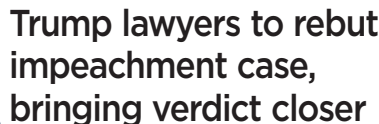


NEW DELHI SATURDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2021



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Dominic Thiem of Austria celebrates after victory against Australia's Nick Kyrgios during their men's singles on day five of the Australian Open in Melbourne on Friday. — AFP

Report on Page 8

New Delhi: A high intensity earthquake hit Tajikistan on Friday night, tremors of which were felt in Delhi NCR and several other parts of north India. The seismology department at first erroneously gave the epicentre as Amritsar and put the quake's depth at 19 km. It later sent a revised statement to confirm the quake was in Tajikistan. It ascribed the error to a software mistake. According to the National Centre for Seismology, the quake's magnitude was 6.3. The tremors created panic among people who rushed out of their homes. — *PTI*

New Delhi: A cover of “moderate” fog enveloped Delhi on Friday morning, with the city recording a minimum temperature of 10.2°C. The maximum temperature was recorded at 27.4°C. The MeT department has predicted partly cloudy sky and dense fog on Saturday morning.
Full report on Page 2

Srinagar: Train services within the Kashmir Valley and between it and Banihal area of Jammu region are likely to resume next week after remaining suspended for nearly one year in view of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Max: 26°C
Min: 12°C
RH: 57%
Rain: Nil

Forecast: Partly cloudy

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Shuddha
 Vidiya till 12.58 am
 Athabhisham till 3.14 pm
Uthayam: 10 pm to 11.41 pm
Uthartham: 6.47 to 8.18 am
Uthalam: 9 am to 10.30 am
SUNSET TODAY 6.09 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 7.01 AM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 8.10 AM
MOONSET TODAY 7.41 PM

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, FEB. 12



AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 12

With border disputes with China increasing in Ladakh, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police, the key India-China border guarding force, is likely to set up a special command unit in Leh. This is significant as it will operate independently of the ITBP's western command based in Chandigarh and focus exclusively on the entire Ladakh sector.

At present, the ITBP western command in Chandigarh is responsible for the border areas of Ladakh, Himachal and Uttarakhand. But after recent incursions by China's PLA, the home ministry feels a separate unit should be set up for Ladakh as it's now an "extremely sensitive sector".

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, FEB. 12



FC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, FEB. 12

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday reeled out pro-poor measures like free ration and gas to hit out at the Opposition parties for creating a “false narrative” that the Narendra Modi government was “pro-rich” and said that her Budget had given a stimulus to the economy for a sustainable high growth rate.

She took on former finance minister P. Chidambaram for questioning the numbers in her Budget, saying unlike the UPA when an “artificial” increase in capital spending was shown to project growth and subsidy shifted from the government budget to companies, the Budget for 2021-22 brings transparency by bringing all spending on the books.

Replying to the Budget debate in the Raja Sabha, she said spending on defence for the fiscal beginning April 1 has increased both on the revenue and capital side and there is a decline only in the provision for pensions as the previous year's spending included payment of arrears for

New Delhi, Feb. 12: Indicating some signs of recovery, industrial production recorded a positive growth of 1 per cent in December while retail inflation cooled to a 16-month low of 4.06 per cent in January, providing some leeway to RBI to cut interest rate to boost consumption.

Industrial production entered the positive territory after a month, mainly due to better performance of the manufacturing sector, official data showed on Friday. — *PTI*

the one-rank-one-pension (OROP) scheme.

"A false narrative is created to accuse this government of working only for cronies," the finance minister said.

Taking on Mr Chidambaram, who in his speech called the numbers in the Budget “suspect”, Ms Sitharaman said the former finance minister had in 2007-08 showed a ₹40,000-crore

Turn to Page 4

AGE CORRESPONDENT
VIRUDHUNAGAR (TN),
FEB. 12

Fifteen workers were killed and around 36 others injured in a fire at a cracker manufacturing unit near Sivakasi in Tamil Nadu's Virudhunagar district Friday.

The accident occurred at around 11 am when over 120 persons were working in Mariammal Fire Works at Achankulam village near Satur.

The accident is suspected to have been caused by the mishandling of the chemical mixture in the process of manufacturing fancy firecrackers. It damaged 20 work sheds fully, killing five persons including a woman on the spot, while 10 others succumbed to burns at the hospital. Around 36 injured persons are being treated at government hospitals in Sivakasi, Virudhunagar, Satur, Kovilpatti.

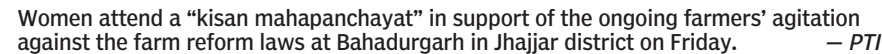
Fire brigade personnel had to struggle for four hours to control the blaze.

■ **More on Page 3**

New Delhi, Feb. 12: Twitter has said it will add labels to identify more government leaders and associated institutions from the next week to provide people with context to what they see and have a “more informed” view of the government.

med experience on the
microblogging platform not part of the list so far

Twitter said the rollout will begin in Canada, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, Germany, Honduras, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Spain, Thailand, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates from February 17. India, however, was



SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, FEB. 12

Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait said Friday he will go on a nationwide march to garner support for the ongoing farmers' agitation against the three agricultural laws.

Addressing a kisan mahapanchayat in Haridwar's Bahadurgarh, Mr. Tikait said he will go to Gujarat as part of the nationwide march and "liberate" its people from the Centre's clutches. He said the Centre was suppressing the farmers' stir and jailing those opposing the new laws.

“We will march nationwide, go to Gujarat and set it free. India is free but the people of Gujarat are imprisoned. If they want to join the movement, they are jailed,” Mr Tikait said.

Earlier Friday, BKU media in-charge Dharmendra Malik said Mr. Tikait will attend seven farmers' meetings in Haryana, Maharashtra and Rajasthan from Sunday to mobilise support. "These mahapanchayats will be held in Haryana's Karnal, Rohtak, Sirsa and Hisar districts, Akola in Maharashtra and Sikar in Rajasthan," he said.

■ **More on Page 2**

SHORT TAKES

Delhi records 141 new Covid cases

New Delhi: Delhi recorded 141 fresh Covid cases and three deaths on Friday, while the positivity rate stood at 0.22 per cent, authorities said. On February 9, no fatality was registered in the national capital. Delhi had recorded 96 coronavirus cases on January 27, the lowest in over nine months, and the first time the daily incidences count had stood below the 100-mark in that month. Also, on February 5 and 7, the fatality counts were two on both the days, same as on February 2. These new 141 cases came out of the 63,022 tests conducted the previous day, according to the latest bulletin issued by the Delhi health department. The infection tally in the city rose to 6,36,670 and the death toll mounted to 10,889 with three new fatalities, authorities said. The active cases tally on Friday rose to 1053 from 1051 the previous day, according to the bulletin.

