


DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | MONDAY | 1 FEBRUARY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 33.0°C
Min: 18.0°C
RH: 73%
Rainfall: NIL

Forecast: Partly Cloudy.
Max/Min temp.
33/18 °C

COVID-19

COUNT

CASES

DEATHS

(+8,662)

(+135)

1,07,52,872

1,54,397

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+163)

(+1)

TS: 2,94,469

1,599

(+116)

(+0)

AP: 8,87,836

7,153

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

10,33,06,428

DEATHS

22,33,104

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES

219

worldometers.info/

coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari; Uttarayana

Tithi: Pushya Bahula Chavithi till 6.23 pm

Star: Uttara till 11.56 pm

Varjyam: 8.04 am to 9.34 am

Durmuhurtam: 12.52 pm to 1.37pm to 3.07 pm to 3.52 pm

Rahukalam: 7.30 pm to 9 pm

HIJRI CALENDAR

Jamadi- ul- Akhri 18,1442 AH

PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)

Fajar: 5.40 am

Zohar: 1.30 pm

Asar: 4.30 pm

Maghrib: 5.48 pm

Isha: 8.30 pm

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.34 AM

SUNSET TODAY 5.58 PM

MOONRISE TODAY 9.16 AM

MOONSET TOMORROW 10.00 AM

COUNTER POINT



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

SHORT TAKES

Yamini to head BJP Mahila Morcha

Vijayawada: Women's rights activist Sadineeni Yamini Sharma, who has been working for the protection of temples, was appointed state secretary of the AP BJP Mahila Morcha. Morcha president Bollina Nirmala Kishore issued the appointment orders on Sunday. Yamini Sharma had recently conducted protests against the desecration of the Lord Rama idol at the Ramateertham temple and alleged occupation of a hill near Guntur by missionaries.

INDIAN COAST GUARD MAY ACQUIRE 200 SHIPS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 31

The Coast Guard (ICG), with a meagre force and two vessels in 1977, has now grown into a major coastal security force with 156 ships and 62 aircraft. The force also became the fourth largest in the world after the ones in the US, the UK and South Korea. It proposes to have 200 vessels and 100 aircraft by 2025.

Briefing media on the eve of its 45th Raising Day, additional director-general V.S. Pathania said the ICG has played a significant role in securing Indian coasts and enforcing regulations in India's maritime zones.

NATION | 4

Centre allows full capacity in theatres



WORLD | 5

Pro-Navalny stir: 3,000 arrested

SPORTS | 8

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



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Atchannaidu's aides block rival sarpanch candidate

DC CORRESPONDENT
SRIKAKULAM, JAN. 31

Followers of former minister and TD state president K. Atchannaidu have allegedly prevented YSRC supporter Kinjarapu Appanna from filing his nomination from Nimmada in Srikakulam district, home village of Kinjarapu family on Sunday.

Reports said Atchannaidu called Appanna, who also happens to be his nephew, asking him not to file his nomination. Appanna refused stating his wife had lost her government job during TD regime and his family also did not benefit much from the TD.

After Appanna expressed his determination to file his nomination, TD workers and

TD SARPANCH CANDIDATE HUBBY ABDUCTED

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, JAN. 31

The husband of a sarpanch candidate of Banepalli gram panchayat at Rayadurgam belonging to the Telugu Desam was abducted on Sunday.

■ Page 2: Kidnapping in Karnataka

close followers of Atchannaidu rushed to YSRC leader's residence and prevented him from coming out of his house.

This led to commotion with the two groups almost coming to blows.

YSRC TURNCOAT TO TD ABDUCTED, LEFT IN FOREST

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 31

One Sabbella Srinivasa Reddy of Gollalakunta village in East Godavari district, who switched over to TD from YSRC on Saturday, was kidnapped and dropped in a forest.

■ Report on Page 2

Police rushed to the spot and dispersed the crowd. Appanna finally filed his nomination papers under police escort.

■ Page 2: Deputy CM demands action



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy administers polio drops to children at the camp office on Sunday. — DECCAN CHRONICLE

Jagan launches pulse polio drive

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 31

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy launched pulse polio campaign by administering polio drops on children in his camp office at Tadepalli on Sunday. Deputy Chief Minister Alla Krishna Srinivas, Health Principal Secretary Anil Kumar Singhal, Health Commissioner Katamaneni Bhaskar and other officials were present on the occasion.

In a separate programme, Governor B. Viswanath Reddy launched Pulse Polio Immunization Programme at Raj

Bhavan. Speaking on the occasion, he said that the campaign was launched to eliminate poliomyelitis (polio) in the country by vaccinating all children under the age of five. He said around 52.72 lakh children of less than five years age are to be administered polio drops in the State. He said the success of the programme was that not a single case of polio has been reported in the country since 2011.

Mukesh Kumar Meena, Secretary to Governor, A Md Imtiaz, Collector, Krishna, Dr Devi, State Immunization Officer and other officials were present on the occasion.

FEAR | FACTOR Forest staff believe animal strayed

Leopard's pugmarks leave college in a tizzy

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 31

Staff and students of Sri Venkateswara Agriculture College are in a tizzy after they sighted pugmarks of a leopard on the university premises here on Sunday. College staff immediately alerted Forest Department officials, who reached the spot to collect samples.

Eyewitnesses, including night watchmen, saw the leopard and two cubs moving around between the university campus and the nearby forest area. They said for the past two nights, the three wild animals have been



Pugmarks of the leopard

coming out from the forest into the agriculture college premises before returning.

Speaking to Deccan Chronicle, Tirupati divisional forest officer (DFO) M. Hima Sailaja said a

team of forest officials are maintaining a watch on the varsity campus and its surroundings. She confirmed that pugmarks found inside the university campus are that of a leopard. She said the leopard might have trespassed into the varsity premises during the late hours of Friday or Saturday.

Forest officials suspect that animal to be a mother leopard, which may have deviated along with her two cubs from their regular trails in the forests.

■ Page 2: Staff, students told not to venture out

Tikait seeks respectable solution to end farm stir

Refuses to agree under pressure, seeks mid-way resolution

SANJAY KAW | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

With more farmers streaming into the protest sites at Delhi's borders, Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait said on Sunday that the farmers' unions were ready for a "respectable solution", but they would "never agree to anything under pressure". In Punjab, chief minister Amarinder Singh has called an all-party meeting to show unity with the protesters and evolve a consensus on the way forward on the three contentious agricultural laws.

As the stream of farmers heading for Delhi's borders remained incessant on the 67th day of the massive agitation, Mr Tikait said the Republic Day violence was "part of a conspiracy" and that the government should nab all those behind it. "The violence on January 26 was part of a conspiracy. The tricolour is over and above everything. We will never let anyone disrespect it. It will not be tolerated."

