available only in Chennai suburban areas for booking tickets in suburban train services.

Commuters will receive five percent cash bonus while recharging on UTS App and for every Rs 100 R-wallet recharge. Tickets can be booked up to Rs 105. As for the geo-fencing aspect, tickets can be booked through UTS Application in the range of five-kms to 30 metres radius of suburban railway stations. Within 30 metres closer limit to railway stations, UTS App bookings will not be possible.

Chennai suburban commuters are requested to use the App for ease of booking unreserved tickets, thus obviating the need for queuing up at ticket counters.

High Court reprieves cop charged with rape

J.STALIN | DC CHENNAI, JAN. 31

A policeman, who suffered punishment of compulsory retirement for allegedly promising to marry a minor girl and taking her from her house several times and molesting her modesty and committing rape on her and then married another woman, got reprieve from the Madras high court.

The court remanded the matter back to the authorities for considering a much lesser punishment which should not amount to dismissal from service or compulsory retirement, as there was no material to come to a finding that the delinquent had outraged the modesty of the minor girl or molested her or committed rape on her.

The First Bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthil Kumar Ramamoorthy set aside an order of a single judge which upheld the orders of the authorities compulsorily retiring the policeman.

Disposing of the policeman’s appeal, the bench said the first charge levelled was in two parts - the delinquent had promised to marry the minor girl and had taken the minor girl from her house “and molested her modesty and committed rape...”.

The bench said what weighed with the disciplinary authority was that several witnesses had said the delinquent was found to be intimate with the minor girl and was found in the company of the minor girl several times. The witnesses also claimed that he had promised to marry her.

It was possible, in such circumstances, considering the nature of the intimacy as brought out by the witnesses, for the adjudicating authority to hold, on a balance of probabilities, that the delinquent’s denial of his promise to marry the minor girl may

not have been truthful. However, merely because he may have promised to marry the minor girl or the disciplinary authority may have been convinced on the state of the evidence that he may have or was likely to have proposed marriage to the minor girl or promised to marry her would not entail that a charge of outraging the modesty of the minor girl or of molesting her or committing rape would stand established, the bench added.

The bench said since the first charge, worded as it was and in a sense loaded, both parts had to be affirmatively established for the harsh punishment of compulsory retirement from service. The failure to live up to a promise to marry cannot be equated with the commission of rape.

What was evident from the appreciation of the evidence by the disciplinary authority was that the intimacy between the two was established but there was not a shred of evidence alluded to, to indicate that any physical violence was resorted to. In such circumstances, it was only the first part of the first charge that can, at best, be found to have been established; certainly, not the second and the more grievous part, the bench added.

Considering the extent of the charges that was proved, the punishment appears to be shocking. “As a consequence, the judgment and order impugned dated September 18, 2020 is set aside as it does not address the real issues and fails to take into account relevant considerations. The findings in the disciplinary order of June 30, 2005 are accepted to the extent that the charge of promise to marry was established and the delinquent did not deliver on such promise,” the bench added.

PIL to lay roads only after removing existing road layer

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, JAN. 31

A Public Interest Litigation has been filed in the High court to restrain the authorities from laying roads on highways, streets, lanes or topping any public movement area without removing/scraping the existing layer of the road. The plea calls for a direction to the authorities to ensure that roads are laid within existing levels in TN.

The First Bench com-

prising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Senthil Kumar Ramamoorthy, before whom the PIL filed by Dr.S.R.Saravanan of Neelangarai came up for hearing, ordered notice to the Union and State governments and adjourned further hearing of the case by four weeks.

According to petitioner, over the years, the roads were being laid above the existing layer of roads leading to a situation where the buildings and superstruc-

tures, which were elevated from the road margins, have gone down. These buildings include heritage structures, religious institutions, government offices, high court buildings, etc. In the normal course of laying the roads on highways arterial road and streets, a layer of bitumen mixed with blue metal was laid and pressed with a road roller without scraping and milling the existing road level. Due to this indiscriminate practice,

the roads gain height while the buildings go down much below road level.

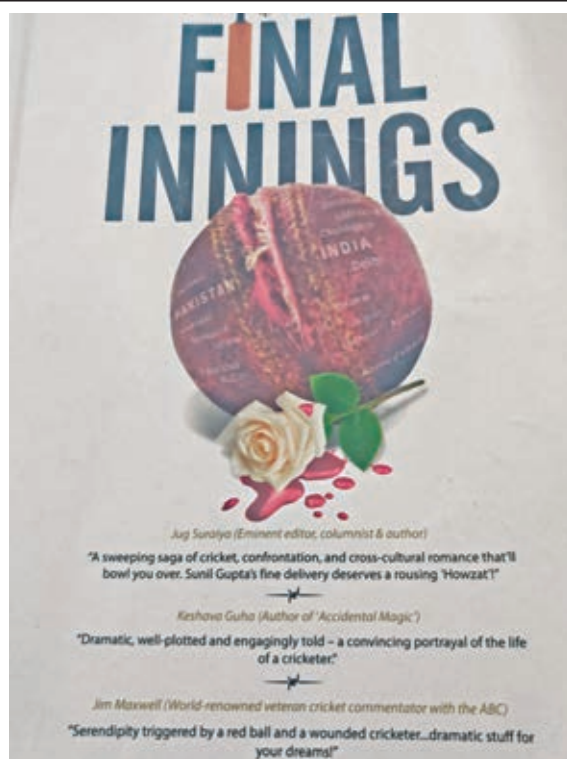
Even in some places where officials or contractors seem to scrape existing roads but it was not done in an effective manner and the level of the roads is raised by a minimum of five inches. He was given to understand that the officials involved in sanctioning the road laying works and tenders do not input scientific analysis; instead the roads were

being laid over and over again, he added.

He said the officials were well aware that the indiscriminate laying of roads without milling or scraping the existing road margins leads to the buildings going down and the roads going up, resulting in inundation during rainy season inside the building premises, flooding residential houses and other properties and blocking the storm water drains and sewage drains. This causes

much hindrance to the public at large.

The petitioner made a representation dated Aug. 31, 2020 to the authorities to desist from laying roads on highways, streets, lanes or lay any toppings on public movement areas without removing the existing layer of the road and ensure that the roads were laid in the existing level within the state of Tamil Nadu. But there was no response till today and hence he filed the PIL.



Howzat! Here's cricket fiction

R. MOHAN | DC CHENNAI, JAN. 31

Sunil Gupta’s ‘Final Innings’ (Notion Press) is “a voyage deep into the dark, choppy and uncharted waters. It is not about the T-20 leagues, nor about corruption and match-fixing. It is a thought provoking and deeply moving human story which happens to be set in the world of cricket.”

The author explains - “The basic underpinning was about an

Indian coaching in Pakistan, of course, and what an anti-establishment story it would be, and why, but as I write it became a mirror for the fraught times we face in the subcontinent today, the result of continued failures of the board, both in India and Pakistan.”

Considering cricket has not been able to mend relations with Pakistan, a book of cricket fiction is not likely to make a break-

through but the author’s feelings must be respected as he sees so many commonalities in life here and there. He explores it with his fictional hero, Randas Upeti, who is called upon to rouse humans “to strive for cooperation, harmony, collective responsibility and the ability to lift ourselves and our world above petty politics and needless controversies and disagreements which so beset us daily.”

SHORT TAKES

MP COP TOUCHES BJP LEADER'S FEET, STIRS ROW

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, JAN. 31

A police inspector in Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh stirred a row when he touched the feet of state BJP president V.D. Sharma late on Saturday evening.

A video showing Madhavnagar police station in-charge Dinesh Prajapati touching Sharma's feet as the latter landed in Ujjain by a bus on Saturday evening to attend a party meeting in the city, went viral on Sunday.

The video showed Sharma patting the cop on his shoulder after being received by the latter in Ujjain. Later, the police inspector was seen touching Sharma's feet, in the video.

The cop later conceded that it was not proper on his part to touch feet of the BJP leader when he was in uniform.

"But, there is a human being behind the uniform. I touched his (Sharma's) feet since he was my senior in our college days. We also have family relations", he explained before the reports while trying to justify his actions.

Incidentally, a circular has been issued by the inspector general of police of a region in Madhya Pradesh asking the police to do away with the practice of touching feet of seniors while receiving them.

Congress has taken a jibe at ruling BJP over the incident.

MAOIST LEADER GUNNED DOWN IN ODISHA

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, JAN. 31

A Maoist leader was on Saturday night killed during an encounter with a combined team of Special Operations Group (SOG) and District Voluntary Force (DVF) in a forest near Nunkhari in Odisha's Kandhamal district, reports said on Sunday.

The Malkangiri district police sources said the security forces reportedly received "concrete inputs" about the presence of the Maoists' presence and their camp in Nunkhari forest and consequently launched an operation.

Soon after the combined forces raided the camp, the rebels opened fire at them. The security personnel immediately retaliated. The gun battle continued for around three hours. Unable to face the indiscriminating fire of the joint forces, the Maoists fled the area and slipped into the wilds.

The security personnel recovered the body of the slain extremist near the camp. The deceased Maoist, believed to be a senior rank leader, was yet to be identified.

Sources said that the rebels had set up a camp in the forest and planned to unleash fresh violence in the nearby areas.

NADDA SLAMS CONG OVER GRAFT IN PUDUCHERRY

Puducherry, Jan. 31: BJP president J.P. Nadda on Sunday asserted his party would sweep the coming Puducherry Assembly elections and assured people of the Union Territory a corruption-free and development-oriented government.

Alleging that corruption was rampant under the Congress government led by Chief Minister V. Narayanasamy, he said the BJP would win 23 of the 30 seats in the Union Territory Assembly in the polls, likely in the next few months.

The BJP in the UT has received a shot in the arm with former minister A. Namasivayam joining the party along with a former MLA recently.

"For the last 35 years under the Congress rule, 52 per cent of the population in the UT is below the poverty line," Nadda claimed, adding corruption extended to admissions in colleges offering professional courses as well.

Addressing a grand first election public meeting here, Nadda said the Congress government did not conduct local body elections for a long time and Central seats in colleges were not allotted to Puducherry students "due to corruption".

While 70 per cent was the grant in aid to Puducherry from the Centre during former prime minister A.B. Vajpayee's tenure, it was cut to 30 per cent when Narayanasamy became a minister at the Centre, he claimed.