Cop ends life on way to hospital

New Delhi: A 39-year-old Delhi Police sub-inspector ended his life while he was being taken to a hospital in an ambulance, officials said on Friday. The deceased has been identified as Rajbir Singh. He was posted in southeast district lines and was mentally unsound, they said. DCP (Southeast) RP Meena said, "An information was received that Singh has ended his life by hanging himself with a piece of cloth in a CATS ambulance which was taking him to a hospital for admission from his house." He had been on leave for five days and was marked absent on Friday morning at District Line, he said. According to the police, Singh called the CATS ambulance from his residence and was taken to the DDU hospital but doctors refused to admit him there. Thereafter, another CATS ambulance took him to the Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences (IHBAS) hospital but due to absence of an attendant, doctors refused to admit him here too, police said.

Air quality 'very poor' in NCR cities

Noida: The air quality was recorded in the "very poor" category across Ghaziabad, Noida, Greater Noida, Gurgaon and Faridabad, according to data issued by a government agency on Friday. Pollutants PM 2.5 and PM 10 also remained in the air of the five immediate neighbours of Delhi, according to the air quality index (AQI) maintained by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). According to the index, an AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good", 51 and 100 "satisfactory", 101 and 200 "moderate", 201 and 300 "poor", 301 and 400 "very poor", and 401 and 500 "severe". The average 24-hour AQI at 4 pm on Friday was 372 in Ghaziabad, 363 in Noida, 352 in Greater Noida, 326 in Faridabad and 347 in Gurgaon, according to CPCB's Sameer app. — PTI

PUNJAB SHOULD GIVE A CHANCE TO AAP: SISODIA

Amritsar: AAP leader and deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia on Friday urged the people of Punjab to give his party a chance to form the next government in the state for implementation of welfare schemes like that in Delhi. Arvind Kejriwal's government in Delhi has done such welfare works for the people which the Congress and the BJP never imagined, he told reporters here. Sisodia said the people in Delhi have been provided better health facilities in government hospitals and better education in government schools compared to private facilities. Free electricity and water have been provided round the clock in Delhi, he said. The Delhi deputy chief minister appealed to the people of Punjab to give a chance to the Aam Aadmi Party once so that the Delhi model would be implemented in the state.

Family of victim alleges communal angle City BJP man stabbed to death after brawl at party

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, FEB. 12

A 25-year-old man was stabbed to death allegedly by five men following a quarrel at a birthday party in Outer Delhi's Mangolpuri area.

The family of the victim, Rinku Sharma, alleged that he was killed over communal issue while the police denied the claims and said that it is investigating the incident from all angles.

Security forces were also deployed to maintain law and order in the area and police teams kept monitoring the situation using drones during the day.

The police said that the five accused, identified as Zahid, Mehtab, Danish, Tassudin, and Islam, have been arrested. It said that Zahid, Mehtab, Danish, and Islam were arrested on Thursday while Tassudin was nabbed on Friday. Rinku, an activist of BJP's Yuva Morcha and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), got into a heated



Rinku Sharma

▶ The family of victim alleged that he was killed over communal issue while the police denied the claims and said that it is investigating the incident from all angles

argument with the five men at a birthday party on Wednesday night. The police said that the accused later went to the victim's house and stabbed him with a knife.

Meanwhile, O.P. Mishra, the joint commissioner of police, appealed to people to avoid rumour mongering since it is a sensitive issue and said that police teams are investigating the incident while the five accused have been arrested. According to a senior police official, on February 10 when both the victim and the accused men were attending a birthday party an argument broke out between them over their food joints in Rohini.

"They also slapped and threatened each other, after which they left. The two parties had similar tussles over the same issue sometime back as well. Later, the five men went to Sharma's house where the victim, along with his elder brother, was already standing outside with sticks. A scuffle broke out between the two sides again during which the accused stabbed Sharma and fled from the spot," said the senior police official.

"The victim was then rushed to a nearby hospital where he succumbed to his injuries. During enquiry, it emerged that both the parties had opened their respective

eateries in nearby areas in Rohini in October last year. But both were incurring losses and had to be closed down. The two parties blamed each other for the losses and often had heated arguments over the issue," said the senior police official.

Rinku's brother, Manu Sharma, said that his brother had gone to a birthday party and he was chased back on his return, then dragged outside the house and stabbed.

"We don't have any food shop. They even fought with us after we went for a donation drive for Ram Mandir on August 5 and since then they wanted to quarrel with us," he said.

The VHP leaders claimed that Sharma was associated with the organisation and was killed because he was collecting donations for the Ram temple at Ayodhya.

"We urge the administration to arrest the culprits without delay and ensure strictest punishment," said VHP joint general secretary Surendra Jain.

Commotion in NDMC House; AAP seeks resignation of mayor

New Delhi, Feb. 12: AAP members in the BJP-led NDMC House on Friday raised vociferous slogans, held placards and sought the resignation of North Delhi Mayor Jai Prakash, a day after the ruling party levelled corruption charges against him.

The proceeding of the House, which had convened to finalise the annual budget was marred by protests from the opposition benches. However, the

budget was cleared. The Aam Aadmi Party on Thursday had claimed that Prakash has built his house by illegally occupying DUBIS land, an allegation he termed as baseless.

"AAP raised slogans and held placards and some even climbed on the seat of the branches while the House proceedings were underway," the mayor said. Leader of Opposition and AAP member Vikas Goyal and other party colleague held placards that bore slogans like "Bhrasht Mayor; Kursi Chhoro", "Bhrasht Mayor; Istifa Do".

Prakash said the AAP has "no other business, but to disrupt the House, they do it often".

— PTI

Cloudy sky & dense fog likely in Delhi today

New Delhi, Feb. 12: A cover of "moderate" fog enveloped Delhi on Friday morning, with the city recording a minimum temperature of 10.2 degrees Celsius, MeT officials said.

The maximum temperature was recorded at 27.4 degrees Celsius. The MeT department has predicted partly cloudy sky and dense fog on Saturday morning.

"The maximum and minimum temperatures will be around 27 and 10 degrees Celsius, respectively," it said.

The air quality in the national capital was recorded in the "very poor" category. The air quality index (AQI) was 345 in the evening compared to 331 at 9 am, real-time data of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)

▶ THE MAXIMUM and minimum temperatures will be around 27 and 10 degrees Celsius, respectively

showed. According to Ministry of Earth Sciences' air quality and weather forecasting system SAFAR, the AQI is likely to stay in the "very poor" category for the next two days.

An AQI between 201 and 300 is considered 'poor', 301-400 'very poor', and 401-500 'severe', while the AQI above 500 falls in the severe plus category.

Due to the fog, visibility was reduced in many parts of the city in the morning hours. It was around 400 metres at Safdarjung and 500 metres at Palam at 8:30 am, a MeT department official said. — PTI

Advocate, 5 associates held for extortion from liquor vends

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 12

The Delhi police has arrested an advocate and his five associates for allegedly posing as representatives of an NGO and extorting money from employees of wine shops by accusing them of selling liquor to minors.

The accused, identified as Kumar Shashank (27), a resident of Neb Sarai, formed a gang by roping in two personal security officers (PSOs) Naresh and Pardeep; a bouncer named Neeraj (24); driver Nitin (30); and Shatrughan (21), who posed as a customer at the wine shops.