Mr Tikait, who is camping at the Ghazipur border and has now become the

MODI SAYS COUNTRY IS SADDENED BY 'INSULT' TO NATIONAL FLAG ON R-DAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

Breaking his silence on the shocking events that took place at the Red Fort just after the majestic Republic Day parade on January 26, when unruly elements brandishing swords and sticks had attacked policemen and 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 tricolour on January 26 in Delhi".

Delivering his monthly face of the agitation, also urged the government to release all those farmers who were arrested in connection with the tractor rally. "The government should release our men and prepare an environment conducive for the talks," he said, adding: "We will honour and respect the dignity of the Prime Minister. Farmers don't want that the government or



Narendra Modi

"Mann ki Baat" address, Mr Modi said "we have to infuse the times to come with new hope and novelty".

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."

After the mahapanchayat at Baraut in UP's Baghpat district, two more mahapanchayats are being planned in UP's Bijnor and Haryana's Jind districts to mobilise the growing support for the protesting

■ Report on Page x

Shah takes aim at Didi for promoting nephew

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, JAN. 31

Making dynasty politics and nepotism the prime weapon of the BJP against the Trinamul Congress, Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday tore into Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee allegedly giving priority to *bhatija kalyan* (nephew welfare) over *jan kalyan* (public welfare), in an oblique reference to her nephew: Abhishek Banerjee.

Shah also accused the Trinamul Congress government of trying to make the young Diamond Harbour MP the successor of Mamata Banerjee as Chief Minister.

Shah told a BJP rally at Dumurjola Stadium in Howrah, which he was earlier supposed to attend in person, virtually from New

PM TO LAUNCH 3 BIG TICKET PLANS IN WB

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, JAN. 31

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on his second visit to West Bengal, will inaugurate three big ticket central projects totalling ₹4,552 crores at Haldia next week in what appears to be a curtain raiser of his campaign to brighten the BJP's prospects in the ensuing Assembly polls.

■ Full report on Page 4

Delhi, "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi wherever



Amit Shah

the NDA has formed its government across the country, it is undertaking work for public welfare and development so that each and every village and household gets all services. But here, no agenda other than making Bhatija the Chief Minister exists. The Modi government is committed to all types of public welfare. But the Mamata Banerjee government is only busy in Bhatija Kalyan. It has no agenda of public welfare here."

Sasikala drives out in Jaya car, uses AIADMK's flag

G. BABU
JAYAKUMAR | DC
CHENNAI, JAN. 31

Sending the message that she is indeed in charge of the AIADMK, V.K. Sasikala sat on the front seat of the Toyota MUV used by the late J. Jayalalithaa as she rode the distance in Bengaluru, from the Victoria Hospital to a farmhouse in the outskirts, with the AIADMK flag fluttering on the bonnet on Sunday.

Acknowledging the cheerful welcome by supporters, who showered flower petals on the vehicle and raised slogans in her praise, Sasikala waved at them and greeted all those who were around even as she was escorted to her temporary residence by a convoy of vehicles.

As an augury to what might happen in Tamil Nadu politics, Sasikala's nephew and the founder of Amma Makkal Mun-netra



Expelled AIADMK leader V.K. Sasikala discharged from a hospital after recovering from Covid in Bengaluru. — PTI

Kazhagam, T.T.V. Dhinakaran, explained the use of the AIADMK flag by saying that she was indeed the general secretary of the party.

It was a clear warning to all those leaders holding the reins of the AIADMK as many of them had openly said that Sasikala would have no place in the party anymore by reminding everyone that she had already been expelled following her going to jail. But going by the hype

farmers. While the Bijnor mahapanchayat has been scheduled for Monday, the one at Jind will be held on Wednesday. Prominent western UP Gurjar leader Madan Bhaiyya has also extended his community's support to the farmers.

The Punjab CM has called an all-party meeting to discuss the situation arising out of the recent developments, especially in view of the Republic Day violence, the Singhu border attack on farmers and the massive vilification campaign against them.

Mr Singh said the "crisis" triggered by the farm laws was a matter of concern for the entire state and its people. "Only through the collective efforts of all Punjabis, and all the political parties of the state, can the crisis be tackled effectively, and the farmers' interests be protected." He went on to add: "Our farmers are dying out there at Delhi's borders for more than two months now. They are being beaten up by the police and assaulted by goons. They are being harassed and are being deprived of basic amenities."

BOWENPALLY IN TS CATCHES PM'S ATTENTION

T.S.S. SIDDHARTH | DC
HYDERABAD, JAN. 31

Employees, workers and vegetable vendors of the Bowenpally vegetable market were on cloud nine when they heard Prime Minister Narendra Modi speak about them.

In his first 'Mann ki Baat' this year, Modi was all praise for the efforts made by officials at the market yard. The innovative practice takes vegetable waste and converts it into biogas through a plant on the premises.

"We have a waste-to-energy plant, which has a capacity of 10 tonnes," L. Srinivas, selection grade secretary, AMC Bowenpally, said.

The energy generated from waste is close to between 250 to 400 units of electricity.

and hoopla over her first whiff of freedom after four years of incarceration, Sasikala's next long drive to Chennai in a motorcade, probably by February 7, could attract more supporters and her entry into Chennai, too, could be marked by more dramatic scenes.

She might even drop in at the resting place of Jayalalithaa, on which she had slapped thrice with her open palms taking a sabatham (vow) even as she was leaving to Bengaluru to start her jail sentence four years ago, before resuming her new political life that has the potential to splinter the AIADMK.

In the event of the present honchos of the AIADMK giving way to her to take over the reins of the party, the party's prospects in the polls could be jeopardised in view of her unpopularity among the common people.

SHORT TAKES STAFF, STUDENTS TOLD NOT TO VENTURE OUT

FROM PAGE 1

They might have trespassed into the human habitation looking for stray animals, such as cows and dogs, which usually roam across the varsity premises.

“We have requested staff and students at the campus to avoid venturing out after dark to avoid human-animal conflict. As a precautionary measure, we have also suggested to the college management that they increase lighting at the campus, clear overgrowth, ensure waste management and preventing stray animals from roaming across the varsity premises. Besides, our patrolling parties will maintain surveillance,” the DFO maintained.

SEC'S VOTER APPLICATION REJECTED

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 31

Guntur district officials have started enquiring into the rejection of voting rights to State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar at his native place Duggirala in Guntur district.

Ramesh Kumar visited his ancestral house at Duggirala on Sunday where he told the tahsildar that he wanted to clear doubts of officials about getting voting rights. Ramesh Kumar had earlier applied for a voter ID in Duggirala but his application was rejected as he was living in Hyderabad.

According to norms, voter ID is issued to the individual based on the place where one lives.