Don't want govt to bow down: Tikait

Naresh Tikait says government must prepare an environment conducive for talks

From Page 1

Mr Tikait said the Republic Day violence was "part of a conspiracy" and the government should nab all those behind it. "The violence on January 26 was part of a conspiracy. The Tricolor is over and above everything. We will never let anyone disrespect it. It will not be tolerated."

Mr Tikait, who is camping at Ghazipur border and has now become face of the agitation, also urged the government to release farmers who were arrested in connection with the tractor rally. "The government should release our men and prepare an environment conducive for talks. We will honor and respect the dignity of the Prime Minister. Farmers don't want that the government or Parliament to bow down before them...But we will also ensure that the self-respect of farmers is protected. A middle way should be found. Talks should be held."

After the mahapanchayat in Baraut in UP's Baghpat district, two more mahapanchayat's are being planned in UP's Bijnor and Haryana's Jind districts to mobilise support for protesting farmers'. While the Bijnor mahapanchayat has been scheduled for Monday, the one at Jind will be held on Wednesday.

Prominent Gurjar leader of western UP Madan Bhaiyya has also extended his community's support to farmers'.

Chaudhary Surendra Singh of the Desh Khap and Chaudhary Subhash Singh of the Chaubisi Khap are among key regional farmer leaders attending Sunday's 'sarv khap mahapanchayat', where supporters of Ajit Singh-led Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) were also present. "Beshak Dilli mein police walon ne kisano ko dande maare hon, par hum aaj bhi bolte hain 'Jai Jawan Jai Kisan'(No doubt policemen hit farmers with batons in Delhi, but we are nevertheless saying: hail soldiers, hail farmers)," a local leader said.

EX-TMC MINISTER DUBS HEALTH SCHEME A HOAX

Howrah (WB), Jan. 31: A day after joining the BJP, former West Bengal minister Rajib Banerjee on Sunday claimed that the Trinamool Congress government's much-publicised "Swasthya Sathi" scheme is a hoax as funds are insufficient.

Attacking the TMC government for launching public outreach programmes just months before the assembly elections, he said that the BJP, after coming to power, will ensure that services reach the doorstep of people throughout the year.

"The funds required for the (Swasthya Sathi) scheme are much more than the West Bengal government's annual budget," Mr Banerjee said on the free medical insurance scheme of Rs five lakh for each family in the state.

The state government has not implemented the Ayushman Bharat health insurance programme, claiming that Swasthya Sathi is much better than the central scheme.

When someone joins the TMC from another party, it is claimed that the person has done so for the welfare of the state, Mr Banerjee said adding that when someone leaves, he is termed a traitor.

This is an indication of the beginning of the end for the TMC, he said.

There is no need for the TMC to remain in power as the party claimed long back that 99 per cent of development work had already been undertaken by it, Mr Banerjee said in his first public meeting after being inducted into the saffron party in presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi on Saturday.

Though some work has been done in the state, a lot more is needed, he said.



Farmers hold a tricolor to protest against the new farm laws at Ghazipur in New Delhi on Sunday.

— PTI

Scribes held: Media bodies flay action

New Delhi, Jan. 31: Media bodies on Sunday condemned the police action against two journalists who were picked up during the farmers' protests at Delhi's Singhu border for allegedly misbehaving with police personnel.

They said such crackdowns impinge on the media's right to report freely and interferes with its right to freedom of expression. Freelance journalist Mandep Punia and Dharmender Singh (with Online News India) were detained by Delhi Police last evening for allegedly misbehaving with personnel on duty.

While Singh was later released, the police arrested Punia on Sunday. The

Indian Women's Press Corps, Press Club of India and the Press Association demanded Punia's immediate release and said no journalist should be disturbed while carrying out their duties at any place.

"Such crackdowns impinge on the media's right to report freely and interferes with our right to freedom of expression, and freedom of the press as guaranteed by the Constitution of India," the bodies said in a joint statement.

They said Punia has been reporting on the farmers' agitation right from the beginning and his arrest "is part of the government crackdown on journalists to prevent them from doing their job independently and freely."

Cops issue notice to more farmer leaders

New Delhi, Jan. 31: The Delhi Police has sent over 50 fresh notices to people, including farmer leaders, in connection with the violence that broke out during the tractor parade on Republic Day, officials said on Sunday.

The Delhi Police had earlier issued notices against 44 people.

The police have identified several people and sent notices to them, a senior police officer said, adding that the process will continue further.

According to the police, some tractors, used during the violence, have also been identified and notices are being sent to their owners.

The process of issuing notices is taking time as

many people are not residents of Delhi and letters are being to their addresses, police said.

Teams of Delhi Police are carrying out investigations at several locations outside the national capital, including Punjab and Haryana, to apprehend the people who were involved in the violence. They are also looking for those who hoisted flags at the Red Fort, they said.

Teams from the Forensic Science Laboratory also visited Ghazipur, Red Fort and ITO to collect evidences.

They have recovered a lot of evidences, including a big rope with knots, that was used to climb on Red Fort, police said.

— PTI

PM to launch 3 projects in WB

RAJIB CHOWDHURI DC KOLKATA, JAN. 31

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on his second visit to poll-bound West Bengal within a span of two weeks, will inaugurate three big ticket central industrial projects totalling ₹4,552 crore at Haldia in East Midnapore next week in what appears to be a curtain raiser of his campaign to brighten the BJP's prospect in the ensuing Assembly election.

What has, however, irked the ruling Trinamul Congress, is Union petroleum minister Dharmendra Pradhan's invitation to its MP of Tamluk Dibyendu Adhikari to Modi's event on February 7.

While Haldia is located in Tamluk Lok Sabha constituency, senior TMC leaders have started reading a hidden and clear message in the invitation to the young MP who has been maintaining distance from the party since his elder brother Shubhendu Adhikari and younger brother Soumendu Adhikari have already switched from Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's party to the BJP and their father and three-time MP Sisir Adhikari has been isolated in the party.

All eyes will be on Dibyendu's attendance at the event where Modi will flag off Dobhi-Durgapur Pipeline Project, a 347-km long section of Jagdishpur-Haldia and Bokaro-Dhamra Pipeline constructed by GAIL at an estimated cost of ₹2,433 crore.

It will revive HURL Sindri in Jharkhand, supply gas to Matix Fertiliser Plant at Durgapur as anchor customers, in addition to supplying gas to industrial, commercial and automobile sectors and city gas distribution across all major towns in these states, including cities of Hazaribagh, Bokaro, Dhanbad, Jamshepur, Purulia, Asansol and Durgapur.

The Prime Minister will also launch LPG Import Terminal, built by Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited at an investment of ₹1,100 crore.

It will meet the LPG requirement in West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand, parts of Uttar Pradesh and North Eastern states.

Modi will lay the foundation stone of the second Catalytic Dewaxing Unit, at the Haldia Refinery of Indian Oil Corporation, built at ₹1,019 crore to help augment the lubricant production.



Union minister Smriti Irani addresses a public rally at Domurjala Stadium in Howrah district on Sunday.

— PTI

TMC looted rations given by PM: Irani

Dumurjala (WB), Jan. 31: Accusing the ruling Trinamul Congress in West Bengal of indulging in corruption, Union minister Smriti Irani said here on Sunday that while Prime Minister Narendra Modi provided foodgrains for 80 crore people of the country for eight months during the pandemic, the rations were looted by the party in the state.

Irani deputised for Union home minister Amit Shah at the programme in Howrah district.

Shah's two-day visit to the state was cancelled at the last minute due to the ongoing protest by farmers in Delhi and an explo-

sion near the Israeli Embassy on Friday. He addressed the rally through video-conferencing.

Maintaining that the PM had said that each guest worker returning home during the Covid-19 lockdown be given at least 100 days of employment under Garib Rojgar Yojana, Irani said, though countrywide more than 50 crore mandays were created, "it did not happen in WB".

"The PM provided five kg rice and one kg dal for 80 crore people of the country for eight months through 'Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana', but in Bengal, 'TMC looted it,' she said.

— PTI

ANOTHER FORMER MLA QUILTS BJP IN HARYANA OVER 3 FARM LAWS

Fatehabad, Jan. 31: Haryana BJP leader and former MLA Balwan Singh Daulatpuria on Sunday quit the ruling party in solidarity with the farmers who are protesting against the Centre's new agriculture laws.

Mr Daulatpuria, who had joined the party ahead of 2019 assembly polls after switching over from INLD, announced his decision at a Panchayat held at his village Daulatpur here.

Talking to reporters later, he said the three agriculture laws "are anti-farmer which should be repealed immediately".

"A Panchayat was held in my village. They directed that I come out fully in support of the farmers who are protesting against these laws, after which I announced my decision to quit the party... I will fight shoulder-to-shoulder with farmers and also visit the Tikri border protest site," Mr Daulatpuria, a former MLA from Fatehabad, said.

Meanwhile, some villagers in Sonipat's Rai block took out a tractor march in support of the farmers protesting against the farm laws.

A 'Kisan Mazdoor Mahapanchayat' was organised by Arhitiyas Association in Palwal on the farm laws issue.

A Mahapanchayat will be held in Jind early next month to mobilise support for the farmers agitating against the three farm laws, a farmer leader said.

Earlier on Thursday, Haryana BJP leader and former chief parliamentary secretary Rampal Majra had quit the party over the farm laws issue.

Mr Majra, a three-time MLA, had switched over to the BJP from the INLD just before the 2019 assembly elections. He had in September last year dubbed then Centre's farm bills as 'anti-farmer'

— PTI

Fish from farms not safe: Report

Patna, Jan. 31: Consumers of fish and shrimps across the country could be staring at a health hazard on account of appalling standards of hygiene and reckless use of chemicals at farms where these are reared, says a study.

Jointly conducted by the Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organisation (FIAPO) and the All Creatures Great and Small (ACGS), the study is based upon investigation of 250 farms across 10 of the highest fish-producing states.

States like Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Assam were surveyed for freshwater fish while Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Puducherry were covered for both fresh water and seawater varieties.

"We have found shocking conditions in this growing sector. Fish are kept in cramped, filthy enclosures, with no waste management. They are cut up alive. The contaminated water from these fish farms is released into local water bodies and estuaries that spread the parasites further, causing

harm to the fish population as well as humans", Verda Mehrotra, executive director of FIAPO, said in a release.

She said in Bihar, the investigation was carried out in the districts of East Champaran, Muzaffarpur, Begusarai and Patna covering 20 fish farms. 100 per cent of the fish farms had toxic levels of lead and cadmium, scoring extremely poor on the public health hazard scale (0.25/1).