According to DCP (South district) Atul Kumar Thakur, the matter came to light on Thursday after an employee of one liquor

▶ THE ACCUSED, identified as Kumar Shashank (27), a resident of Neb Sarai, formed a gang by roping in two PSOs Naresh and Pardeep; a bouncer named Neeraj (24); driver Nitin (30); and Shatrughan (21), who posed as a customer at the wine shops

outlet approached the police team deployed near a mall in South Delhi's Saket area.

"He informed the police that some people claiming to be officials of the 'International Human Rights Commission' had come to their shop and demanded money from the manager after accusing him of selling liquor to minors. They also threatened to cancel their liquor license if

their demand was not met," said the DCP.

"Later, in a written complaint, Naresh Singh, the manager of the wine shop, stated that five men came to their shop, two of whom were armed. They claimed to be officials of the International Human Rights Commission (IHRC) and one of them, who identified himself as Kumar Shashank, threatened him and accused him of selling liquor to people below the age of 25," said the DCP.

"Kumar told the manager that they had committed offences under the Excise Act and the JJ Act and their liquor license would be cancelled. He said that cases would be registered against them. Kumar also told the manager that he should pay him ₹2 lakh to evade all this," said the DCP.

BKU leader Rakesh Tikait to join 7 'mahapanchayats'

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, FEB. 12

Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait, on Friday, said he will go on a nationwide march to garner support for the ongoing farmers' agitation against the three contentious agricultural laws.

Addressing a Kisan Mahapanchayat in Haryana's Bahadurgarh, Mr Tikait said he will go to Gujarat as part of the nationwide march against the farm laws and liberate its people from the clutches of the Centre. He attacked the Centre for allegedly suppressing the farmers' stir in the state by jailing those raising their voices against the new laws.

"We will march nationwide, go to Gujarat and set it free. It's controlled by the Centre. India is free but people of Gujarat are imprisoned. If they want to join the movement, they are jailed. We are deciding on the date," Mr Tikait said.

Earlier in the day, BKU's media in-charge Dharmendra Malik said that Mr Tikait will attend seven farmers' meetings in Haryana, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan from Sunday to garner support for the ongoing stir.

"These Kisan Mahapanchayats are scheduled to be held in Haryana's Karnal, Rohtak, Sirsa, and Hisar districts; Maharashtra's Akola; and Rajasthan's Sikar," he said.

Hinting that the ongoing farmers' protests will go on for an indefinite period, Mr Tikait reiterated that they will end the stir only after the new laws are repealed.

"There will be ghar wapsi only after the farm laws are repealed. Our manch and panch will be the same. The Singhu border will remain our



BKU spokesperson Rakesh Tikait during a Kisan Mahapanchayat in support of the ongoing farmers agitation against Centres farm reform laws at Bahadurgarh in Hajar district on Friday.

— PTI

SC panel holds consultations with 12 farmer unions from 8 states

New Delhi, Feb. 12: The Supreme Court-appointed committee on Friday held consultations with 12 farmer unions and peasants from eight states, including West Bengal, on the controversial farm laws enacted by the Centre recently.

This is the seventh meeting held by the panel so far. The three-member committee is holding consultations with stakeholders, both online and in person.

In a statement, the committee said it held its interactions through video conference with farmers, farmer unions and farmer producer organisations (FPOs).

Twelve farm unions and farmers from Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal partici-

pated in the detailed deliberations with the committee members, it said.

"All the participating farmer unions, FPOs and farmers gave their detailed views and suggestions on the three farm laws," the committee added.

On January 12, the apex court had stayed the implementation of the three contentious farm laws for two months and asked the committee to submit a report within two months after consulting the stakeholders.

Thousands of farmers, especially from Punjab, Haryana and parts of Uttar Pradesh, have been camping at Delhi's borders for over two months seeking repeal of the new legislations, introduced by the Centre last year, saying they are pro-corporate and can weaken the mandi system.

office; whether the Centre wants to talk today, in 10 days, or next year, we're ready. Won't go without removing metal spikes from Delhi," he said.

Mr Tikait had earlier warned that the agitation

will not end unless the government repeals the new laws and it may go on till October. On Friday, he mentioned that the farmers hold a protest every year on October 2 at the Ghazipur border.





DELHI POLICE
SHANTI SEWA NYAYA

DELHI STATE LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY
IN COORDINATION WITH
DELHI TRAFFIC POLICE

is organizing

GHAR-GHAR LOK ADALAT

on 14.02.2021 from 10.00 AM to 03.30 PM

FOR SETTLEMENT OF TRAFFIC CHALLANS

All Compoundable traffic challans (ON THE SPOT AND CAMERA-BASED CHALLAN) pending in Virtual and Regular courts shall be taken up

Disposal of Challans will be done at Court Complexes i.e. Tis Hazari, Karkardooma, Patiala House, Saket, Rohini & Dwarka