As Ramesh Kumar's permanent address is in Hyderabad, officials in Duggirala refused his application to register his name as a voter. The SEC has rented a house in Vijayawada and he lives there only on working days. Ramesh Kumar appealed to the Guntur district collector to use his discretionary powers and give him voting rights in Duggirala, where he has never lived.

Ironically, the SEC himself admitted this during a press conference and stated that he would move the court for his voter ID from Duggirala.

Guntur district officials informed that an enquiry into the issue was on and it would be resolved soon.

NIMMAGADDA WILL JOIN TD, SAYS SRINIVASA RAO

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 31

Minister for endowments Vellampalli Srinivas Rao expressed his anger at State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar for behaving like a political leader.

The minister made the remark while inaugurating some developmental programmes in Vijayawada west constituency on Sunday.

Srinivas Rao alleged that Ramesh Kumar was degrading the government during his ongoing tour of districts. He said the people would not tolerate the SEC if he degrades Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.

He said that despite such tactics by the SEC, eventually Reddy will be victorious as people are supporting YSRC government for its governance. The minister opined that there are a lot of chances that Ramesh Kumar would join TD and all these gimmicks are to have a strong foothold in politics after his tenure as the SEC.

Meanwhile, the minister donated ₹5,01,116 for the construction of Rama temple in Ayodhya.

Nothing ‘unanimous’ about gram panchayat elections

YSRC at war with SEC and TD on unanimous elections; ‘Shadow Teams’ to be formed

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 31

The scuffle over unanimous elections between YSR Congress, State Election Commission and opposition parties is heading for a flashpoint with the ruling party completely in favour and the SEC and opposition parties opposing the same.

YSRC maintains that it was legal and constitutional and helps in resolving political differences and factions in villages. However, the SEC warned against abnormal unanimous elections. Interestingly, for the first time, SEC Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar announced forming ‘Shadow Teams’ to prevent forcible unanimous elections and also to monitor everything at the ground-level. He stated that unanimous elections pose a grave threat to democracy as they are against the spirit of Constitution and such trends tend to deprive downtrodden communities of power. He warned that if anyone is found guilty of forcing unanimous elections, they would be sternly dealt with.

Going a step further, Telugu Desam demanded cancellation of unanimous elections forcibly made in March last year. Around 27 per cent unanimous elections were registered during the MPTC and ZPTC elections, which was ‘abnormal’. The TD called its leaders and cadre to prevent unanimous elections and this has turned the gram panchayat unanimous concept into a war between the ruling party, the opposition parties and the SEC.

The YSRC argues that the system of local governance has existed since ancient times. In those times each village had a self-administered governance system. The village governance was shrouded by the Panchas (five wise leaders). The village community used to select the panchas unanimously. The important criteria followed in their selection were the individual's character, truthfulness, benevolence, impartiality and capability of delivering justice without prejudice.



YSR Congress supporters coming in a rally to submit nominations for Gram Panchayat elections at Ramavarappadu in Vijayawada on Sunday.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

Polls: Litmus test for YSRC, TD

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 31

The gram panchayat elections is turning into a litmus test for YSR Congress and its welfare-based administration and to Telugu Desam to re-strengthen itself.

TD is battle-ready with a call centre to receive complaints about violations and teams to keep track and expose violations of the YSRC administration.

Ministers along with ruling party MLAs, MPs and other local leaders, are

striving hard to win a majority in the gram panchayat elections.

According to sources, the party high command has directed all ministers and legislators to win over the people with the help of welfare schemes implemented in the last 20 months. The YSRC is hopeful of winning a landslide as everyone has benefitted from one welfare scheme or the other.

TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu called for blocking unanimous elections so as to

prevent villages from falling into the iron-like grip of ruling party rowdies. Stating that the present elections should be seen as a big test to the leadership at the village level, Mr Naidu said that future leaders would emerge from the panchayats.

Mr Naidu told his party leaders to take photos and videos whenever any ruling party leader tries to pick up arguments or attacks people and opposition workers. He stated that written complaints

should be made to the returning officers and to the party office also. He said that a 24-hour control room has been set up at the TD office and the legal cell would be ready to provide all information on the election process. He asked TD cadres to file nominations in all places without any fear.

The TD round-the-clock control room can be contacted on 73062-99999 or WhatsApp 75575-57744, especially to submit photos and videos pertaining to illegalities of YSRC.

DEPUTY CM DEMANDS ACTION

FROM PAGE 1

Deputy Chief Minister Dharmana Krishnadasi issued a statement asking State Election Commissioner to take action

The intention of adopting this method was to have unity and harmony among diverse groups of people

against Atchannaidu. He said that holding the responsible post of party president, Atchannaidu should not have resorted to threatening a contesting candidate over phone.

in the village to enhance cooperation between the people, the ruling party points out.

Ministers Botsa Satyanarayana and Peddireddi Ramachandra Reddy, leaders Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy and others stated that Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Telangana and Punjab continued to have gram panchayat elections on a non-political party basis.

They claimed that states have adopted innovative methods to encourage

unanimous elections at the village panchayat level. They claimed that the constitution itself is giving preference to unanimous elections with people's consent. They pointed out no election commissioner has so far opposed unanimous elections.

Ramesh Kumar, however, was playing his role in the political conspiracy being hatched by vested interests.

TD leader kidnapped, abandoned in forests in EG

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 31

One Sabbella Srinivasa Reddy of Gollalakunta village in Jaggampeta mandal of East Godavari district, who switched over to Telugu Desam from YSR Congress on Saturday, was kidnapped and dropped in a forest between Bhavaram and Govindapuram. On Sunday morning, a cattleherd saw Reddy lying on the ground. He informed the villagers, who came and took him to his house. Later, his wife Pushpaveni filed her nomination papers and Srinivasa Reddy accompanied her.

Meanwhile, Telugu Desam Kakinada Parliamentary district president Jyothula Naveen Kumar said that there was no doubt that the kidnap was at the behest of YSRC leaders. He alleged that the ruling party wants to make village sarpanch posts unanimous by threatening the opposition party candidates. But, he said that the TD would not be silent on such inci-

dents. Senior TD leader Jyothula Venkata Appa Rao (Nehru) said that a new trend has emerged

house and was drinking water, some unknown persons came and covered his face with a hood. Later, they tied him with ropes and dropped him near a forest between Bhavaram and Govindapuram. On Sunday morning, a cattleherd saw Reddy lying on the ground. He informed the villagers, who came and took him to his house. Later, his wife Pushpaveni filed her nomination papers and Srinivasa Reddy accompanied her.