Additionally, cent per cent of fish farms had no outlets, which implied dirty water being re-circulated posing a grave threat to fish and human health. Several farmers admitted massive losses due to prevalent diseases and massive floods every year.

All the fish farms lacked basic maintenance and were littered, and open defecation is a regular practice near the fish farms. All the fish farms had poor dissolved oxygen levels, which means fish were struggling to survive with high mortality rates. Indiscriminate use of antibiotics, insecticides and pesticides was also rampant, she said.

— PTI

SUPERIOR | AVIONICS

Upgraded version to have bigger fuselage, longer range among other facilities

Tejas Mark II to roll out next year: HAL Chief

New Delhi, Jan. 31: A more potent version of the indigenous Tejas multi-role combat jet featuring a much powerful engine, greater load carrying capability, next-generation electronic warfare system and an array of superior avionics is expected to be rolled out next year and its first high-speed trials will start in 2023, Chairman and Managing Director of Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd R. Madhavan has said.

He said the structural package and other work on the Tejas Mark II is progressing well and its production is likely to start somewhere around 2025.

He said the upgraded version will have a bigger fuselage, longer range, better maintainability, greater load carrying capability, much stronger engine power and superior net-centric warfare systems.

With increase in range and payload capability, Madhavan said the new

variant will be much superior than Tejas Mark-IA, 73 of which are being procured by the Indian Air Force from the HAL under a ₹48,000 crore deal that was approved by the government on January 13.

"Tejas Mark II is likely to

roll out by August-September of 2022 after that the first flight will take some time. The first high-speed trial of the jet will start in 2023 and we expect the production to start somewhere around 2025," Madhavan said.

Asked about the weapon package for Tejas Mark II, Madhavan did not give a direct reply and said it will be decided at a later stage depending on requirement and changing dynamics. Tejas is a single

engine and highly agile multi-role supersonic fighter manufactured by the state-run HAL.

The aircraft is a potent platform for air combat and offensive air support with reconnaissance and anti-surface operations as its secondary roles.

The Tejas Mk-1A will be equipped with an active electronically scanned array radar, beyond visual range missile, electronic warfare suite and air-to-air refuelling system.

On the next generation advanced multi-role combat aircraft (AMCA) project, the HAL chairman and managing director said the aim was to implement the project under the framework of a special purpose vehicle also involving private sector players.

India is working on the fifth-generation medium weight deep penetration fighter jet and the project is estimated to cost around \$5 billion.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

GUNMEN OPEN FIRE IN PAK, KILL POLICEMAN

Peshawar, Jan. 31: A Pakistani police officer was killed and two others were injured when unidentified gunmen opened fire on them here on Saturday, officials said. Counter Terrorism Department Inspector Khushdil Khan was killed, while his two colleagues — Assistant Sub-inspector Bakht Zeb Khan and constable Iftikhar — sustained bullet wounds when the assailants ambushed their vehicle near the central jail, Peshawar Police chief Ahsan Abbas said.

PALESTINIAN KILLED FOR KNIFE ATTACK

Jerusalem, Jan. 31: The Israeli army said it killed a Palestinian who carried out an attempted knife attack Sunday in the Gush Etzion area of the occupied West Bank.

"A knife attack was reported at the Gush Etzion junction, south of Bethlehem," the army said in a statement. "The attacker was neutralised." The attacker "is dead", the army said, confirming that the military had killed the assailant.

The military later said the incident took place at a bus station, where soldiers were providing security to Israelis, with the suspect "running" at the forces while brandishing a stick with three knives fastened to it.

It said no military personnel were wounded in the attack.

Gush Etzion is a bloc of two dozen Israeli settlements and outposts near Bethlehem.

There is frequent friction at the nearby junction, which has been the site of numerous so-called lone wolf Palestinian attacks. Israel has occupied the West Bank since the 1967 Six-Day War.

MEXICO: FOUR OF 19 BODIES IDENTIFIED

Ciudad Victoria, Mexico, Jan. 31: Mexico has identified at least four of the 19 bodies found shot and burnt near the US border, prosecutors said Saturday. Two Guatemalans — believed to be migrants — and two Mexicans were identified by their DNA after authorities discovered the bodies on January 22, the prosecutor's office in the northern state of Tamaulipas said in a statement.

It said members of the Interior Ministry's national search commission had been added to the investigation for "greater transparency", in collaboration with the foreign ministry and the Guatemalan embassy in Mexico.

"It was determined that 16 correspond to the male sex, one to the female sex, and two are pending clarification" due to the severity of the burning, the prosecutors said.

A team of forensics experts, dentists, geneticists and criminology specialists has been formed to identify the victims.

Residents of the Guatemalan town of Comitancillo suspect at least a dozen of the victims are their relatives, according to authorities in the Central American country.

CYCLONE IN FIJI: ONE DEAD, FIVE MISSING

Suva, Fiji, Jan. 31: At least one person was dead and five were missing Sunday as Fiji was battered by a tropical cyclone for the second time in a month. Cyclone Ana, a Category Two storm, slammed into the South Pacific island nation with winds up to 140 kilometres an hour and heavy rain, causing widespread flooding.

The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) said a 49-year-old man drowned while four fishermen and a three-year-old boy were missing.

More than 7,600 people, many of them rescued from flooded villages, were taking shelter in evacuation centres. Local media reports said the three-year-old went missing when he accompanied his grandfather to check their boat.

NDMO director Vasiti Soko said people continued to ignore warnings against venturing out during the storm.

"We are in the midst of a cyclone with widespread flooding throughout the country, yet we continue to receive reports of members of the public, adults and children alike wandering around," she said.

In December, four people died and 23,000 people fled their homes when super cyclone Yasa flattened entire villages with wind gusts of up to 345 kilometres an hour.

New UK visa for HK residents who want to flee

Hong Kong, Jan. 31: A new visa scheme offering millions of Hong Kongers a pathway to British citizenship went live on Sunday as the city's former colonial master opens its doors to those wanting to escape China's crackdown on dissent.

Anyone with a British National (Overseas) passport and their dependents can now apply online for a visa allowing them to live and work in the United Kingdom. After five years, they can apply for citizenship.

The immigration scheme is a response to Beijing's decision last year to impose a sweeping national security law on Hong Kong to snuff out the huge and often violent democracy protests.

Britain has accused China of tearing up its promise ahead of Hong Kong's 1997 handover that the financial hub would maintain key liberties and autonomy for 50 years, and has argued it has a moral duty to protect its former subjects.

"We have honoured our profound ties of history and friendship with the people of Hong Kong, and we have stood up for freedom and autonomy," Prime Minister Boris Johnson said of the

● **ANYONE WITH a British National (Overseas) passport and their dependents can now apply online for a visa allowing them to live and work in the United Kingdom. After five years, they can apply for citizenship.**

scheme this week.

The website for visa applications went online at 5pm in Hong Kong (0900 GMT).

China has reacted with fury to the visa offer, announcing that it would no longer recognise the passports as a legitimate travel or ID document.

The move was largely symbolic as Hong Kongers tend to use their own passports or ID cards to leave the city. But Beijing said it was prepared to take "further measures", raising fears authorities might try to stop Hong Kongers from leaving for Britain. On Sunday, the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of China's State Council said it strongly condemned the British for violating its promise not to give BN(O) passport holders right of residence. —AFP



Daniel Pearl

PEARL'S FAMILY TO CHALLENGE ACQUITTALS

Islamabad, Jan. 31: The family of American journalist Daniel Pearl will challenge an order by Pakistan's top court to release a British-born militant acquitted of masterminding his kidnapping and brutal murder in 2002. The Supreme Court on Thursday upheld the acquittal of Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and three other men last year, triggering outrage from the US.

Pearl was the South Asia bureau chief for *The Wall Street Journal* when he was abducted and beheaded by jihadists in Karachi in January 2002 while researching a story about Islamist militants.

"The Pearl family intends to file a review petition against the illegal and unjust majority decision," parents Ruth and Judea Pearl said in a statement that was tweeted by the murdered journalist's friend and former *Wall Street Journal* colleague Asra Nomani. They join both the federal government and Sindh provincial government in launching a plea for the latest verdict to be reviewed. Lawyers for Pearl's family have argued that Sheikh played a crucial role in organising the abduction and detention of the journalist before ordering his captors to kill him. —AFP

STIMULUS | PROPOSAL

New York, Jan. 31: When President Joe Biden unveiled a \$1.9 trillion stimulus proposal earlier this month, few were surprised by the plan's hefty price tag or sweeping scope.

More striking was Biden's inclusion of a measure to more than double the federal minimum wage to \$15. The move, backed by leading Democrats including left-wing Senator Bernie Sanders, establishes the fight for higher wages as a top priority for the new administration, potentially leading to one of

Washington's boldest adjustments in US social and labour policy in decades.

The fate of the initiative — which so far lacks support from Republicans — will help determine whether Biden delivers on a core pocketbook issue as US income inequality widens during the Covid-19 pandemic. Sanders, a former presidential candidate, called the current federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour a "starvation wage" as he unveiled the proposal for an increase in Congress.

3,000 held in pro-Navalny stir

Protesters defied govt warnings on rally, demand release of Kremlin critic

Moscow, Jan. 31: Police detained more than 3,000 people across Russia and blocked off the centre of Moscow Sunday in a massive clampdown on protests demanding the release of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

Thousands of protesters defied government warnings to rally from Vladivostok to Saint Petersburg in a second weekend of mass demonstrations over the arrest of President Vladimir Putin's most prominent critic.

Navalny was detained at a Moscow airport in mid-January after flying back to Russia from Germany where he was recovering from an August poisoning he blames on the Kremlin.

The 44-year-old anti-corruption campaigner is being held in a Moscow detention centre and faces years of potential jail time in several different criminal cases, despite calls from Western governments for his release.

In moves not seen in years in Moscow, authorities locked down the centre of the capital Sunday, with hundreds of police lining the streets, central Metro stations closed and the movements of pedestrians restricted.

Protesters who had hoped to gather outside the headquarters of the FSB security service were instead scattered to various parts of the city as organisers made last-minute



Police detain a man during a rally in support of jailed Opposition leader Alexei Navalny in Saint Petersburg on Sunday. —AFP

changes in locations.

AFP journalists saw dozens of protesters detained and taken into police vans. It was unclear amid the chaos how many people took part in the demonstration.