NAME OF DISTRICT LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY (DLSA)	PLACES WHERE GHAR-GHAR LOK ADALAT WILL ORIGINISE ON 14.02.2021 (SUNDAY)
Central District Legal Services Authority, Room No. 287, Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi Tel.: 239332321 (O), Tel. 23925035, central-dlsa@nic.in	1. Janki Devi Memorial College, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital Marg, Old Rajinder Nagar, Delhi-110060 2. Delhi School Tribunal/STAT, Old Parliament Building, Timarpur, Delhi-110054 3. Ramjas School No. 5, RD Block, Karol Bagh, Delhi
West District Legal Services Authority, Room No. 295, Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi Tel.: 23988052, 23950919, E-mail: west-dlsa@nic.in	1. Shivaji College, Gandhi Marg, Shivaji Enclave, Raja Garden, New Delhi 2. Rajdhani College, Mahatma Gandhi Marg, Block-C, Raja Garden, New Delhi-110015 3. Community Hall, Saranath Dham Mandir, B-Block, Meera Bagh, Paschim Vihar, Outer Ring Road, Delhi-110063
East District Legal Services Authority, Room No. 36, Ground Floor, Karkardooma Courts Complex, Delhi Tel.: 22101336, 22382490, E-mail: east-dlsa@nic.in	1. Mayur Public School, IF Extension, Delhi-110062 2. Mother's Global School, Preet Vihar, Delhi-110092 3. Sports Complex, New Condit, Police Line, East District, Delhi-110096
North-East District Legal Services Authority, Room No. 35, Ground Floor, Karkardooma Courts, Delhi Tel.: 22101335, E-mail: northeast-dlsa@nic.in	1. Jag Parvesh Chandra Hospital, Shastri Park, Delhi 2. DCP Office, North East District, Delhi 3. Govt. Sr. Sec. School, C-Block, Yamuna Vihar, Delhi
Shahdara District Legal Services Authority, Room No. 35A, Ground Floor, Karkardooma Courts, Delhi Tel.: 22101456, 22308970, E-mail: shahdara-dlsa@nic.in	1. BHAKHANI, BHA Bhadara, 31, Shalimar Park, Bhasan Nagar, Shahdara, Delhi-110032, Near East Apur Nagar Metro Station 2. Delhi School Teacher's Co-operative Building Society Ltd., Shantam Sagar, Community Centre B Block, Surajmal Vihar, Delhi 3. GTB Enclave Police Station, Tahirpur Village, Oldshad Garden, Delhi
South District Legal Services Authority, Ground Floor, Utility Block, Saket Courts, New Delhi Tel.: 23963440, E-mail: south-dlsa@nic.in	1. Holiday Club, D-Block, Panchsheel Enclave, New Delhi 2. Culture Club, D-Block opposite Sai Mandir, Saket, New Delhi 3. Go Green Residents Welfare Association Office, Geetanjali Enclave, Adjacent to Ram Mandir, New Delhi
South-East District Legal Services Authority, Ground Floor, Utility Block, Saket Courts, New Delhi Tel.: 23961040, E-mail: southeast-dlsa@nic.in	1. Co-operative Society, Meeting Room, Panchsheel Colony, Near Samvat, Greater Kailash-1, New Delhi 2. Community Hall, Lajpat Nagar, Delhi-110033 3. Govt. Primary School behind Police Station Amar Colony, New Delhi
New Delhi District Legal Services Authority, Patiala House Courts, New Delhi Tel.: 23072418, E-mail: nddlsa@nic.in	1. Ramjas School at R.K. Puram, Delhi 2. Kalyan Kendra at Vasant Vihar, Delhi 3. Ryan International School at Vasant Kunj North, Delhi
North District Legal Services Authority, Room No. 405, Rohini Courts, Delhi Tel.: 27557310, E-mail: north-dlsa@nic.in	1. VSPK International School, Sector-13, Rohini, Delhi 2. B. R. Ambekar, Hospital Rohini, Delhi 3. Shaheed Bhikshu Singh Collage, K.N. Kalju Marg, Delhi
North-West District Legal Services Authority, Room No. 405, Rohini Courts, Delhi Tel.: 27555536, E-mail: northwest-dlsa@nic.in	1. Sarvodaya Vidyalaya, Sector-3, Rohini, Delhi 2. Sarvodaya Vidyalaya, Sector-6, Rohini, Delhi 3. KITT World School, Zone H-4, Pitampura, Delhi-110034
South-West District Legal Services Authority, SA, Admin. Block, Dwarka Courts, New Delhi Tel.: 26041480, E-mail: southwest-dlsa@nic.in	1. MVR School, Sec-13, Dwarka, Delhi 2. Govt. Boy Sr. Sec. School, Sec-3, Dwarka, Delhi 3. Govt. Coed Sr. School, Sec-17, Dwarka, Delhi

Note: - Traffic Lok Adalat will be organized physically keeping in view all safety measures of social distancing etc. due to the present COVID situation.

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DP/9270/2021

SHORT TAKES

MP COPS PROVIDE SECURITY TO KANGANA

Bhopal, Feb. 12: Madhya Pradesh police have put in place thick security cover around Bollywood actor Kangana Ranaut in the wake of a threat by some state Congress leaders that they would not allow her shoot for a film if she did not apologise to farmers over her tweets, an official said on Friday.

Shooting for *Dhaakad*, Ranaut's new film, is going on in Sarni area of Betul district. Sarni City Superintendent of Police (CSP) Abhy Ram Choudhary said, "Security has been tightened for the actress after MP home minister Narottam Mishra directed Betul Superintendent of Police Simala Prasad to do so."

Police personnel equipped with batons and firearms are deployed around the coal handling plant (CHL) near a power project, where the shooting is on, he added.

"Police will man gate numbers two and four of the CHL, from where actors usually enter the shooting venue," Choudhary said.

An inspector has been assigned to oversee Ranaut's safety at the resort, located around 45 kms from Sarni town, where she is during for the shoot, he said.

"We will ensure that she does not face any disturbance during the shoot," the CSP added.

UP POLICE BOOK PICHAI OVER VIDEO AGAINST PM MODI

Varanasi (UP), Feb. 12: Police in Uttar Pradesh's Varanasi had booked Google CEO Sundar Pichai and 17 others last week over a video that allegedly defamed Prime Minister Narendra Modi but later removed the tech giant officials' name from the FIR, police officials said on Friday.

The names of Pichai and three other Google top officials were removed after they were found "not involved" in the case, a police official privy to the probe said.

The FIR was lodged following a complaint by a local resident who claimed that he got over 8,500 threat calls on his mobile phone after he objected to the video that he first came across in a WhatsApp group and later on YouTube, where it has over five lakh views, the officials said. Besides the US-based Pichai, others named in the FIR are three Google India officials including Sanjay Kumar Gupta, according to the FIR lodged at Bhopal police station on February 6.

Google's response over the case is awaited. Among the rest named in the FIR are Ghazipur district-based musicians who allegedly made the video song, a recording studio and a local music label company. The FIR has been lodged under IPC Sections 504 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace), 506 (criminal intimidation), 500 (defamation), 120B (party to a criminal conspiracy).

INDIA RECORDS STEEP DECLINE IN COVID-19 CASES

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 12

India on Friday recorded 9,309 fresh cases and 87 deaths due to Covid-19 as the country's total active caseload saw a sharp decline, falling to 1.35 lakh.

The positive cases now comprise only 1.25% of the total cases and the day to day change of active cases in the last few weeks is showing a consistent decline, said Union health ministry officials.

The distribution of new cases in India in the last 24 hours shows a positive picture with only one state reporting over 1,000 cases while the rest of the states and UTs reporting less than 1,000 new cases. Four states and union territories have not reported any new cases in the last 24 hours. These are Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, Ladakh, Tripura and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

A significant decline in the daily deaths too has been noticed as 18 states/UTs have not reported any new deaths in the last 24 hours while 13 states/UTs have reported between 1-5 new deaths.

National Recovery Rate is 97.32 per cent, which is one of the highest globally. Officials said the continued high rise in the recoveries has led to progressively improving national Recovery Rate.



TMC Rajya Sabha MP Dinesh Trivedi pays tribute to Mahatma Gandhi after resigning as MP during the ongoing Budget Session of Parliament in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

'Temporary lake' triggers concern, threatens rescue work in U'khand

Tapovan (U'khand)/New Delhi, Feb. 12: Experts were trying Friday to determine if a temporary lake formed upstream by an avalanche could breach its banks and threaten the rescue work at the sludge-choked Tapovan tunnel, where 25-30 people are feared trapped.

The confirmed death toll in Sunday's flash flood in the Alaknanda river system in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district climbed to 38 after the recovery of two more bodies and 166 people still remain missing. At the devastated Tapovan power project site rescuers worked non-stop even as the odds of finding the trapped workers alive seemed slim.

Upset over the pace of the rescue work, anxious family members of the missing workers shouted slogans near the NTPC site.

3 J&K scribes to move HC against 'false, frivolous' case

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, FEB. 12

A group of Kashmir-based journalists has decided to move to the high court by filing a quash petition over an FIR filed against it for publishing a report that said the management of a private educational institution in southern Shopian district was not only forced to by the Republic Day function but also many participants seen unfurling the tricolour during it had been brought in by the Army this year.