Meanwhile, Telugu Desam Kakinada Parliamentary district president Jyothula Naveen Kumar said that there was no doubt that the kidnap was at the behest of YSRC leaders. He alleged that the ruling party wants to make village sarpanch posts unanimous by threatening the opposition party candidates. But, he said that the TD would not be silent on such inci-

dents. Senior TD leader Jyothula Venkata Appa Rao (Nehru) said that a new trend has emerged



S. Srinivasa Reddy, TD supported candidate for Gollaguta Panchayat of Jaggampeta mandal of East Godavari district, who was kidnapped.

dents. Senior TD leader Jyothula Venkata Appa Rao (Nehru) said that a new trend has emerged

after YSRC came to power whereby they threaten opposition candidates. He said that they would lodge

a complaint with the State Election Commission, DGP, SP and Jaggampet police. If the police offi-

KIDNAPPING IN KARNATAKA

FROM PAGE 1

The kidnapping took place near Molakalmur in Karnataka.

According to Eeranna, TD leader from Banepalli in Rayadurgam Assembly segment, he went to offer pooja and seek blessings from the goddess of a temple in Hulagi of Koppal district before his wife could file nomination papers for the post of sarpanch in the ward reserved for women.

Eeranna was at Molakalmur bus stand in Karnataka, about 30 km from his village, when a group of unidentified persons dragged him into car and took him into deserted fields away from Molakalmur town. Eeranna said he escaped from the abductors at Morampalli village in Karnataka and reached home on Sunday.

“The abductors beat me severely and forcibly poured liquor into my mouth. They demanded that my wife should not file her nomination for the gram panchayat polls, as they want a unanimous election in the area,” Eeranna recalled.

TD politburo member Kalava Srinivasulu lashed out at YSRC MLA Kapu Ramachandra Reddy for terrorising Telugu Desam cadres in villages where he is not in a position to win elections through democratic means. Telugu Desam supremo N. Chandrababu Naidu also spoke to Eeranna over telephone and promised support from the party.

In view of complaints about pressure from rival parties for unanimous polls, police have formed 44 shadow teams to prevent such incidents in Anantapur district, superintendent of police Satya Esubabu disclosed. Police also seized ₹2 lakh from relatives of a sarpanch candidate travelling in a vehicle at Mudigubba. Meanwhile, district collector Gandham Chandrudu has reviewed poll arrangements in 12 mandals of Kadiri revenue division.

MAOISTS CALL FOR BOYCOTT

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 31

The CPI Maoist has called for a boycott of the gram panchayat elections in tribal parts of North Andhra Pradesh. The Maoists termed that the local body elections as bogus and appealed to the people to abstain from voting.

cials toe the YSRC diktat, then TD will approach courts for justice.

Meanwhile, Jaggampeta Circle Inspector V. Suresh Babu said that on learning about the incident on social media, he contacted Srinivasa Reddy and tried to enquire. But, he said that he was with his wife who was filing papers for sarpanch post.

TEMPLE PRIEST, 2 TD LEADERS HELD FOR IDOL VANDALISING

DC CORRESPONDENT
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM,
JAN. 31

A temple priest Marla Venkata Muralikrishna, 45, Telugu Desam leader Malla Venkata Raju and former TNTUC organising secretary Danthuluri Venkatapathi Raju have been arrested on Sunday on charges of vandalising the idol at Lord Subrahmanyeswara Swamy Temple in Sriramanagar area of Rajamahendravaram on December 31, 2020.

Special Investigation Team (SIT) deputy inspector general (DIG) of police G.V.G. Ashok Kumar, along with Rajamahendravaram superintendent of police Shemushi Bajpayee told reporters here on Sunday evening that Muralikrishna has been working as a priest of Siddhi Vinayaka Temple in Sriramanagar. He lodged a complaint with police that unknown persons had broken the arms of Lord Subrahmanyeswara Swamy in the temple. Police them formed special teams for investigating the case.

The DIG said the priest has confessed to his crime of colluding with two Telugu Desam leaders.

He stated that the priest was in financial difficulties.

Following continuing attacks on Hindu temples, TD leaders wanted to get political benefit and offered the priest money for vandalising the temple idol.

Ashok Kumar said the matter is being investigated further.

5 SARPANCHES TO BE ELECTED UNANIMOUSLY

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 31

As the last day of filing nominations in East Godavari district ended on Sunday, there are indications that at least five sarpanches will be elected unanimously.

District panchayat officials said though the time for filing nominations ended at 5 pm, many candidates remained in queue to file their nominations. They have been given tokens and are filing nominations one by one.

According to primary information, at Sankhavaram, Achampet and Jaggampet in Sankhavaram mandal, Poduru in Rowthulapudi mandal, and Lachipalem in Tallarevu mandal, only single nominations have been received for sarpanch posts. In Lachipalem, eight wards have also received single nominations.

As per information made available by election officials, as many as 3,486 nominations have been received, including 777 for sarpanch and 2,709 for ward member posts on the last day of filing nominations on Sunday for the first phase of elections in Kakinada and Peddapuram divisions of East Godavari district. Kakinada division witnessed 344 nominations for sarpanch and 1,023 for member posts in eight mandals.

NOMINATIONS FOR FIRST PHASE OF PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS CONCLUDE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 31

The process of filing nominations for contesting gram panchayat polls in 12 districts of Andhra Pradesh concluded on Sunday.

According to reports received here, over 13,000 nominations have been filed for posts of sarpanch. More than 33,000 nominations have been received for ward members' posts. Officials will scrutinise these nominations from Monday morning.

The State Election Commission is conducting panchayat polls in four phases. First phase of polls will be held on February 9. Filing of

nominations for it started on January 29 and ended on Sunday. Contestants, along with their family members and supporters, reached panchayat offices in their areas to file nominations.

Though panchayat elections are supposed to be apolitical, impact of political parties is clearly visible, as many leaders of ruling and opposition parties are trying to get elected unanimously.

Candidates have a very limited time for campaigning. YSRC and TD are extending support to various candidates.

BJP and Jana Sena have formed an alliance to work together for winning the panchayat polls.

SAVING | LIVES Pavan has organised almost 900 blood donation camps across undivided Andhra Pradesh

Everyone donate blood once in 3 months: Donor

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JAN. 31

A voluntary donor Pattupogula Pavan Kumar of Kadapa feels all people must donate blood once every three months if the needy are to get blood without running around blood banks.

A young man of 30 years, the founding president of Blood 2 Live Foundation has been working towards achieving this goal for past eight years. He has organised almost 900 blood donation camps across the

undivided Andhra Pradesh. The blood collected thus has helped 13 lakh patients. Even during the difficult Covid-19 lockdown time, he and the youth he encouraged donated more than 900 units of blood.

Pavan Kumar completed his B. Tech degree and started earning a five-figure salary. What prompted him into starting his Blood 2 Live Foundation was his mother's need to undergo spinal surgery, which was getting delayed due to insufficient blood.