Independent monitor OVD-Info said at least 3,062 people had been detained across the country, including 844 in Moscow, and arrests were continuing. It

reported more than 4,000 detentions during similar protests last Saturday. The Russian Union of Journalists said around 35 people working for media outlets were also detained on Sunday.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Twitter condemned "the persistent use of harsh tactics against peaceful protesters and journalists

by Russian authorities for a second week straight." The Russian foreign ministry hit back, accusing the United States of "gross interference" in its affairs and of using "online platforms controlled by Washington" to promote the protests.

Hundreds marched through the centre of Moscow chanting "Freedom!" and "Putin is a thief!" before

arriving outside Matrosskaya Tishina prison where Navalny was being held.

Several dozen were detained at the prison, with police chasing down protesters in the snow outside the complex.

"The people in power don't want to listen to anything or to anybody," 34-year-old vet Darya said at the Moscow rally.

—AFP

Protesters disrupt vaccination site in LA

Pentagon pauses vax plan for Guantanamo detainees

Washington, Jan. 31: The Pentagon said Saturday it was putting on hold a plan to give Covid vaccines to terror detainees at Guantanamo, following an outcry as the United States struggles to deliver jabs to frontline workers and vulnerable elderly Americans.

"No Guantanamo detainees have been vaccinated," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby tweeted. "We're pausing the plan to move forward, as we review force protection protocols. We remain committed to our obligations to keep our troops safe." The Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba houses detainees in the US "war on terror," including top Al-Qaeda figure and alleged 9/11 attack planner Khalid

Sheikh Mohammed. The Department of Defence told US media earlier in the week that it would offer vaccines to its detainees and prisoners, to be administered "on a voluntary basis." Backlash came from Republican lawmakers, including the party's top congressman, Kevin McCarthy.

"President Biden told us he would have a plan to defeat the virus on day 1. He just never told us that it would be to give the vaccine to terrorists before most Americans," he said on Twitter.

Added New York congresswoman Elise Stefanik: "It is inexcusable and unacceptable that President Biden is choosing to prioritize vaccinations for convicted terrorists in Gitmo

over vulnerable American seniors or veterans." The United States has been the world's hardest-hit country by the Coronavirus pandemic, in absolute terms, with 436,000 deaths and nearly 26 million cases.

President Joe Biden has pledged to vaccine 100 million Americans in his first 100 days in office, but so far the country's mass inoculation drive has been beset by stumbles, including a shortfall in vaccines and widespread technical difficulties for eligible Americans trying to make appointments.

According to health officials, the US has so far administered just under 30 million of the nearly 50 million doses distributed in the country. —AFP

VACCINE DELAYS: GERMANY MULLS LEGAL ACTION

Berlin, Jan. 31: Germany's government on Sunday threatened legal action against laboratories failing to deliver Coronavirus vaccines to the European Union on schedule, amid tension over delays to deliveries from AstraZeneca. "If it turns out that companies have not respected their obligations, we will have to decide the legal consequences," Economy Minister Peter Altmaier said.

"No company can favour another country over the EU after the fact," he added. There has been growing tension in recent weeks between European leaders and the British-Swedish pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca, which has fallen behind on promised deliveries of its vaccine. —AFP

ISRAEL TO GIVE SOME VACCINES TO PALESTINIANS

Jerusalem, Jan. 31: Israel Defence Minister Benny Gantz's office says Israel has agreed to transfer 5,000 doses of the Coronavirus vaccine to the Palestinians to immunise frontline medical workers. It is the first time that Israel has confirmed the transfer of vaccines to the Palestinians. Israel has come under criticism from UN officials and human rights groups for not providing vaccines to the Palestinians. Israel is one of the world's leaders in vaccinating its population after striking procurement deals with drug giants Pfizer and Moderna. —AP

PERTH GOES INTO SNAP LOCKDOWN OVER SINGLE CASE

Sydney, Jan. 31: The Australian city of Perth will begin a snap five-day lockdown after a security guard at a quarantine hotel tested positive for Covid-19, authorities announced Sunday.

Roughly two million residents of the city must stay at home as of Sunday evening, as will those living in the nearby Peel and South West regions.

A scheduled return of schools on Monday will be delayed, with locals only permitted to leave their homes for exercise, medical care, essential work or to buy food.

The new rules follow the first case of community transmission in Western Australia state for 10 months, officials said.

—AFP

THOUSANDS JOIN FUNERAL, FLOUT RESTRICTIONS

Jerusalem, Jan. 31: Thousands of ultra-Orthodox Jews defied Israel's Coronavirus restrictions to attend a rabbi's funeral on Sunday, prompting Defence Minister Benny Gantz to demand the community's repeated breaking of lockdown rules must end.

A huge crowd, many not wearing masks, packed the streets in Jerusalem for the funeral of 99-year-old Rabbi Meshulam Dovid Soloveitchik, head of the influential Brisk yeshiva, or religious educational institute. Soloveitchik died earlier on Sunday. —AFP

Tycoon Carlos Slim leaves hospital after Covid bout

Mexico City, Jan. 31: Mexican telecoms billionaire Carlos Slim, one of the world's richest men, has been discharged from hospital and is doing well after a bout with Covid-19, a source close to his family said Saturday.

The 81-year-old tycoon "has been at home since January 28 and is in very good health," the source with the Slim family's Grupo Carso said.

On Monday Slim's son, Carlos Slim Domit, announced on Twitter that his father was being treated for Covid-19 and had only

mild symptoms.

"He's very well. He is making very good progress with Covid-19 after more than a week of minor symptoms," Slim Domit wrote at the time.

Slim and his family, who control mobile telecom giant America Movil, are worth an estimated \$58.5 billion, according to *Forbes* magazine, making him Latin America's richest man.

Through his foundation, he is helping to fund joint production in Mexico and Argentina of the Coronavirus vaccine deve-

loped by AstraZeneca and the University of Oxford for distribution in Latin America.

Slim's infection came a day after Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador announced he had tested positive for Covid-19. On Friday Lopez Obrador said he still has the disease but "the critical phase is passing."

Mexico has officially registered around 1.8 million Coronavirus cases and more than 155,000 deaths, one of the world's highest fatality tolls.

—AFP

It is one of Washington's boldest adjustments in US social and labour policy in decades

Biden, Dems seek hike in US minimum wage

● **WHEN PRESIDENT Joe Biden unveiled a \$1.9 trillion stimulus proposal earlier this month, few were surprised by the plan's hefty price tag or sweeping scope.**

● **The fate of the initiative — which so far lacks support from Republicans — will help determine whether Biden delivers on a core pocketbook issue as US income inequality widens during the Covid-19 pandemic.**

The senator said he hopes Republicans "will understand the severity of the crisis," but added that Democrats should be prepared to enact the policy on a narrow party-line vote. Such an increase would boost wages for

more than 32 million US workers, according to the Economic Policy Institute, a progressive think tank.

The Sanders bill proposes "a significant increase in the minimum wage," Ben Zipperer, an economist at the institutesaid.

"Unfortunately, we have quite a big hole to dig out of in terms of providing what low-income workers need." The bill would put the United States on par with a growing number of states and cities that have already enacted the hike at the urging of the "Fight for \$15" movement launched by fast-food workers in the early 2010s.

"The bump up made it a little bit easier," said Maggie Breshears, who works at grocery store and retailer Fred Meyer in Seattle and has gone from

making about \$10 per hour in 2013 to \$17.59 after Seattle lifted its minimum wage in 2014. The US minimum wage was first enacted in 1938 as part of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal reforms.

The measure has been periodically increased since then, most recently in 2007, when Congress lifted it gradually from \$5.15 to \$7.25 an hour, which would equal a \$15,000 annual salary. Barack Obama was unable to win a boost during his eight-year presidency from 2009 to 2017. In

2019, the House of Representatives approved an increase, but the bill died in the Republican-led Senate.

Supporters of an increase draw hope from rising public support apparent in 2020, when Florida voters backed a hike to \$15 per hour at the same time the state voted for Republican President Donald Trump, who ended up losing reelection. In Arkansas, another Republican state, 68 percent of voters in 2018 backed gradually increasing the wage to \$11 an hour. —AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

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Pass a resolution on MSP, drop cases against farmers

In his address to the all-parties' meeting on the eve of the first sitting of the Budget Session of Parliament, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Saturday that the government's offer on farm laws still stands, and that his agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar was "only a phone call away". This is the first signal after the violence and chaos of January 26 in the national capital that the government remained open to the idea of resuming talks with the agitating farmers. The impression had formed that talks with the farmers had collapsed following the events of Republic Day.

While the prospect of talks re-starting is no bad thing, the first thing is that the perspective should be clear. Here it is necessary to understand that the "government's offer" to keep the three controversial farm laws in abeyance is in reality a suggestion of the Supreme Court and no generosity of the government. The farmers, of course, had not accepted the idea of an 18-month reprieve since the government left no stone unturned to impress upon all concerned that it was not prepared to write the idea of the availability of MSP into law.

While a government can repeal a law passed by Parliament, it has no authority to 'suspend' a law

Perhaps a way forward can be found through the resolution route. A suitable resolution, which reposes faith in the idea of an MSP for agriculturists, can be passed by Parliament. The wordings of this can be cleared with the farmers through discussions. Then, it should be permitted to gain the concurrence of the non-NDA parties so that it can be passed unanimously. Indeed, if other parties are brought on board and not just the government parties, the Budget Session can be conducted with mutual suspicions abating as between the government and its opponents. The farmers' issue has brought up a wall between the government and the Opposition parties. This was on view when 20 parties boycotted the President's Address to the joint sitting of the two Houses to inaugurate the Budget Session.

However, in order to create a congenial atmosphere for the resumption of talks with the farmers, the government must immediately drop cases lodged against the farmers' leaders, accusing them of the Republic Day violence. These are the same individuals who had been holding talks with the farmers. How can they be invited for fresh talks with the sword of criminal cases hanging over them? Enough material is now available that indicates that the main body of farmers remained peaceful on January 26 and only a very small group of *agents provocateur* took the law into their own hands. There is much to be gained if the government accepts this proposition.

Judicial correction

The Supreme Court collegium has reportedly withdrawn its recommendation to make an additional judge of the Bombay high court permanent following a series of back-to-back controversial judgments she recently delivered, of which two have attracted national attention, and condemnation. In one order, the judge decided that a person accused of groping a 12-year-old girl should not be given the maximum punishment under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO Act), 2012, because there was no skin-to-skin touch. In the second, she concluded that a man holding the hands of a minor girl and opening the zip of his pants cannot be convicted for 'sexual assault' under POCSO Act but for 'sexual harassment' under Indian Penal Code. The Supreme Court stayed the first order the very next day but its collegium chose to send the recommendation of the collegium to make her permanent. It has gone back on that decision now.