"We've decided to move the J&K high court with a quash petition against the FIR which has been filed on baseless grounds. We also strongly feel the proceedings of the case will not be conducted fairly," Fahad Shah, editor of *The Kashmir Walla*, a multimedia news and views platform, told this newspaper.

A local court had earlier this month denied interim relief from arrest to Shah and the Kashmir Walla reporter Yashraj Sharma in the case. The additional sessions judge of Shopian held that there was no "exceptional reason and sufficient ground" to grant the duo anticipatory bail to the duo.

Rejecting their plea that they were being implicated in a "false and frivolous" case and, therefore, were entitled to get anticipatory bail under the relevant provisions of the law, the court maintained that the duo could not establish prima facie that they had been falsely implicated in the case, or that they "would not misuse their liberty". The court, citing a 2005 judgment (Adri Dharan Das versus State of West Bengal), said that the arrest was "a part of process of investigation which enables the unrevealing of the various facts of crime including the motive, preparation and its commission".

AGE CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, FEB. 12

A Kashmiri engineer who was among over two hundred people who went missing after the February 7 glacier burst in Uttarakhand was found dead on Friday. The family said that his body would be brought to the Valley for the last rites and appealed

Apart from clearing the sludge with heavy machinery, rescue agencies were simultaneously trying to drill their way through another tunnel to reach them. "It may be the sixth day after the calamity but we have not lost hope and will try our best to save as many lives as we can," Uttarakhand DGP Ashok Kumar told PTI.

the Jammu and Kashmir government to extend necessary help to it.

Basharat Ahmad Zargar, a resident of Srinagar, was working on Rishi Ganga power project and was caught in flash floods triggered by the glacier burst in the Tapovan-Reni area of Chamoli district of Uttarakhand on Sunday.

His brother Shabir

Ahmad said that Zargar's body was located near the project site by a team of the NDRF at 2.30 pm on Friday. "We want to take it to Srinagar and request the J&K administration to help us", he said. Ahmad and his cousin Salig Zargar had rushed to the area soon after the family lost contact with their kin after the catastrophe.

the formation of a temporary lake. If breached, the new lake could cause further damage in the valley, the report said. The Central Water Commission also confirmed the formation of a 350-metre long artificial lake.

Satellite pictures suggest it is at the confluence of Raunthi Gad and Rishiganga. — PTI

15 workers killed, 36 hurt in TN fireworks unit explosion

AGE CORRESPONDENT
VIRUDHUNAGAR, FEB. 12

As many as 12 workers were killed and around 36 injured in a fire accident in a cracker manufacturing unit near Sivakasi in Virudhunagar district on Friday.

The accident occurred at around 11 am when more than 120 persons were working in Mariammal Fire Works at Achankulam village near Satur. The accident is suspected to have been caused by mishandling of the chemical mixture in the process of manufacturing fancy type crackers. It damaged 20 work sheds fully, killing five persons including a woman on the spot while seven more succumbed to burns at the hospital. Around 36 injured persons were undergoing treatment at the government hospitals in Virudhunagar, Sivakasi, Satur, Kovilpatti.

Fire and rescue person-



Police personnel inspect after an explosion ripped through a fireworks factory near Satur in Virudhunagar district of Tamil Nadu on Friday. — PTI

nel from the fire stations at Sivakasi, Virudhuagar and Satur had to struggle for four hours to contain the spread of the fire further and to put it out by 3 pm, according to the district fire officer Ganesan.

District collector R. Kannan said after inspecting the accident spot that those workers who suffered more than 50 per cent burns were referred to Madurai Rajaji government hospital for further treatment. A detailed enquiry would be conducted, which will help identify the exact cause of the fire that sparked the explosion.

The local villagers, who first rushed to the rescue of the workers on hearing the deafening sound of the blast, however, complained that eight workers were made to work in a shed against the permitted four.

ment hospital for further treatment. A detailed enquiry would be conducted, which will help identify the exact cause of the fire that sparked the explosion.

The local villagers, who first rushed to the rescue of the workers on hearing the deafening sound of the blast, however, complained that eight workers were made to work in a shed against the permitted four.

PM a coward, says Rahul; BJP retorts

Saffron party accuses Cong leader 'lying left, right and centre', denigrating Army

AGE CORRESPONDENTS
NEW DELHI, FEB. 12

A day after defence minister Rajnath Singh told the Parliament that India and China have reached an agreement on disengagement in the North and South bank of Pangong lake in eastern Ladakh, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi hit out at the government questioning why Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given up country's territory to China.

Pointing out that the troops are now going to be stationed at Finger 3, moving back from Finger 4, which is also Indian territory, he asked, "Why has Mr Modi given up our territory to the Chinese?"

Addressing a press conference, Mr Gandhi said the PM has "not fulfilled the responsibility of protecting India's territory" and has instead ceded territory to China.

"The PM is a coward who cannot stand up to the Chinese. He is spitting on the sacrifice of our army. He is betraying the sacrifice of our army. Nobody in India should be allowed to do it," Mr Gandhi said.

"Why have Indian troops, after the hard work that they had done in capturing Kailash ranges, been asked to move back, What has India got in return for this? Most importantly, the more important strategic area, Depsang plains, why have the Chinese not moved back? These are the real questions. Why have they not moved from Gogra-Hot Springs?" he added.

He also targeted the government for not referring to the strategically important Depsang plains.

Hitting back at Mr Gandhi, the BJP accused the Congress leader of "lying left, right and centre" and denigrating the country's security forces, and said the "nation cannot forgive the Gandhi family for losing 43,000 sq kms of land to China".

The BJP asserted that "no Indian land has been given up by the government as part of the current disengagement process" with China.

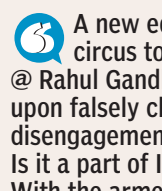
Dubbing Mr Gandhi's presser as a "new edition of Congress circus", BJP president J.P. Nadda questioned whether or not the Congress leader has insulted the armed forces who are leading the disengagement strategy.

WAR OF WORDS



Why has he asked the Defence Minister to make the statement, the Prime Minister should say — I have given Indian land to China, this is the truth. Finger-4 is our territory, that is where our post used to be. So, now we have moved from finger-4 to finger-3. Why has the Prime Minister Modi given up Indian Territory to the Chinese? This is the question that needs to be answered by him and by the Defence Minister

— Rahul Gandhi, Congress leader



A new edition of Congress circus today, again due to @RahulGandhi. Why is he bent upon falsely claiming that disengagement is a loss for India? Is it a part of INC-China MoU? With the armed forces leading the disengagement strategy, isn't this an insult of our brave forces? No Indian land has been given up by the government as part of the current disengagement process. If anyone committed the sin of giving up thousands of sq km, it is one corrupt, cowardly dynasty that has broken the country to keep their power intact

— J. P. Nadda, BJP president

ITBP command unit in Leh likely

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 12

In view of the increasing incidents of border disputes with China in the Ladakh region, the Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), which is the Indo-China border guarding force is likely to set up a special command unit in Leh.

The move is significant as this unit will operate independently of the ITBP's western command based at Chandigarh and will focus exclusively only on the security situation in the entire Ladakh sector.