That was when he donated a unit of blood. He married the girl he loved shortly after finishing his engineering. But she had to be admitted to a Vijayawada hospital for 20 days due to a heart-related problem. During this time

too, he noticed patients struggling for blood.

It was then that Pavan Kumar decided to save lives with blood donation by starting Blood 2 Live Foundation in 2012, though he had been donating blood since 2007. His organisation, supported by friends and donors, has been donating blood in the two Telugu states. Apart from donating blood, he has been distributing pamphlets, running campaigns through radio, cartoons, poems, songs and videos. He has got many awards

from various organisations. Recently, the All India Marvadi Association felicitated him at Hyderabad for his services.

He prints tens of thousands of calendars a year with addresses of major blood banks in the two states, their phone numbers, the names of blood donors, and their phone numbers too. So far, Pavan Kumar's endeavour has facilitated 13 lakh people into receiving blood. He himself has donated blood 21 times.

Founding president of Blood 2 Live Foundation, Pavan Kumar, told *Deccan Chronicle* that instead of the patient or patient's relatives going to blood banks for blood, they should be able to get blood without asking. For that to happen, he felt everyone should voluntarily donate blood at their nearest blood bank once every three months. “This would be possible only thorough understanding among people about blood donation. That is why, I am fighting tirelessly,” he remarked.

SHORT TAKES

PULSE POLIO PROGRAMME ORGANISED

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 31

The East Godavari District Collector D. Muralidhar Reddy said that the officials should follow the Covid-19 protocols while administering the pulse polio drops.

He inaugurated the pulse polio programme on Sunday at the Community Health Centre in Yetimoga area. Mr Muralidhar Reddy, Joint Collector Keerthi Chekuri, Kakinada Municipal Commissioner Swapnil Dinkar Pundkar, Kakinada MLA Dwarampudi Chandrasekhara Reddy, Kakinada mayor Sunkara Pavani and others administered the pulse polio drops to the children.

Mr Muralidhar Reddy said that there were 4,69,445 children in the district who were administered pulse polio drops. He said that the programme would continue on February 1 and 2 by house-to-house survey and 140 mobile teams would participate. The Medical and Health Supervising Officer Dr Vanisri, the District Medical and Health Officer Dr K.V.S. Gowreeswara Rao and District Immunization officer Dr Aruna and others were present.

In West Godavari, the District Collector Revu Muthyala Raju administered pulse polio drops to a child at the collector's camp office in Eluru.

MLA REBUTS MAFIA, GUN CULTURE

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 31

P. Gannavaram MLA Kondeti Chittibabu expressed anger and resentment over a recent land dispute between two groups where a youth threatened a rival group with a gun. He told the reporters on Sunday that there was no sand mafia, soil mafia and gun culture in his constituency, but some of the opposition parties were targeting his constituency basing his caste to malign the constituency with false allegations.

He said that though Amalapuram MLA P. Viswaroop is also of the same caste, nobody can dare to target him as he is a Minister. He refuted allegations by opposition parties that the land and soil mafia is flourishing in his constituency, levelled charges by the former Amalapuram MP G.V. Harsha Kumar and BJP leader and former MLA Ayyaji Vema. He said that there was no land mafia, sand mafia.

TD BLAMES CM FOR CRISIS IN AGRICULTURE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 31

Telugu Rythu president Marreddy Srinivasa Reddy on Sunday blamed the Jagan Mohan Reddy government for the crisis in the agriculture sector. Its anti-farmer policies are only benefitting ruling party leaders, he said.

He alleged that the ruling party leaders had caused serious losses to both farmers and tenant farmers with their irregularities and now they were shamelessly trying to get the cultivators' support for winning panchayat elections. He further alleged that of the 15.5 lakh tenant farmers, over 14 lakh could not get input subsidy because of the heartless policies of the ruling party.

Addressing a press conference here, Srinivasa Reddy recalled that the Chandrababu Naidu regime had provided bank loans to tenant farmers considering their increasing significance in the protection of agriculture sector. Now they were not having any loan card, insurance cover or input subsidy. He stated that over Rs. 700 crore loss was caused to Nellore paddy farmers through wrong weighing and alleged that when they questioned the irregularities, false cases were filed against Dalit farmers. Reddy deplored that the Chief Minister has ignored farmers in his Rythu Bharosa programme. He recalled that during the 2017 YSRC Plenary, Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had promised to give ₹12, 500 to each farmer but now he was giving only ₹7,500, which also was being given in a haphazard manner.

The TD leader lamented that the government's negligent policies had reduced the agriculture growth rate from 11 to eight per cent.



Vijayawada Bishop T. Joseph Rajarao launches Navadina Japamala prayer on the occasion of Mary Matha shrine Tirunallu at Gunadala in Vijayawada on Sunday.

NINE-DAY PRAYERS START AS PART OF GUNADALA FETE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 31

The nine-day special prayers began on Sunday at Gunadala Mother Mary shrine in Vijayawada on a grand note. The special prayers are part of the three-day Mother Mary feast (Gunadala Thirunallu) from February 9 to 11.

Coinciding with the event, Bishop T. Joseph Raja Rao unveiled a new statue of Saint Mother Theresa at the shrine. Speaking on the occasion, he said the nine-day special prayers are part of the annual tradition before Mother Mary's feast commence on February 9. He underlined that the Gunadala feast has been going on since the past nine decades.

Nearly 10 lakh devotees from AP and other states will visit the shrine to seek blessings of Mother Mary.

Monsignor M. Prasad said all arrangements have been made to follow Covid-19 guidelines stipulated by the state government during the feast. He stated that prayers have begun remembering Mother Mary and would continue till the feast concludes.

Fr K. Mariyanna, Fr V. Thomas, Fr. Anthony, priests, sisters and devotees were present on the occasion.

Iron Age protohistoric monument neglected

The menhir is the only extant monument of its kind in Nakrekal in TS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 31

Structures of archaeological importance belonging to the Iron Age at Padurivaripalem near Chandupatla village in Nakrekal mandal in Nalgonda district in Telangana state are under serious threat. Archaeologists worry that the destruction of many burials built by huge boulders arranged in circular fashion near the local tank called Chinnacheruvu are being bulldozed out for want of land for agricultural operations.

Dr E. Sivanagi Reddy, archaeologist and CEO, Cultural Centre of Vijayawada and Amaravati, came to the spot in Chandupatla village along with Tanguturi Saidulu, amateur archaeologist, with a view to sensitising villagers on the significance of preserving these Iron Age monuments.

After conducting a survey of these proto-his-

toric structures, Dr Reddy said that out of 100 burials, only 10 are left here and there is no guarantee for their safety unless steps are taken to protect it.