The two judgments triggered widespread outrage among the general public as well as the legal circles. And there are many sound reasons, too. The judge refused to understand the legislative intention of POCSO Act, a special Act brought to protect the interests of children, one of the most vulnerable sections of society. The apex court is right in deciding that the judge needed better sensitisation on the subject.

This is not the first time that a judgment has assaulted the sense of justice of fair-minded people. A Supreme Court judgment referred to satisfying the "collective conscience of society" while confirming a death penalty. This not the first time a well-thought out piece of legislation has been turned upside down; the National Judicial Appointments Commission Act, 2014, which sought to replace the self-made collegium system of appointing judges in the higher judiciary, is a prime example. It is time the judiciary started taking steps to correct itself, and this could well be a major step towards that direction.

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Subhani



Elite clubs bastions of hereditary entitlement



Mohan Guruswamy

The control of the prestigious Delhi Gymkhana Club is now a bone of contention with the Central government seeking to take over its managing committee. Recently, a petition was filed by the ministry of corporate affairs in the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) seeking action under Sections 241 and 242 of the Companies Act, which allows a member of a company or the government to seek relief if the affairs of the entity are being run in a manner "prejudicial to public interest" or is "oppressive", among other things. The government had used the same provisions of the Companies Act to get NCLT approval to supersede the board of the bankrupt IL&FS in October 2018.

Incredibly, the Central government had cited "*parivarvaad*", or nepotism, nepotism, financial irregularities, misuse of allocated land and issues related to membership, as the primary reasons for it to acquire the club. While it is at it, it might as well take a look at all other such elite clubs where nepotism is more rampant and where the real estate is often bigger and more valuable.

Every major city in India has such clubs. Most of the better-known ones are relics of the Raj and were meant as a private place for the ruling elite to socialise and fraternise. Being the ruling elite, they gave themselves tracts of public land for their private enjoyment. At a time when the whole country was for their private enjoyment, this raised few questions. After the white man departed, these clubs turned into a preserve of the new Indian elite — many called them the "brown

sahibs". The brown sahibs too have long gone and cannot aspire to memberships. Unlike the clubs of the past, which were extensions of a ruling hierarchy, today's clubs are mostly watering holes for the well-born, and more for card games than field games. Generally speaking, an elite means a more capable group of people. In sociological terms, an elite is a group of people who control a disproportionate share of wealth or power. C. Wright Mills in *The Power Elite* describes the power elite as "those political, economic, and military circles, which as an intricate set of overlapping small but dominant groups share decisions having at least national consequences". But most of our "elite" clubs defy such descriptions and have ceased to be based on social or official hierarchical or professional considerations, where membership was dependent on attainments and achievements. They are increasingly an association of neither the more capable people or a social elite or a power elite. They are just social clubs where membership is dependent on birth. The term "*parivarvaad*" used by the Central government in its petition describes a uniquely Indian system that combines dynastic succession and clan nepotism.

Clubs all over India are being increasingly taken over by a hereditary membership. Most of these clubs have framed rules for themselves, which automatically confer their children membership, by virtue of being dependent members, a classification for members' children of a certain age group. Since these dependents are given priority, it is almost impossible for a non-dependent to become a

member. Most people who become members through the direct route do so late in their life, which means their children invariably cannot become dependent members.

The constitutionality of hereditary membership is questionable, but who among the members will go out and challenge it? There are other implicit issues as well. Many of India's clubs are private clubs enjoying public land or land that could be deemed as "commons". The term "commons" refers to the cultural and natural resources that should be accessible to all members of a society, including natural materials such as air, water, and a habitable earth. The "common good" is a utilitarian ideal, which means "the greatest possible good for the greatest possible number of individuals". Many, like the philosopher Michael Sandel, believe that promoting the "common good" should be the main ideal of a democracy. Implicit in this is that the "commons" must only be for the "common good".

In 2014, Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal, then making an entrance into national politics, specifically referred to the Delhi Golf Club as a prime instance of corruption and cronyism that allowed a small number of people to take possession of public property. Like the Delhi Gymkhana, the Delhi Golf Club comes under the jurisdiction of the Central government.

Compared to the 27 acres of land occupied by the Delhi Gymkhana, the Delhi Golf Club is in possession of 220 acres of

common land and enjoying it for the exclusive benefit of its 3,000 "members", of whom only 900 have the right to vote, and most of these are hereditary members.

Across India, a majority of those who are members of such clubs are a hereditary elite, unlike the white colonials who largely set up these establishments, who came to India as a "selected" elite by going through a very rigorous process. For instance, the Secunderabad Club has 3,998 permanent members, of which 2,295 have made the cut by virtue of being members' children. Incidentally, this club only has 173 ladies as permanent members. A more recent addition for cornering the "commons" for the recreation of the elite is the HGA golf course and club promoted by the Telangana government on 105 acres of the Golconda fort's 155 acres. Though a good part of its membership is for government officials, this club too now has a system of hereditary membership. One irony must not be missed here. Those who become members by virtue of being government officials, and hence bypass the long waiting list of the less privileged, are able to confer the hereditary benefits for posterity by bequeathing the automatic membership rights to their descendants.

In a few decades, these public commons too will become the preserve of a hereditary elite. It has even gone one better than most such clubs by making its membership fungible, affording indigent members a soft landing by transferring membership to a person of his or her choice.

It's only in the fitness of things that a government headed by a *chaitwalla*'s son is now challenging this growing system of hereditary legitimacy.

The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.

The Secunderabad Club has 3,998 permanent members, of which 2,295 have made the cut by virtue of being members' children. Incidentally, this club only has 173 ladies as permanent members.

LETTERS

ECONOMY GOES DOWNHILL

The article (*A 'new deal' for India is the call of the hour, Jan.31*) is so clinical in approach, even as it enumerates India's staggering economic slide right from thoughtless demonetisation to anaemic strategy of stimulus package, which with the advent of Covid-19, the situation has gone from bad to worse. As advocated, Roosevelt's strategy of drafting to revive the dismal economic slide is the need of the hour, and the direct cash transfer to the needy and the vulnerable should be on the cards lest the nation should continue to suffer more. Let the policy managers rise to the occasion and sooner the better.

E.S. Chandrasekaran,
Chennai

TN POLITICS

THE ARRIVAL of V.K. Sasikala on the political scene in Tamil Nadu and the formal announcement of AIADMK-BJP alliance assume added political significance. It is true that the present top leadership of AIADMK gives Sasikala short shrift and even shuns her. But the party's rank and file appear to view her as the true inheritor of Amma's legacy and crave for her leadership. The posters wanting her to take over the party's reins are a foretaste of what is to come. Viewers of the current political scene will wait and watch where Sasikala fits in BJP plans. As for the AIADMK-BJP alliance, it lends credence to the perception that CM Edappadi K. Palaniswami and Dy CM OPS are only playing second fiddle to the BJP. Given the strong anti-BJP in Tamil Nadu the alliance works to the DMK's advantage.

G. David Milton, Maruthancode

BEWARE KOHLI & BOYS

WE ARE happy that after five years a Test match has been allotted to Chepauk stadium. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, Chennaiites will be deprived their presence at the ground to cheer our players. No doubt, the statistics of play at MAC stadium gives an advantage to our team, where we have won our last 3 Tests against the visiting England teams, but our team should not be complacent against this England team ably led by Joe Root who is on a roll. They have the world's best opening bowlers in Stuart Broad and Jimmy Anderson, who have more than 1,000 wickets to their credit. Above all, take the example of Brisbane, where our team conquered Australia. Likewise, Root & company too must be itching to create history at Chepauk. Beware Kohli & boys.

N. Mahadevan,
Chennai

Kishwar Desai
London Diary



King of Spices to be dearly missed; Boris really hated the 'L' milestone

We have had every kind of weather in London — but then that is the norm isn't it? It snowed one early morning and we woke up to white blankets on our road and trees and grass. Then there have been days when the sun shone brightly warming us all up though only for a few hours. Otherwise, the dull days of winter are only tolerable because there is no place to go but home! One cannot imagine that London — where the city never slept, where every form of entertainment was available 24/7, would be like this!

The lockdown continues and our death toll crossed 100,000, the worst in Europe and higher per million people than even America. Boris Johnson has always fancied himself as Winston Churchill, the wartime leader with Britain standing alone (apart from armies of India, Canada and Australia-New Zealand). But this was a milestone he hated announcing. For once he was sombre, nearly in tears at his press conference, when he had to pronounce the hated 'L' word.

But his luck has turned. The Vaccine Wars have saved him — and made the UK look

stronger and smarter.

Whitehall may have done many things wrong but it was very smart at ordering vaccines in advance. The Oxford project was the first to announce their intentions so Boris ordered 100 million in a real gamble. Then when the Pfizer vaccine glimmered on the horizon, UK ordered 60 million. Quick approval followed and by early December, the above-80s and care workers began getting inoculated. By now eight million have been inoculated.

The European Union, on the other hand, has had a slow start. Their regulators took their time. After all, they have 27 countries to worry about. So now they are on a warpath with the UK, whom they feel has booked up all the vaccines, and the EU wants a large chunk of them. The vaccine can be invented in Oxford or Vienna but they are manufactured in many locations round the world. AstraZeneca who manufacture the Oxford vaccine have some assembly locations on the continent and others in UK. Same for the Pfizer.

The Vaccine Wars have broken out! The EU is imposing export control on vaccines manufactured on its territory

from being exported to UK. Boris can at last put on his helmet and police the coastline to wait for 'our' vaccines to come to us. So be assured that the memoirs of Boris/Churchill (no doubt being already dictated) will be a bestseller.

But no country can afford to be complacent. Yes, the vaccination programme is ongoing — with huge inequalities. Some countries are moving ahead and others have barely started. The Vaccine Wars may yet take a wider, global form.

That apart, Covid has also created new stars, and put pressure on old ones! Entertainers and influencers are hatching more and more bizarre schemes to remain in the limelight, as there are no public platforms except the Internet which is getting very crowded. Our newspapers are full of desperate looking people in costumes, weird cookery columns, unimaginable YouTube hits and unbelievable Instagram displays. You have to feel sorry for these people with no early chance of theatres or cinemas or music festivals restarting. And now musicians need separate visas for each EU country they want to perform in.