At present the ITBP's Western Command based at Chandigarh, is largely responsible for border areas of Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. But following recent incidents of incursions by Chinese Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) in some parts of the Ladakh sector there is a growing view within the home ministry that a separate specula command

unit should be set up exclusively for the Ladakh region for ITBP as this had now become an "extremely sensitive sector."

"The special command unit based in Leh will ensure quick and timely action as a team of senior officers will be permanent stationed who can take decisions seeing the ground situation. They will not have to wait for decisions from the Chandigarh based Western command. Since the security situation in Ladakh is constantly evolving we need to take decisions according to the increasing Chinese activities in the region," a senior home ministry official said.

The 90,000 strong ITBP, with 56 service battalions and several other technical and specialised units, is responsible for the peacetime management of the 3,488-km-long Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China, with some of its posts being located at heights of 20,000 feet.

Kharge set to replace Azad in RS

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 12

Senior Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge is all set to replace retiring member Gulam Nabi Azad as the Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha. Mr Azad's tenure

comes to an end Monday.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi has written to Rajya Sabha Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu for appointing Kharge to the post as Azad is retiring.

He was also handling the affairs of Maharashtra till recently as the general

AICC secretary. Others who were in the race included Anand Sharma, P. Chidambaram and Digvijaya Singh. He is a nine-time Karnataka MLA and two-time Lok Sabha MP. He will be the 17th Leader of the Opposition in RS since December, 1969.

Will not block accounts of journalists, leaders: Twitter

New Delhi, Feb. 12: Twitter has blocked over 97 per cent of the accounts and posts flagged by the IT ministry for provocative content and misinformation around farmers' protest, sources said.

This followed a meeting between Twitter representatives and the information technology secretary on Wednesday evening where the US-based microblogging platform was issued a stern warning to comply with local laws or be prepared for action.

The ministry had questioned Twitter's delay in taking action on its order to block provocative content that could impact public law and order, whereas the American

company had been quick to crack down when a similar instance occurred at US Capitol Hill.

According to the sources, Twitter has now complied with the orders and over 97 per cent of the accounts flagged have been blocked.

Twitter did not respond to queries on the matter. On February 4, Twitter was asked to take down 1,178 accounts with links to Pakistan and Khalistan supporters that were spreading misinformation and provocative content related to farmers' protest.

Prior to that, the government had sought blocking of 257 tweets and handles in connection with the agitation by farmers over the new agricultural laws.

Twitter had complied with the orders only to restore the accounts hours later.

Twitter on Wednesday morning had said it has suspended over 500 accounts and blocked access to several others within India, but maintained that it would not block accounts of "news media entities, journalists, activists and politicians" as doing so "would violate their fundamental right to free expression" guaranteed under the country's law.

It, however, yielded to the orders later after the crucial meeting on Wednesday evening.

In a statement after the meeting, IT ministry had stated that the microblogging platform had been

asked to take strong action against "well-coordinated" campaigns "designed to create disharmony and unrest" in the country.

Monique Meche, Twitter vice-president Global Public Policy and Jim Baker, Deputy General Counsel and Vice President Legal, had affirmed Twitter's commitment towards following Indian laws and rules.

The executives had also requested for better engagement between the Indian government and the company's global team. Sources said Twitter's latest move to block the flagged accounts is itself a validation that the government's orders were backed by sound reasoning and logic. — PTI

VIJAYAWADA MUNICIPAL CORPORATION (VMC)			
'e' Procurement Notice No.CE-14/VMC/AE/2020-21, Dt.12-02-2021			
S. No.	Name of the work	No. of call	Estimate Amount Rs. in Lakhs
1	Providing Greenery and Beautification of Ryves Canal Bund for 3 Km stretch. With Reverse Tendering Process.	3rd call	300.00

Contact:
Superintending Engineer (P), VMC, Vijayawada - 99639 95283.
Further details can be seen @ 'e' procurement market place @ www.apcprocurement.gov.in.
Download of bid documents starts from - 15-02-2021 from 03.30 P.M.
Last date / time for receipt of tenders - 01-03-2021 upto 4.00 P.M.
Sd/- xxxx
CHIEF ENGINEER

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED
General public is hereby informed that one person namely **Krishan Sharma S/o Zile Singh R/o H.No. 138, Village Khatkar, PO Shershah, PS: Kundli, Sonapat (HR)** has been missing/kidnapped from the area of PS: Narela, Delhi since 11.01.2021. In this regard, a case DD No. 64A Dated 13.01.2021 has been registered at P.S. Narela, Delhi. The description of the missing person is as under:
Age: 32 Years, **Complexion:** Wheatish, **Height:** 5' 3", **Face:** Round, **Hair:** Black, **Wearing:** Red colour jacket, cream colour shirt, black colour lower, grey colour shoes in feet. Sincere efforts have been made by the local police to trace out him but no clue has come to light so far. If anyone has any information about the missing/ kidnapped person then please inform P.S. Narela, Delhi at following Tel No./e-mail: cic@cbi.gov.in and Website: <http://cbi.nic.in>
Ph: 011-24368638, 24368641
Fax No. 011-24368639
Sd/- S.H.O.
P.S. Narela, Delhi
Ph: 011-27280435
DP/752/ON/2021



SHORT TAKES

Short-circuit led to fire at SI: Pawar

Pune: Maharashtra deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar on Friday said the fire that broke out at the Serum Institute of India (SI) here last month, in which five persons died, was caused due to short circuit. Five labourers had died in the fire that broke out in a five-storey building in the SI's Manjari premises in Pune on January 21. However, the Covishield vaccine production was not impacted due to the blaze. Mr Pawar, while addressing the media after the annual general meeting of districts under Pune division ahead of the state budget, said he had visited the institute after the fire in the presence of senior officials, including the collector. "The premises where the blaze erupted was empty and work was going on there. It is a private institute and they are carrying out their audit. The government is also investigating. There is no other cause behind the fire other than short circuit," he said. — PTI

Activists seek ban on Rihanna's brand

New Delhi: Days after international popstar Rihanna came out in support of the protesting farmers, a group of child rights activists from Jharkhand have submitted a memorandum to the NCPCR, demanding it to ban her cosmetic brand for allegedly using mica from mines where child labourers are reportedly hired. National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) Chairperson Priyanka Kanungo told PTI that the memorandum has been received and they are examining the matter. In the memorandum submitted to the NCPCR, the child rights activists under the banner of Jharkhand Bal Swachh Manch have demanded a ban on Fenty Beauty for allegedly using mica from mines in Jharkhand where child labourers are reportedly hired. — PTI

Rlys to roll out Tejas sleeper coaches

New Delhi: The railways will roll out Tejas sleeper type trains from February 15 with the introduction of the Agartala Rajdhani Special train, the ministry said on Friday. The railways has decided to replace the rake of Agartala-Anand Vihar Terminal Special Rajdhani Express with Tejas Sleeper coaches with upgraded facilities. It will offer better connectivity with the national capital. "Provided with smart features, the coaches of this New Sleeper Type Tejas Train will offer best in class travel experience. The start of the Tejas service is planned for February 15," the railways said in a statement. — PTI

JAVADEKAR JOINS TWITTER REPLICA KOO

New Delhi: Union minister for information and broadcasting Prakash Javadekar on Friday began using India's micro-blogging platform "Koo", joining several ministers who already created their accounts on it. Making the announcement through his Twitter handle, Javadekar said, I am now on #Koo also, the #MakeInIndia micro-blogging platform.