Dr Reddy inspected a huge granite stone, known as a menhir, erected in the memory of a dead chieftain of the megalithic tribe near Netturu Sthambham Chelka area of Padurivarigudem. He said the menhir, the only extant monument of its kind in Nakrekal, measures 11 feet above ground level, six feet in width and is half a foot in thickness and is buried at least six feet deep underground.

Such an invaluable monument cries for protection, he bemoaned. He said it is interesting to note that the menhir is locally known as Netturu Sthambham, meaning 'pillar of blood', as it turns into red colour during summer season due to mineral composition.

Dr Reddy also surveyed



Archaeologist E. Sivanagi Reddy inspects the pre-historic Iron Age monuments at Padurivaripalem near Chandupatla village in Nakrekal mandal in Nalgonda district on Sunday.

the surroundings of Kandimallavarigudem, a hamlet, 2 km from Chandupatla, where an inscription dated to November 27, 1289 AD, is

located. He observed the near extinct burials of 10 Iron Age, built by boulders encircling a cist chamber arranged with huge slabs at the centre

in the periphery of an irrigation tank.

He found a huge quantity of pot shreds of megalithic period comprising red ware, black ware and black and red ware (typical pottery of Iron Age) and bones scattered around the damaged burials by bulldozers by miscreants due to lack of historical awareness.

Dr Reddy, as part of an awareness campaign, 'Preserve Heritage for Posterity', launched by the CCVA, sensitised local communities in Padurivarigudem and Kandimallavarigudem on the historical significance of Iron Age monuments and the need to preserve them for future generations. Keeping the archaeological potential of these monuments, he made an appeal to the Department of Heritage, Telangana, to declare the site and Menhir, protected under the provisions of the Archaeological remains and Historical monuments of Telangana Act.

NTR, unlike Chiranjeevi, never took people for granted, says biographer

A recently launched biography of the late N.T. Rama Rao, titled 'Maverick Messiahs', written by journalist Ramesh Kandula, chronicles and analyses the political life of NTR and its impact on both the state and the nation. An objective assessment of the late leader, the book has been well-received for its critical insight and diligent research.

What set NTR apart from later day movie stars entering politics? Is the Telugu Desam a Kamma party meant to empower the community and is it dying? In this two-part interview with Sriram Karri, author Kandula defends the party and explains what set NTR apart.

Q. Why did NTR remain the last real actor phenomenon to achieve political success? Tamil superstar Rajanikanth has now announced he won't enter politics, while Chiranjeevi and Pawan Kalyan had great fan networks but could not convert them into political parties that could debut with electoral wins.

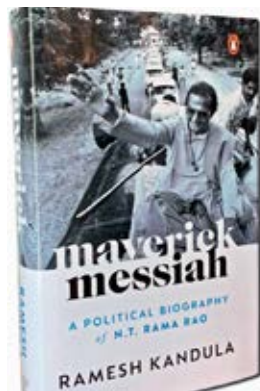
A. Film actors who

PART -1

entered politics in the past, especially M.G. Ramachandran (MGR) and later on, N.T. Rama Rao (NTR), had a strong artistic urge to connect with the people. The social bonding they enjoyed with their audiences was qualitatively different from actors who strayed into politics in recent years. Despite enormous adulation they enjoyed, neither MGR nor NTR took the people for granted when entering politics. Unlike MGR, NTR did not have a political pedigree, but spared no effort in understanding and articulating public issues that impacted the masses.

Chiranjeevi enjoyed many advantages but failed to convince the voting public that he was an alternative to the existing set-up. His campaign began with an assumption that he was a chief-minister-in-waiting and he had to just walk through elections to occupy the chair.

While NTR used his celluloid image to reach out to the public, he never relied on his glamour alone. The political content of NTR's campaign was more focused and



The book has been well-received for its critical insight and diligent research.

serious, while Chiranjeevi's was more style than substance. I think Pawan Kalyan also suffers from the same failings (as his brother). Actors cannot succeed in politics unless they carry a serious political message.

Q. Did the kind of films NTR played, particularly mythologies, give him any advantage? Why did he have such high credibility with masses? What in your estimate justifies calling him a messiah of any kind, even if of a maverick kind?

A. An interesting aspect of NTR's mythologies were that they were pan-Indian stories, and not directly related to Telugu nationalism and pride that NTR propounded politically. During NTR's time, screen adaptations of mythologies became known for a distinctive Telugu, which was formal and ceremonial. As several researchers have pointed out, NTR's mastery over language, considered a quintessential Telugu experience, did help in his emergence as a Telugu cultural symbol.

My hypothesis is that NTR carried over the linguistic identity of these films into his political campaign, but not his screen 'divinity'. His political credibility was not a by-product of his playing godly characters. He worked towards it consciously both in his film career and later on in politics.

As for the tag of messiah, NTR burst on to the political scene in 1982 as a ray of hope and captivated the imagination of the Telugus like no other leader. His campaigns were the greatest spectacles of democracy in action. Shortcomings notwithstanding, NTR

emerged as a larger-than-life personality and brought a sea-change in the socio-political landscape of AP.

The maverick apart, NTR was a man of strange contradictions. He believed in the power of people, but his democratic credentials were suspect because he had no qualms in turning his party into a one-man show. He was secular to the core but exhibited a peculiar religious streak. He entered politics on the plank of regionalism but remained a committed nationalist throughout.

Q. How did people relate to his dramatics and eccentricities?

A. His dramatics entertained the masses but some sections of people intensely disliked the theatrics he brought into politics. He carried this urge to be the centre of attraction from reel to public life. However, common folks were not particularly put off by this, because of his ability to convey seriousness of intent. Despite the nickname 'Drama Rao', NTR was a very serious man in private and rarely cracked a joke. But a common person felt warmth in his presence.

₹3cr to be spent on renovating desecrated temple

DC CORRESPONDENT
RAMATEERTHAM (VIZIANAGARAM), JAN. 31

The 10th century Sri Kodandarama Swamy temple atop Bodikonda hill in Nellihera of Vizianagaram district, which drew attention of the entire nation for wrong reasons, is set to regain its past glory with the state government planning to spend ₹3 crore on its development and renovation.

The temple is mostly visited by farmers of north coastal Andhra. Every pilgrim makes it a point to visit the Kodandarama Swamy either at the beginning or end of their pilgrimage to the area. Many villagers come from far away in bullock carts and stay at the temple for four days to celebrate Maha Sivaratri and Ramanavami. "When news about decapitation of the statue spread, it was farmers who were the most hurt," stated Ch. Rama Raju, a structural engineer by profession, whose family has been living in Ramateertham since four generations. Another local resident Vekatalakshmi, who is in her 60s, said during her childhood, there was a hot spring in the middle of the pond. It was then believed that idols of Lord Rama, Lakshmana and Seetha installed at the temple had been found in the pond's deep water. Pusapati Gajapathi Raju's family thought it was a blessing for the local people and built a temple there.