The British government in their hurry to Brexit forgot people need the bigger audience in Europe to earn their living. You can only do so much Zoom.

Meanwhile, some stars have even gone to the extent of breaking the lockdown rules openly. Rita Ora booked a restaurant in Notting Hill, invited friends, persuaded the restaurant to black out all the CCTV cameras and parties. The photos taken by her publicity staff were obviously much more glamorous than the CCTV cameras'. She was fined £5000 — and her name was splashed in all media. Now was it because she could never have managed so much publicity for so little? Hmmm.

A real rags-to-riches story which transformed the British perception of India and Indian food came to a sad end last week when Kirit Patak, the owner of Patak Spices, died. Those of us who arrived here and craved Indian food know how much the Patak brand meant for our taste-buds. His parents had arrived in the mid-50s with the proverbial £5 in their pocket from Kenya. They worked the usual 16 hours a day preparing Indian recipes — samosas, pickles, ground

The vaccine wars have broken out! The EU is imposing export control on vaccines manufactured on its territory from being exported to the UK.

spices — even selling their products door-to-door. Kirit abandoned his college studies but brought management savvy to the business selling the stuff to White British — and not just Indian — families. This was in the 70s when Madhur Jaffrey's book on Indian cuisine came out and British middle classes were trying to make *masala dosa* at home. It was all about Patak spices, sauces and pickles. Kirit Patak eventually sold his business in UK for £60 million and retired to Dubai. Patak (shortened from Pathak to make it easy for the locals to pronounce) remains and will continue to remain an iconic brand.

Kishwar Desai is an award-winning author. The Longest Kiss: The Life and Times of Devika Rani is her new book.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46,285.77	-1.26
Nifty 50	13,634.60	-1.32
S&P 500*	3,714.24	-1.93
Dollar (₹)	72.94	0.14
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.04	-0.34
Euro (₹)	88.33	0.12
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,690,▲286	0.002
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	55.04	-0.11
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.949	00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.071	2.14

* As of Friday/Saturday

GST revenues touch record ₹1.20 L cr in Jan.

GST collections for January touched an all-time high of Rs 1.20 lakh crore, the finance ministry said. It said in line with the trend of recovery in the GST revenues over past five months, the revenues for January 2021 are 8 per cent higher than that in the same month last year. The gross GST collected is Rs 1,19,847 crore, of which CGST is Rs 21,923 crore, SGST is Rs 29,014 crore, IGST is Rs 60,288 crore and cess is Rs 8,622 crore.

Sitharaman to present Union Budget today



Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday will deliver her promised “budget like no other” that is expected to provide relief to the common man as well as focus on driving the economic recovery through higher spending on healthcare, infrastructure and defence. The ninth budget under the Modi government, including an interim one, is widely expected to focus on boosting spending on job creation and development.

Power demand touches all-time high of 189.6 GW

Power demand touched an all-time high of 189.64 GW on Saturday, power secretary S. N. Sahai said. “Power demand galloping. All India demand: 1,89,644 MW (189.64 GW) at 10.39 hrs today (Jan.30) crossed the previous highest all-India demand of 1,88,452 MW (188.45 GW) on 28th January,” he tweeted. Last week, power minister R. K. Singh had said power demand will cross the 200-GW mark soon.

MF investment in Reits jumps 6-fold to ₹3,970 cr

Emerging investment instrument Reit is finally gaining popularity among investors, with mutual funds investing Rs 3,972 crore in such units in 2020, a six-fold jump from the preceding year. Green Portfolio co-founder Divam Sharma said that with names like DLF, Brookfield and Godrej in the process of launching Reit, more interest from mutual funds in such offerings is expected in the coming years.



Govt wants to save cash and honour Cairn may be offered fields in lieu of \$1.4 bn

New Delhi, Jan. 31: The government may give Cairn Energy one of the surrendered oil fields such as Ratna R-Series in lieu of the \$1.4 billion it has pay to the British firm, helping prevent seizure of foreign assets in case of default as well as get an experienced operator in the struggling E&P sector, sources said. Cairn Energy gave India its biggest onland oil discovery but exited the country after it was slapped with a Rs 10,247-crore tax demand using a legislation that gave the government the powers to tax companies retrospectively. The firm has now won an international arbitration against the tax demand and the government has been ordered to return the value of shares of Cairn it had sold, dividends it had seized and tax refund it had withheld to recover the tax demand.

For a government struggling to find revenue to boost a Covid-19 battered economy, options of appeal against the arbitration award are limited and it may not have the financial bandwidth for such a payout, two sources with knowledge of the development said.

“One option is to give Cairn one or more of the oil and gas fields that the government now owns after they are surrendered by operators for various reasons,” one of them said. “The government could give the Ratna and R-Series oil and gas field in the Arabian Sea that taken away from Essar Oil-



Premier Oil consortium in 2016 because contractual terms had changed.”

The Barmer oilfield in Rajasthan, which was originally discovered by Cairn Energy, could be another option. Vedanta Ltd, which now operates the field after it bought out Cairn's Indian subsidiary a decade back, has so far not agreed to the government conditions for getting an extension of contract beyond its original end day of May 2020.

Under Vedanta, which continues to operate the field on monthly extensions till its legal challenge to government conditions is settled, Rajasthan oil-fields have seen a steady decline in output.

“It's a win-win—the government settles its liability without paying a single penny or upsetting investor sentiments by not honouring the arbitration award through endless legal challenges and at the same time getting back an established exploration and production (E&P) firm

back,” another source said. No major oil and gas discovery has been made in the past seven years since the retrospective tax demand was raised.

In case the government chooses not to honour the arbitration award, it risks the prospect of its assets in foreign countries being seized, just like US oil firm ConocoPhillips did with Venezuela to recoup multi-billion dollar of compensation awarded in arbitration.

Earlier this month, Cairn Energy's chief executive officer Simon Thomson wrote to the Indian government saying that the arbitration ruling is final and binding, and failure to comply would breach the international rules.

Cairn Energy has asked the Indian government for an early indication of implementing the arbitration award, well before the announcement of its full year earnings on March 9 for clarity of its shareholders, according to the letter.

—PTI

CEA PITCHES FOR PRIVATE SECTOR-LED BAD BANK



K.V. Subramanian

KUMAR DIPANKAR & CHANDRA SHEKHAR
NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

Chief economic adviser K. V. Subramanian has made a strong case for setting up a bad bank led by the private sector to effectively deal with the non-performing assets of the financial sector, which may see a surge once regulatory forbearance to deal with the impact of Covid-19 is withdrawn.

The proposal to set up a bad bank has been under the government's consideration for long and some steps may be announced in Monday's Budget 2021-22.

Bad bank refers to a financial institution which takes over bad assets of lenders and undertakes resolution. Lenders have been making a case for setting up a bad bank to ease the pressure of bad loans on them in these difficult times.

“The bad bank will certainly help in consolidating some of the non-performing assets. It's important to also think about implementing the bad bank in the private sector that enables (faster) decision making,” he told PTI in an interview.

—PTI

Crypto players want to be heard before ban decision

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JAN. 31

As the government plans to ban “private cryptocurrencies”, digital currency platforms hope that the government will consult them before taking a decision.

“Since the government is considering introducing the bill during this session of the Parliament, we are sure the government will definitely listen to all the stakeholders before taking any decision. We are talking to other stakeholders and will definitely initiate deeper dialogue with the government and showcase how we can actually create a healthy ecosystem in unison,” Sumit Gupta, co-founder and CEO of CoinDCX said.

The government is planning to introduce a bill “The Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official



Digital Currency Bill, 2021” that will prohibit “all private cryptocurrencies” in India. It will also provide a framework for creating an official digital currency that will be issued by the Reserve Bank of India.

“The digital currency bill to be introduced before the Lok Sabha is a welcome step forward. Its success will depend on the details, particularly the definition of what the bill calls “private cryptocurrencies”. This is not a common term. Bitcoin

is not privately owned by anyone. It is a public good, like the internet,” said Rahul Pagidipati, CEO at ZebPay.

According to him, Bitcoin and most crypto assets are more like gold and not an alternative to government-issued legal tender. Crypto assets and digital government currency can coexist and together, they can bring tremendous benefits to the Indian economy.

“We hope the Lok Sabha members and advisors will consult crypto and blockchain companies as they make their decisions. Millions of Indians have already invested in this new asset class. Millions more want the same opportunity to build wealth that investors in other countries already have. We have faith in the government and hope that this bill will move India forwards, not backwards”, he said.

China giant reports \$10 bn fraud

Beijing, Jan. 31: Three units of HNA, once China's most acquisitive conglomerate, said nearly \$10 billion had been embezzled by shareholders, in disclosures to stock exchanges that came amid a government-led probe into the deeply indebted group.

A total of 61.5 billion yuan (\$9.57 bn) had been embezzled by shareholders and other related parties, Shanghai-listed Hainan Airlines Holding Co, HNA Infrastructure Investment Group Co and Shenzhen-

listed CCOOP Group Co said late on Friday.

The identities of the shareholders were not disclosed in the statements.

The three companies and their subsidiaries had also provided non-compliant guarantees for 46.5 billion yuan in financing, according to the statements filed after creditors of their parent applied to a court for the conglomerate to be placed in bankruptcy and restructured.

The move came after a local government-led working team concluded

due diligence at HNA earlier in January, and laid out risk disposal plans, enabling it to move to the next stage of resolving a multi-year liquidity crisis.

The government-appointed working team expects as many as 500 companies linked to HNA Group to go into bankruptcy restructuring, Chinese financial magazine *Caixin* reported on Saturday, citing sources that it did not identify.

Caixin previously reported that HNA owns more than 2,300 companies.

—Reuters

Stocks encounter Budget hurdle

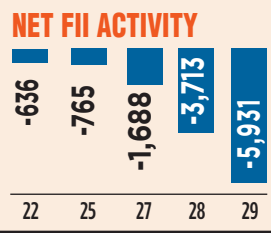
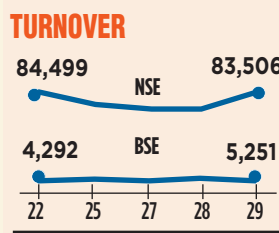
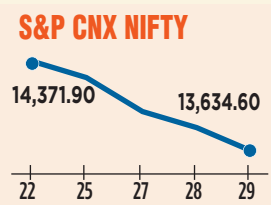
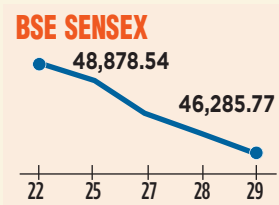
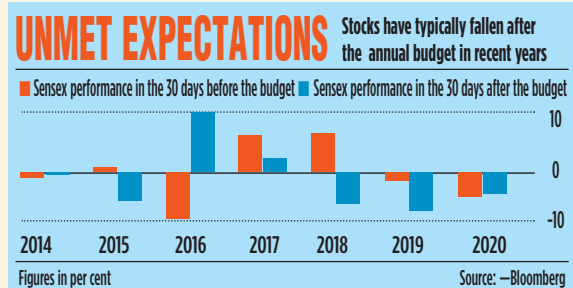
NUPUR ACHARYA & RONOJOY MAZUMDAR
JAN. 31

If history is a guide, the recent rough ride for Indian stocks will continue after Monday's budget.