Follow me @prakash-javadekar on #KooApp. The application was launched 10 months ago but in the last few weeks I saw a massive surge in user base as Union ministers and government departments have endorsed the homegrown microblogging platform amid a spat with Twitter. Minister of railways, commerce and industry Piyush Goyal on Tuesday tweeted that he was on Koo and asked people to connect with him. The IT ministry used Koo to broadcast its stand on Twitter's non-compliance with its order to take down allegedly inflammatory content by some farmer protesters, while ministers urged people to switch platforms. These developments have led to a surge in the user base of the Indian rival. Koo, which has startling similarities with Twitter, now has over three million users, Koo co-founder Mayank Bidawatka had said on Thursday. — PTI



State cuts petrol, diesel prices by ₹5, duty on liquor by 25% ahead of polls Fuel, liquor to get cheaper in Assam

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, FEB. 12

Assam government on Friday announced to cut petrol and diesel prices by ₹5 and reduced the duty on liquor by 25 per cent. The new rates will come into effect from Friday midnight. The announcement has come months before the assembly election and especially at a time when fuel prices have been touching new highs across the country.

While presenting a vote-on-account for six months, finance minister Himanta Biswa Sarma told the Assembly that the move will result in losses of nearly ₹80 crore revenue

per month. "When the Covid-19 pandemic was at its peak, we had increased taxes on petrol and diesel. With the Covid-19 situation improving and the additional burden on the health sector reducing, the state cabinet has decided to withdraw the additional taxes on these fuels," Mr Sarma said.

"Effective from Friday midnight, prices of petrol and diesel will decrease by ₹5 per litre. As a result, Assam will have the record of providing cheapest petrol in the country after Gujarat. Even prices of diesel would be the lowest after Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh," he stated.



Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal with finance minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and others visit the newly-constructed Assembly Hall in Guwahati. — PTI

Mr Sarma further announced that additional taxes of 25 per cent imposed on liquor products at the peak of Covid-19 pandemic has also been with-

drawn. "Since these additional taxes were imposed because of Covid-19, ethically it would be wrong to continue to charge these taxes as the pandemic situ-

MLA accuses BJP MP of 'blackmail'

Bishwajit says Shantanu 'blackmailing' TMC on pretext of controlling refugee votebank

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, FEB. 12

Bongaon North MLA Bishwajit Das on Friday accused Bongaon BJP MP Shantanu Thakur of "blackmailing" their party on the pretext of controlling it's refugee votebank among the Matua community in West Bengal for the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act.

The Trinamul Congress turnout made the explosive allegation against Mr Thakur, the All India Matua Mahasangha joint president, a day after he was not invited to Union home minister Amit Shah's rally for the Hindu migrants at Thakurnagar in North 24 Parganas for his recent meeting with his previous party supre-

Normal life partially affected in 12-hour LF Bengal bandh

AGE CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, FEB. 12

Normal life in West Bengal was partially affected on Friday due to the 12-hour state-wide bandh called by the Left Front, along with its ally Congress, in protest against police action on its activists during their march towards state secretary Nabananda.

The bandh supporters put up rail blockade at

some places, including Kanchrapara railway station in North 24 Parganas and many others in South 24 Parganas, disrupting local train services.

They also blocked the road at Shyamnagar, Barasat in the district and Sukanta Setu and College Street in the city, ignoring the reopening of schools for the students from Class 9-12 after a gap of almost 10 months due to Covid-19 lockdown.

mo and chief minister Mamata Banerjee.

Mr Das also kept his door ajar about his come-

back to the TMC while breaking his silence to the BJP's creation of a new organisational district:



Congress leader Nana Patole drives a tractor from Maharashtra Assembly Vidhan Bhavan to Girgaon Chowpatty as a show of support for the ongoing farmers' agitation against the Centre's new farm laws in Mumbai on Friday. — PTI

Setback to TMC as Trivedi quits RS

Continued from Page 1
Trivedi was welcome in the party.

Mr Trivedi said: "If you sit here quietly and cannot do anything, then it is better that you resign from here and go to the land of Bengal and be with the people. The way violence is taking place in our state, sitting here, I am feeling perplexed as to what I should do."

Talking to reporters after submitting his resignation, he said: The TMC is no longer in Mamata Banerjee's hands. It has been taken over by a corporate professional who

doesn't understand politics. And there is no forum within the party to air our views."

Mr Trivedi had endorsed Mr Modi's Lok Sabha speech on Twitter, saying: "I am personally in agreement with this. The way forward is to let our young talented minds innovate, create and distribute wealth. Pay Govt levies, create jobs. For that, our Govt officers (babus) too, need to encourage the youth." He was trolled for his tweet with many saying he may switch from the party.

TMC Rajya Sabha deputy

leader Sukhendu Sekhar Ray said that Mr Trivedi was "ungrateful" and had betrayed the trust of the masses. "For the last so many years he (Trivedi) did not say anything. Now all of a sudden, just months before the Assembly polls, he has complaints. This shows his true colours," Mr Ray said.

TMC Lok Sabha MP Sougata Roy said: "People like Trivedi enjoy power during their tenure and leave at the time of elections. If he had grievances, he could have aired them in the party."

An elated BJP said: "The

beginning of the end of the TMC has already begun". Claiming the TMC will disintegrate soon, state BJP chief Dilip Ghosh said: "It is only a matter of time before the TMC disintegrates. If Dinesh Trivedi wants to join us, we will welcome him."

Speculation is rife that Mr Trivedi, who basically hails from Gujarat, is likely to join the BJP and may be given a Rajya Sabha seat. Interestingly, two Upper House seats from Gujarat are lying vacant, and the polls will be held next month.

'China's moves 'created an atmosphere of distrust'

Continued from Page 1
He noted that the ongoing dynamics in these neighbouring countries directly impacts the security environment in India's Northeast. "A large number of initiatives are already underway to leverage military diplomacy with our Eastern Command playing the springboard for fostering stronger bilateral relations," said Gen. Naravane. He said the regional and internal connectivity is acutely linked to security. "It is central to unleashing the potential of the Northeast and balancing the influence of China," said Gen. Naravane. He said the

failure to deliver on promises and delivery deficit plagued our efforts at improving regional connectivity. He noted that the Kalandan Multimodal Transport Project and the Trilateral Highway have both seen cost and time overruns. "On the internal front also, infrastructure development has been marred by numerous challenges. Multiple agency involvement and varied sources of funds, along with environmental factors, are major stumbling blocks," the Army Chief said, adding that there was a need for an apex body to coordinate multi-agency efforts.

Tej bombards Prez with cards seeking Lalu Yadav's release

Patna, Feb. 12: RJD leader Tej Pratap Yadav has started a campaign to press the demand for the release of his ailing septuagenarian father Lalu Prasad from custody in his characteristic maverick style.