Both temples of Ramaswamy and Srikodandarama Swamy attract thousands of pilgrims in the post harvest season till Ramanavami. Noted historian and former department of history and archaeology chief Prof K. Suryanarayana said inscriptions

CONSECRATION CEREMONY TO ANTARVEDI CHARIOT IN FEB.

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 31

A Samprokshanam programme (Consecration) will be held at Lord Lakshmi Narasimha Temple's new chariot on February 11, 12 and 13 in Antarvedi in East Godavari District.

The old chariot was gutted in September month, and the government has made a new chariot to the Lord. The Endowment Department officials met Sri Sarada Peetham Seer in Visakhapatnam SriSriSri Swaroopnanda and explained about the traditional customs for the Samprokshanam programme for the new chariot. They requested Swamiji to do the programme on the day. Swamiji said special Vydik programmes should be taken up in Antarvedi Temple and Lord Lakshmi Narasimha Kalyanam would be performed regularly.

of Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism (Durga) dated from 10th Century have been found atop the Bodikonda hill. "This has been confirmed by British archaeologist Prof Alexander Rea, who worked mainly in South British India, in 1908," he stated.

Assistant commissioner of Ramateertham Devasthanam, Ch. Ranga Rao said they are trying to revive the rich religious traditions of Hinduism at the temple.



Swimming competitions in Krishna river: The Aqua Devils Welfare Association conducted a 1.25-km swimming competition in the Krishna river in Vijayawada on Sunday in which 225 swimmers participated from Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka. Association secretary Yarlagadda Venkata Ramesh Kumar said that Mangalagiri MLA Alla Ramakrishna Reddy launched the swimming competi-

tions and Vijayawada Central MLA Malladi Vishnu presented prizes to the winners. He said that swimming competitions were held in a sportive atmosphere and association was conducting these swimming competitions for the 21+ years in which men and women were participating. He said that the first, second and third prizes were given to the winners in 61 above years, 46-60 years, 15-30 years categories.

116 COVID CASES, NO DEATHS REPORTED

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 31

No new death was registered and 116 new Covid-19 infections were reported in the past 24 hours in AP on Sunday. As many as 41,910 samples were tested, and their positive rate was at 0.28 per cent. The overall positivity rate of 1.31 crore samples was 6.76 per cent.

The recovery rate

remained at 99.05 per cent, and the number of recoveries increased to 8,79,405 as 127 patients recovered in the past day. The number of active cases has further come down to 1,278.

Throughout the past week, Krishna district reported the highest single-day tallies among the districts. On Sunday Krishna district reported 24 new cases.

SP visits sensitive villages in EG district

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 31

The East Godavari Superintendent of Police Adnan Nayeem Asmi visited the sensitive and hyper-sensitive villages like AP Trayam, G. Mamidada, Peddada, Pedapudi, Rameswaram and other villages and observed the nomination process and also polling stations. Mr Asmi said that the candidates should follow the code of conduct and prevent the illegal liquor, arrack, distribution of cash, ornaments and allurements during the elections. He said that every voter should exercise their

vote liberally without fear. If anybody obstructs their freedom during franchising their vote, they can contact police who would take stringent action against the wrongdoers. He said that criminal cases would be booked against violators of election code and others.

The District Additional Superintendent of Police K. Kumar, Kakinada DSP V. Bhima Rao, Special Branch DSP M. Ambika Prasad, SUB Inspector N. Rajanikumar, Kakinada Rural Inspector A. Muralikrishna, Pedapudi Sub-Inspector K. Kranthi Kumar and others were present.

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. Narayanansamy, 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 Narayanansamy 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

New Delhi, Jan. 31: Farmer leader Naresh Tikait on Sunday said that protesting farmers will honour the dignity of the Prime Minister, but are also committed to protect their own self-respect, a day after Narendra Modi said his government was just a phone call away for talks with them.

Tikait said the government should release our men and prepare an environment conducive for talks.

A respectful solution should be reached. We will never agree to anything under pressure, he said at the Ghazipur border between Delhi and Uttar Pradesh.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had on Saturday said his government's offer on agri laws made to protesting farmers still stands and it was a just phone call away for talks, days after violence broke out in parts of the national capital on Republic Day.

"We will honour and respect the dignity of Prime Minister. Farmers don't want that the government or Parliament bows down to them," Tikait said.

"Will also ensure that the self-respect of farmers is protected. A middle way should be found. Talks should be held," he added.

During their January 26 parade, many of the protesters, driving tractors, reached the Red Fort while some of them hoisted religious flags on its domes and the flagstaff at the ramparts, where the national flag is unfurled by the Prime Minister on Independence Day.

Tikait said, 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, he said.

The Delhi Police has registered nearly 40 cases and made over 80 arrests in connection with the violence. The government should release our men and prepare an environment conducive for talks. — PTI



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

— PTI

Scribes held: Media Cong hits out at govt bodies flay action for FIRs on journo

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 interfere with its right to freedom of expression. Freelance journalist Mandeep 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 interfere 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." — PTI

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

The Congress on Sunday launched a scathing attack on the arrest of a journalist who was covering the farmer protest at the Singhu border. Senior leader Rahul Gandhi tweeted, "Those who fear truth arrest honest journalists."

He also tagged a video purportedly showing journalist Mandeep Punia being held by police at the border protest site. Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi said journalists covering the farmers' movement are being arrested, cases are being slapped against them and the internet is being shut down in many

places. She tweeted, "The BJP government wants to trample upon the voice of the farmers, but they have forgotten that the more you suppress, the more voices will rise against your atrocities."

On Saturday also the Congress had hit out against BJP governments for filing cases against journalists and Congress Lok Sabha MP Dr Shashi Tharoor. Priyanka Gandhi had tweeted in Hindi "Respecting democracy is not the government's prerogative but it is its responsibility. The atmosphere of fear is like poison for democracy. The BJP has torn to shreds the dignity of democracy by FIRs against senior journalists and public representatives."

SISODIA SLAMS BJP FOR FAKING KEJRIWAL VIDEO

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia on Sunday lashed out at Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and said that the viral video of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal promoting farm laws is doctored.

While addressing a press conference, Sisodia said, "Yesterday the BJP and its spokesperson posted a doctored video of Arvind Kejriwal stating benefits of farm laws. I was furious over it, but also felt sad for BJP that it had to post a distorted video clip of Arvind ji to establish the credibility of the laws."

Sisodia further targeted the Centre and said that it has lost its credibility.

"Today, not only BJP, but Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also lost credibility. BJP understands this very well, that is why they posted a doctored video of Arvind Kejriwal ji," he added.

In a tweet in Hindi, the national spokesperson of BJP Sambit Patra on Saturday shared a video of Arvind Kejriwal and said, "Sir ji (Arvind Kejriwal) counts the benefits of farm laws. See video."