The Sensex has climbed in the month after budget day on only two of the past seven years since Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power, while falling or staying range-bound on other occasions. Risks are compounded in 2021 given stretched valuations.

“There are expectations that the government will keep aside fiscal prudence and open its pockets to spend more,” said Ajit Mishra, vice president of research at Mumbai-based Religare Broking Ltd. “Investors and businesses are pinning high hopes on the budget and any disappointment could lead to profit-taking.”

The Sensex had a blistering advance last quarter—even as data showed that the economy had plunged into recession. But there are signs the



rally is petering out: the index clocked its biggest weekly declining since

early May from its peak in January.

—Bloomberg

FPIs INVEST OVER 19,470 CRORE IN EQUITIES IN JAN.

New Delhi, Jan. 31: Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have remained net buyers to the tune of Rs 14,649 crore in Indian markets in January, amid availability of global liquidity.

Depositories data shows overseas investors pumped in a net of Rs 19,473 crore into equities but pulled out Rs 4,824 crore from the debt segment between January 1 and January 29. Thus, the net investment in January stood at Rs 14,649 crore.

Geojit strategist V. K. Vijayakumar said due to uncertainty over the budget proposals, FPIs have been a bit apprehensive about the direction of the market and, therefore, have seen selling in the past few days.

—PTI

MAKING | IN INDIA

Over ₹7,300 crore offered is little for global players to relocate

Mait seeks ₹20K cr PLI for IT hardware

New Delhi, Jan. 31: IT hardware makers urge the government to allocate Rs 20,000 crore under the production-linked incentive scheme, to boost manufacturing of personal computers, tablets and servers in the country.

The proposed amount of around Rs 7,000 crore is insignificant for global players to relocate their facilities to India, said industry body Mait.

The Manufacturers' Association of Information Technology (Mait), whose members include Apple, Dell, HP and Lenovo, wants the government to address various disabilities that the sector faces, including improvement in export infrastructure to support growth under the PLI scheme.

Mait president Nitin Kunkolienker told PTI,



“We are looking for higher funds for the PLI scheme. For laptops, servers, etc, the government has just proposed Rs 7,325 crore. “I don't think that, for PCs, if you relocate and reposition supply from China or other parts of the world, it will be possible with just these kinds of funds. They are very insignificant.”

He said the mobile phone industry got around Rs 41,000 crore, where there has been sustained effort

for the past 10 years to push manufacturing, and even it does not come under ITA-1 (information technology agreement).

“You gave them (mobile industry) duty arbitrage earlier. There was some base created for mobile manufacturing; whereas for PC, laptop, servers and tablets, there was an inverted duty regime from 2005 to 2014 that impacted manufacturing of these products. Now, we need to re-invent,” Kunkolienker

said. Under ITA-1, members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) were not allowed to impose tariff barriers on IT products, which include personal computers, set-top boxes and servers.

The enforcement of ITA-1 led to many companies shutting their manufacturing unit in India, as import of finished IT products became cheaper compared to their production in the country.

Kunkolienker said there is a need to recreate and reposition India's market. “At least Rs 20,000 crore is required (under PLI). It is based on value addition potential that exists in the country.”

“There is an immense potential for Indian MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises) to

become part of the global manufacturing ecosystem. There is a disability in MSMEs to borrow capital,” Kunkolienker said.

He said currently, India has major challenges in terms of manufacturing ecosystem, including logistics.

“For real make in India to happen, there is a need to address disabilities. It won't be possible by giving 2 per cent. It does not even cover up for loss of transactions. Relocating the supply chain is not an easy target.”

To achieve this target, you need to have an export-centric approach. Shipping lines may offer competitive rates. We support the strategy of export-led growth but export infrastructure is very uncompetitive,” Kunkolienker said. —PTI

OLECTRA GETS ₹600-CR PUNE ORDER FOR 350 ELECTRIC BUSES



MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, JAN 31.

The Secunderabad-based Olectra Greentech, the BSE-listed manufacturer of electric buses, and its sister concern Evey Trans have received the letter of award from Pune Mahanagar Parivahan Mahamandal for 350 electric buses.

The order is under the FAME-II (Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles) scheme for supply of 350 electric buses on gross cost contract (GCC) / Opex model basis for a period of 12 years.

Evey Trans will procure these 350 electric buses from Olectra Greentech and deliver them within seven months. The maintenance of these buses shall also be undertaken by the company during the contract period.

“The value of this order from Pune is about Rs 600 crore,” Sharat Chandra, CFO, Olectra Greentech told *Financial Chronicle*.

Olectra Greentech, which has been declared as the least quoted bidder for 300 electric buses from the Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTCL), is also likely to get the order for a 12-year contract. “The order from BMTCL is expected shortly and the value of this tender is about Rs 570 crore to our firm,” Chandra said, adding the se 300 buses would be delivered in 12 months.

“We have in hand an order book of 1,250 electric buses to deliver across Indian cities over 12-15 months,” he said.

Olectra already operates 150 buses in Pune.

SHORT TAKES

Messi's contract biggest in sports

Madrid: Lionel Messi's most recent contract with Barcelona is worth up to 555 million euros (\$673 million) over four seasons, the *El Mundo* newspaper reported on Sunday. The Spanish daily said it had access to the document Messi signed with the Catalan club in 2017, which included fixed incomes and variables that could reach nearly 138 million euros (\$167 million) each season. The newspaper said it is the most expensive contract ever agreed with an athlete in any sport.

Messi would have to pay about half of that in taxes in Spain. The report said the 33-year-old player has already secured more than 510 million euros (\$619 million) of the total. Barcelona denied responsibility for leaking the document and said it would take legal action against the newspaper.

Messi did not immediately make any public comments about the report. — AP

Hyderabad FC too hot for Chennaiyin

Vasco: Hyderabad FC strengthened their chances of qualifying for the play-offs with a 2-0 victory over Chennaiyin FC in the Indian Super League, here on Sunday.

Goals from Fran Sandaza (28th minute) and Joel Chianese (82th) were enough to secure all three points for the Nizams and propel them to third place on the table.

Hyderabad made their intentions clear right from the start, winning a corner in the fifth minute. The promising Asish Rai, who is enjoying a breakthrough season, was the architect of the move, sprinting into the Chennaiyin box and finding Mohammed Yasir.

After Yasir's cross was put behind for a corner, Rai got another chance but sent his cross over.

Hyderabad kept attacking in the first quarter and got their reward just before the half-hour mark when Sandaza broke the deadlock. — PTI

Gill blazes to title in Coimbatore

Coimbatore: Gaurav Gill was in blazing form at the wheels of his Mahindra XUV as he and navigator Musa Sherif showed immense skills and patience to win the Rally of Coimbatore on Sunday and again emerge national champions. By winning two legs on tarmac in Itanagar last month and coming to the leafy environs of Kethanur, 40km outside Coimbatore, Gill showed he was also the king on gravel as well. For JK Tyre, the return to the rallying scene with a bang after a long hiatus could not have been sweeter. The comeback to the latest season in a year of the pandemic has been simply captivating.

It was a brave decision on part of the FMSCI's INRC and the competing teams to go ahead with the rally season despite fears over the Corona virus. From Saturday to Sunday afternoon, Gill had a lot of problems, though by sheer dint of experience and his large heart he conquered the elements and technical glitches in the car.

Jesus wins it for Manchester City

London: Manchester City opened up a three-point lead at the top of the Premier League with a game in hand to come as Pep Guardiola's men beat Sheffield United 1-0, while Manchester United played out a goalless draw at Arsenal on Saturday. Gabriel Jesus scored the only goal inside the first 10 minutes at the Etihad as City extended their winning run to 12 games in all competitions.

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Odisha vs Jamshedpur from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

WWE

Raw: Bouts from 6.30 am (Tuesday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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MOEEN TARGET

England allrounder Ali looks to get Test career back on track

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR
CHENNAI, JAN. 31

England all-rounder Moeen Ali has fond memories of the 2016 Test series in India. Moeen had started and ended the series with centuries even though England didn't have much to cheer about, having lost 0-4.

Back in Chennai where he scored his last Test ton, Moeen is now looking to get his red-ball career back on track. England coach Chris Silverwood has hinted that Moeen is in contention to play the Chennai Test.

This would be his first Test since he was dropped during the 2019 Ashes.

"I enjoyed the break and played in a few leagues around the world. But ultimately it is Test cricket that I missed. I've waited long enough," said Moeen.

Nineteen wickets short of joining the 200-wicket club, Moeen has set his sights on completing the milestone in India.

"That is my biggest motivation. I still feel I've got wickets and runs in me and match-winning performances within me. I have small targets I want to achieve first.

"I am not too far away from getting 200 wickets. I know people say they don't look at these things but it would be something I would look at. Then I would set another target after that," said Moeen.

Moeen was part of the England squad that toured Sri Lanka recently, but the 33-year-old spent most of his time in isolation after testing Covid-19 positive.

Moeen said he is fit and raring to go now.

"Once I tested positive, I just wanted to get it over and done with really. It has been tough but I'm a big believer in 'after hardship comes



A file photo of England allrounder Moeen Ali (left). — ECB

He's (Virat Kohli) a great guy and a good friend of mine — we don't talk too much about cricket. I don't know how we're going to get him out because I don't think he has any sort of weakness but we have a good bowling attack, some pace in the line-up.

— MOEEN ALI
England allrounder

ease'. Hopefully there is ease after this," said Moeen.

The off-spinner who took 10 wickets, including that of Virat Kohli, during the 2016 series knows the importance of

removing the Indian skipper early.

"How do we get him out? He's obviously an amazing player, world-class, he's very motivated to do well and I'm sure he'll be even more motivated after they did well in Australia and he had to leave for the birth of his child," said Moeen.