Farmers have been protesting at different borders of the national capital since November 26, 2020, against the farm laws: Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.

● NOT ONLY BJP, but the PM has also lost credibility. BJP understands this very well, that is why they posted a doctored video of Kejriwal, Sisodia said.

PM SADDENED BY 'INSULT' TO NATION FLAG ON REPUBLIC DAY

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

Breaking his silence on the shocking events that took place at the Red Fort just after the majestic Republic Day parade on January 26, when unruly elements brandishing swords and sticks had attacked policemen and 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 tricolour on January 26 in Delhi".

Delivering his monthly "Mann ki Baat" address, Modi said "we have to infuse the times to come with new hope and novelty". This was the only direct, but brief, reference to the tumultuous 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 these shocking events had taken place in Delhi shortly after noon when some irate farmers, mostly from Punjab, Haryana and western UP, had taken out a "tractor rally" as part of their protests against the three farm laws. The government has always backed the rationale behind the farm laws but their implementation has already been stayed by the Supreme Court.

Modi said, "The country was saddened by the insult to the tricolour on Jan. 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."

On India's Covid vaccination drive, Modi said: "Our vaccination programme too is turning out to be exemplary to the world."

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, Jamshedpur, 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 explosion 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

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

● STRUCTURAL PACKAGE and other work on the Tejas Mark II is progressing well and its production is likely to start somewhere around 2025.

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-ship 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 said 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

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

1 FEBRUARY 2021

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

There is a further legal hurdle to be crossed. It appears that while a government can repeal a law passed by Parliament, it has no authority to "suspend" a law. The most it can do is to delay framing the rules for the implementation of laws. But what's to happen after 18 months? The government's refusal to yield on the MSP question makes the gap between the government's stand and that of farmers unbridgeable.

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.

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 is 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 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

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.

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 colonialists 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.

LETTERS

AMMA VODI SOP

Students eligible under Amma vodi scheme are being denied benefit citing zero attendance last year even though students had full attendance. No option is provided on website to complain. There is no response from the school. Hundreds of eligible students are waiting for benefit.

Supriya Umesh
Visakhapatnam

DESTITUTE

It is very sad and distressing to read that workers of Indore Municipal Corporation dumped homeless elders by the side of the highway (*Elderly destitute left on roadside, DC, Jan. 31*). The civic staff have brought disgrace and ignominy to the commercial capital of Madhya Pradesh. Further, the city was adjudged cleanest city for the last four years. Clean and kind heart is far more important than a clean city. The culprits should not be spared.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

PM'S PROMISE

Even though the Prime Minister reiterated his promise to suspend farm laws, the SKM is unlikely to budge from its stand to repeal the laws after being emboldened by the resurgence of their agitation. The only course left for the government is to make the implementation optional to the states since agriculture is, after all, a state subject.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Rs 4.4 crore relief granted to city

HYDERABAD, JANUARY. 31 The Central Government had sanctioned Rs 4.4 crore towards various measures for providing relief to the victims of the floods in the twin-cities.

It has sanctioned another sum of Rs 2.5 crore for flood relief works in Nizamabad district.

Chief Minister, Mr K. Brahmananda Reddi, who returned from Delhi here today, told reporters that of the amount sanctioned for the twin cities, Rs 230 lakh was marked for repairs to the surface and underground drainage systems including the embankments of the Musi river and Rs 75 lakh for repairs to roads and buildings.

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.

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

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 come 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

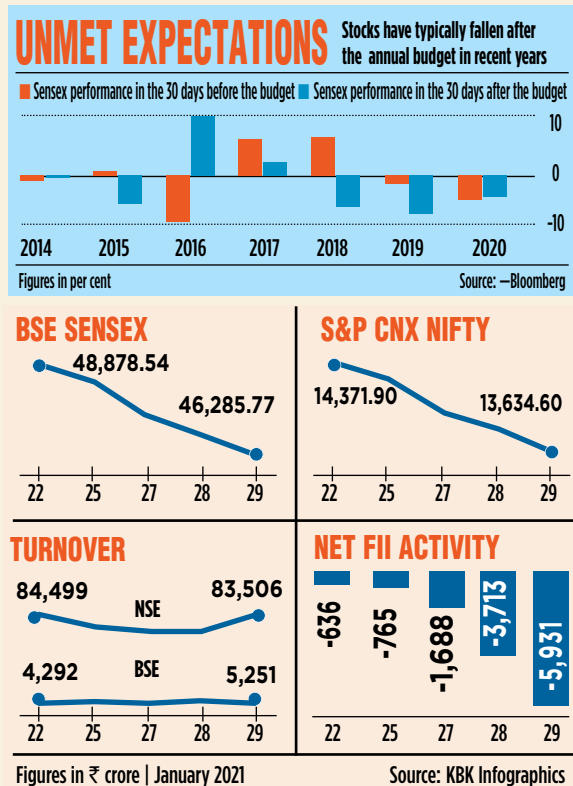
NUPUR ACHARYA & RONJOJ MAZUMDAR JAN. 31

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

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. Ferran Torres and Jesus were two of five changes made by Guardiola and they combined to make the breakthrough. — AFP

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 | DC 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.

AFTER FRESH GUIDELINES, 50% SPECTATORS LIKELY FOR 2ND TEST

New Delhi, Jan. 31: Spectators might be allowed in the second India-England Test in Chennai after the central government's fresh Covid-19 guidelines permitted crowd attendance at fifty per cent of capacity at sporting venues.

The BCCI and the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association had deliberated on entry of spectators earlier also before deciding that the first two matches would be held closed doors. But the fresh home ministry guidelines on easing of restrictions on public movement

have changed the scenario.

"There is no time to allow entry of spectators for the first Test starting on February 5 as we only received the government notification on Saturday. You can't organise entry of spectators at such a short notice," a senior TNCA official said on conditions of anonymity.

"But yes, now with fresh guidelines, there is every possibility that second Test starting from February 14 might have spectators as per notification," he added.

The Chepauk has a capacity of 50,000. — PTI

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

DOMESTIC | TWENTY20

TN pip Baroda for second title

Ahmedabad, Jan. 31: Tamil Nadu produced an impressive batting display after left-arm spinner M. Siddharth'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. — PTI

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.

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.

He managed to regroup to win the second game 21-5.

But in the decider Antonsen had all the right answers, triumphing 21-17 to claim the game and the hour-long match against an increasingly ruffled Axelsen. Antonsen is the only man to beat Axelsen in three weeks. — AFP



Taiwan's Tai Tzu-ying reacts after beating Carolina Marin of Spain in the women's singles match at the World Tour Finals in Bangkok on Sunday. — BADMINTON ASSOCIATION OF THAILAND/AFP

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.