Moeen and Kohli are teammates at Royal Challengers Bangalore. "He's a great guy and a good friend of mine — we don't talk too much about cricket. I don't know how we're going to get him out because I don't think he has any sort of weakness but we have a good bowling attack, some pace in the line-up," he added.

INDIA FAVOURITES, ENGLAND'S TOP 3 INCONSISTENT: CHAPPELL

New Delhi, Jan. 31: Former Australia captain Ian Chappell reckons India will start as favourites in the Test series against England owing to a quality pace attack with plenty of depth and a top order that is more consistent than the visitors'.

What should also bolster the home team is the addition of captain Virat Kohli to a strong batting line-up and their incredible recent triumph in Australia. "India will start as favourites after an exhilarating victory over Australia, overcoming all

obstacles. When you add the name Virat Kohli to the batting order, the team suddenly assumes a bullet-proof cloak," Chappell wrote in his column for *ESPNcricinfo*.

"In also adding the names R Ashwin, Hardik Pandya and Ishant Sharma to the list of available players, India take on an unbeatable appearance."

The big-ticket series starts in Chennai on February 5. Chappell feels India's formidable top order may tip the scales in favour of the home team.

— PTI

MUSHTAQ ALI | FINAL

TN pip Baroda for second title

Ahmedabad, Jan. 31: Tamil Nadu produced an impressive batting display after left-arm spinner M. Siddarth's four-wicket haul as they lifted the coveted Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 Trophy after defeating Baroda by seven wickets in the final here on Sunday.

This was Tamil Nadu's second Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy triumph, after winning their first title way back in 2006-07. Baroda, who had won the title twice in the past (in 2011-12 and 2013-14), ended runners-up this time.

Siddharth (4/20) spun his web around the Baroda batsmen to restrict them to a meagre 120 for 9 and then Tamil Nadu overhauled the target in 18 overs, with opener C. Hari Nishaanth top-scoring with 35.

Chasing 121 for a win, Tamil Nadu lost opener Narayan Jagadeesan (14) early as pacer Lukman Meriwala (1/34) picked up the first wicket, with the opposition at 26/1.

But Nishaanth continued playing his shots and was joined by Baba Aparajith (29 not out off 35 balls) as Tamil Nadu reached 61/1 after 10 overs.

However, medium-pacer Babashafi Pathan removed Nishaanth in the 12th over, as he holed out in the deep, to reduce TN to 67/2 and give Baroda a glimmer of hope.

Skipper Dinesh Karthik played his part to perfection with a 16-ball 22 but

perished when his side needed 20 runs off 23 balls. Aparajith and Shahrulkh Khan (18 not out) then took TN home. Shahrulkh, fittingly, finished the game with a boundary.

Earlier, Siddharth's brilliant bowling upfront enabled TN to restrict Baroda to 120 for 9 on a difficult track.

It was largely due to the 58-run seventh wicket stand between Vishnu Solanki (49) and Atit Sheth (29) that Baroda after being reduced to 36/6 managed a three-figure total.

Siddharth used the pitch to his advantage by varying the pace of his deliveries and also using the crease well to create awkward angles for the batsmen.

Put in to bat on a Sardar Patel Stadium track that offered both turn and bounce, Baroda lost left-handed opener Ninad Rathva (1) early as the move to start with spinners from both the ends paid off for Tamil Nadu.

Rathva was caught by KB Arun Karthik off offie Baba Aparajith (1/16). Aparajith and left-arm spinner R Sai Kishore (0/11) kept things tight as Baroda was 11/1 after three overs.

BRIEF SCORES

Baroda 120/9 (Vishnu Solanki 49, Atit Sheth 29; M Siddharth 4/20; M. Mohammed 1/16) lost to **Tamil Nadu 123/3** (C. Hari Nishaanth 35, Baba Aparajith 29 not out; Atit Sheth 1/20) by 7 wickets.



Tamil Nadu celebrate after winning the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 trophy by beating Baroda in the final.

Antonsen, Tai emerge champs

Bangkok, Jan. 31: Top-ranked Tai Tzu-ying won a dramatic cliffhanger women's badminton World Tour Final in Bangkok on Sunday, blocking reigning Olympic champion Carolina Marin's bid for a hat-trick of titles in three weeks.

The all Danish men's singles final was equally nail biting as Anders Antonsen denied Viktor Axelsen a third tournament win in three weeks.

Marin beat the Taiwanese 26-year-old two weeks in a row during the previous Thailand Open tournament finals.

The Spaniard had a shaky start Sunday as Tai exploited holes in her defence early, but Marin mounted a successful comeback in the later stages winning the opener 21-14.

Marin was loud and feisty in her verbal celebrations, but a visibly annoyed Tai soon found

her own voice.

In the second game Tai dominated early and dictated a commanding pace, eventually triumphing 21-8. The decider was filled with fast and furious rallies — both players yo-yoed up and down the scoreboard — but two late spectacular drop shots were critical in sealing Tai's victory 21-19.

"Before this match today I kept telling myself that I had to play patiently. In the previous matches, all my mistakes were caused (by) my own impatience," Tai said.

Thailand has hosted three consecutive badminton tournaments in a bio-secure bubble to guard against the pandemic.

Axelsen, ranked fourth, couldn't control his nerves — losing the first game 16-21 — his body language showing immense frustration as errors piled up and shots landed wide.

— AFP

Strike-rate doesn't really matter at times: Pujara

New Delhi, Jan. 31: There are times when balls faced matter a lot more than runs scored and the recent tour of Australia was all about that for India's Test batting mainstay Cheteshwar Pujara, who finds the "strike-rate talk" overrated.

Pujara had collected a lot more runs (521 at 41.41 strike rate and three hundreds) in his player of the series performance to ensure a historic win in Australia two seasons ago but considering the "extraordinary circumstances" of the recent showdown that just went by, he rates his effort (271 at 29.20 and three half-centuries) equally special.

"Both tours have been fantastic for the team and personally I did well on both tours but the cir-



Cheteshwar Pujara

cumstances were completely different. This time I was starting up after a long time, almost eight months (due to Covid-19), there were no first class games also," Pujara said.

The 31-year-old stood like a rock through the series, quite literally in the final Test in Brisbane, where he took multiple blows on the body to keep a relentless

Australian attack at bay.

"It wasn't easy at all in terms of preparation and the Australian team had a thorough game plan for each of us. To get back into rhythm took a little bit of time but luckily all went positive in the end.

"Numbers wise, it may not look like a very, very good series for me but if you look at the pitches, not many runs were scored this time. It was more challenging than last time without a doubt."

The 81-Test veteran said the balls faced, 928 to 1,258 two years ago, mattered more than runs scored, given the challenging pace attack, nature of pitches and barrage of injuries that the Indian team suffered through the four games.

— PTI

Ranji survived World War, freedom struggle but not Covid



Hemant Kenkre
Silly Point

The recent news that the Ranji Trophy has been suspended for the 2020-21 season caused a dampener in what has otherwise been a fabulous season for Indian cricket. It has been 86 years since MJ Gopalan bowled the first ball in a first class fixture for Madras (Tamil Nadu) against Mysore (Karnataka) in the inaugural game of the Ranji Trophy. The tournament that was conducted unabated since that match played in Madras, has been the lifeline of Indian cricket and is considered the

most important contest to be played by Indian cricketers, barring Test cricket. What began with 14 teams in the inaugural season has now morphed into a mammoth tourney featuring 38 teams from across the country. The decision taken by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) was after consultation with their stakeholders (teams, players, etc.) is a correct one considering the current situation. The gigantic logistical efforts needed to conduct the national tournament in these times (with the

threats still being posed by the pandemic) prompted the BCCI to take this unfortunate step to put player and public safety on top priority.

Just how important the Ranji Trophy is for Indian cricket and its growth is not too difficult to demonstrate to the present generation that has been weaned on the shorter formats of the game. For Zoomers (Generation Z) whose birth years range from the mid-to-late 1990s to the 2000s, the Ranji Trophy will not have the same importance as shorter tournaments such as the Indian Premier League that has complete top-of-the-mind recall. The recent exploits of the Indian team in Australia in the Test series are ample proof of how the Ranji Trophy has contributed to the growth of Indian cricket.

The way the bench players put their hands up to take India to a convincing win over the Australians just goes to show how deep cricket has penetrated into the country. Performances by members of the team (who started the tour down under as 'net bowlers') wowed audiences in India and also passed a strong message to followers of the game abroad that Indian cricket cannot be taken lightly. The strength of any team does not lie only in its playing stars but is uncovered when their replacements show their hunger for success. And that's what was on show during the series, particularly in the final Test match at the Gabba.

Former Australian great, Greg Chappell commended the domestic structure in India and called it the main reason for the superb

turnaround that was caused by stand-in captain Ajinkya Rahane and team. In his column the former Aussie skipper wrote: "An India wannabe gets the cricket equivalent of the Gurkha military training programme — arguably the toughest physical and mental induction regime in the world." Having coached India for two years, Chappell saw, at first hand, the Indian cricket system (from age-group cricket onwards) and understood the rigours of coming up through the same.

In a summation, Chappell went on to call their young cricketers 'weekend warriors' as compared to their Indian counterparts. He mentioned the cut-throat competition that a young Indian cricketer has to survive from the Under-16 age

group level till he reaches the first class level, saying: "As cricket is THE major sport in India, the best athletes in the country are playing the game and competition for state places is fierce." Indian legend Sunil Gavaskar has often written about the 'hunger' that a young Indian cricketer has as he undertakes the sharp climb, up from the age group level to the Ranji Trophy.

In recent times, many experts often talk about the influence of the IPL in getting an Indian cricketer ready for the international stage. That, in a sense, is partly true as we have seen many youngsters catch the eyes of cricket experts thanks to their performances in the tournament. What they probably don't realise is the hard work all these cricketers have gone through performing in far

corners of the country playing the Ranji Trophy to reach the IPL level.

There will be discussions about T. Natarajan's penchant to bowl good yorkers for his IPL franchise but not about the 67 wickets he has snared in only 21 first class (Ranji included) matches. It was his, and Mohammed Siraj's experience playing the long format Ranji Trophy that gave them the edge while playing Test cricket, not the IPL. In a sense, the IPL has given players the right attitude while playing at the international level but the real experience will always be due to their hard work in the competitive Ranji Trophy which (unfortunately) will be missed this year. The tournament survived a World War and the freedom struggle but not the pandemic.