Mr Yadav, the elder son of former chief ministers Prasad and Rabri Devi, on Thursday marched to the General Post Office here, along with hundreds of supporters who carried bundles of postcards addressed to President Ramnath Kovind seeking release of the jailed party supremo.

"We are here with lakhs of 'azadi patras' (petitions seeking freedom) in the interests of a socialist movement that is being undertaken in Bihar. We hope the President will heed the voice of the people," said Yadav, who is known to be a doting son to the RJD boss.

Prasad, who is serving sentences in a number of fodder scam cases in Jharkhand, carved out of Bihar, is at present in Delhi undergoing treatment for multiple ailments.

In his late 70s, the leader, who had also served as the railway minister in the UPA-1 government, is a diabetic and suffers from a heart condition and kidney problems. He has been granted bail by the Jharkhand High Court in some of the cases but he needs to secure the same in a few others in order to be freed from custody.

When asked about the campaign, RJD state spokesman Chitaranjan



Tej Pratap Yadav

Gagan said, "It is, of course, a personal initiative of Tej Pratap Yadav but the party does back it since the matter involves our undisputed leader."

The move, however, met with strong disapproval from BJP Rajya Sabha member Sushil Kumar Modi.

In a couple of tweets, he pointed out that Prasad was convicted after a "prolonged legal battle" and "legal wizards like Ram Jethmalani could neither save him from punishment nor help him get bail".

In an indirect reference to Tej Pratap Yadav having been overshadowed by his younger brother Tejashwi, Mr Modi added "the sidelined prince of RJD is now trying to create mistrust in the judiciary by the gimmickry of sending two lakh postcards to the President".

Mr Modi also referred to the RJD's dismal performance in the Lok Sabha polls of 2019, when it drew a blank, and Prasad's attempts to topple the NDA government after the recent Assembly elections, in which the party won the maximum number of seats but the coalition helmed by it fell short of getting majority. — PTI

Canadian PM hails India's handling of farm protest

'Discussed India's efforts in vaccine production'

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, FEB. 12

India on Friday said Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau "commended efforts of the Government of India to choose the path of dialogue in dealing with the farmer protests and described it as "befitting in democracy" during his telephonic talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday.

In an obvious reference to India's concerns about the inimical anti-India activities of pro-Khalistan elements on Canadian soil, New Delhi also said the Canadian PM had "acknowledged the responsibility of his government in providing protection to Indian diplomatic premises and personnel in Canada".

It may be noted that on Wednesday night, the Indian government had stated that Mr Trudeau had called up PM Modi and sought facilitation of vaccine supplies to Canada following which PM Modi agreed that India would "do its best". However, that statement had made no direct reference to any conversation on the farmers' stir.

'India's interest to participate in Colombo port long-standing one'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 12

India's "interest for participation in (development of) the Colombo port is a long standing one since most goods handled there are from and to India", the MEA said.

According to earlier media reports, the potential private investors in the Colombo port project include the Adani group from India.

Following media reports that Sri Lanka has decided to pull out of the pact inked in 2019 with India

and Japan to develop and operate the East Container Terminal of Colombo Port, India had last week said it is in discussions with Sri Lanka on the matter and has conveyed "the importance of adhering to international commitments" to the island nation.

A recent Reuters report had said that Sri Lanka government had now decided that India and Japan would instead be invited to develop the nearby West terminal on a public-private partnership basis.

We supplied 229.7L doses of jab: MEA

New Delhi: India has supplied a total of 229.7 lakh doses of India-made Covid-19 vaccines all over the world till date, the MEA said. Around 64.7 lakh doses of the vaccine have been supplied as a grant while 165 lakh doses have been supplied on a commercial basis, MEA spokesperson Anurag Srivastav said at a press conference.

FM hits out at Opp. 'false narrative', hits back at PC

Continued from Page 1
fiscally neutral transaction of acquiring the RBI's stake in SBI under capital expenditure to show a 62 per cent growth in spending. If this is taken out, the "growth rate was only nine per cent", she said, asking if this was not "suspect".

Ms Sitharaman said the strong stimulus in her Budget 2021-22 would not only provide quick short-term solutions but also long-term and sustainable growth that will help India remain one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. Besides, she said, the Budget was the instrument for "Atma Nirbhar Bharat" at a time when economies worldwide had suffered due to the pandemic.

"The post-pandemic

economies have suffered all over the world and the Union Budget 2021 was an attempt to provide a 'strong stimulus' to deal with this situation. In doing so, it will not only provide quick short-term solutions that were created, but we also looked at medium, long-term and sustainable growth that will help us remain one of the fastest-growing economies in the world," she said in Parliament.

In her Budget, she had promised a slew of economic measures, including a significant increase in health and capital expenditure along with reforms on divestment where privatisation of two state-owned banks and a general insurance company has been proposed as well. "The

Budget 2021 has been carefully thought after listening to views, suggestions and opinions from experts and economists around the country and the world. The building of an 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat' actually represents the aspirations of 130 crore people of this country," she said.

Silencing the Opposition's hue and cry over its "false narrative" around her Budget for being "pro-rich", Ms Sitharaman said the government had helped the poor with free foodgrains, gas, building roads and houses. "Over two-thirds of this population are youth looking for opportunities and the Budget was aimed at not only giving relief packages but creating opportunities for employment," she added.

THE ASIAN AGE

13 FEBRUARY 2021

Go slow on peace thrust, up the ante during talks

Once the breakthrough was achieved after several rounds of talks at various levels, the India-China agreement on disengagement at Pangong Tso in Ladakh is only a promising start towards peace. Surprisingly speedy the process of China moving back its armour from the shores of the lake may seem, but India would have to be most cautious on how the de-escalation exercise works out because it will be surrendering a lot of leverage in giving up the Kailash range heights for securing just the Pangong Tso disengagement in the north and south banks.

Given the history of fraught relations exacerbated by border tensions over the last few years since China's intrusion in 2017, it should be considered fortunate if this initial pullback leads to lasting peace. India would do well to remember how disadvantageous the narrow agreement seems right now because armed Chinese soldiers can be present at Finger 8 while India will be confined to its Finger 3 base and will be unable to patrol up to the Chinese perception of LAC, which used to be east of Finger 8 prior to April 2020.

India must monitor the progress closely and also press for the resolution of all remaining issues, which are many considering the number of hotspots in Ladakh and further east, including the Depsang plateau

The disengagement is indubitably positive but India must monitor the progress closely and also press for the resolution of all remaining issues, which are many considering the number of hotspots in Ladakh and further east, including the Depsang plateau where China has held Indian territory of around 1,000 sq km and the PLA has also been stopping the Indian troops from patrolling traditional points. Obviously there is far more to do in terms of tough negotiating in military commander level talks that are to be held within two days and

in higher-level negotiations afterwards.

The border situation cannot be dealt with in isolation as China seemed to demand in its call to set right ties, including trade even as talks went on about de-escalation. The point to ponder is whether China is aiming for a larger resetting of ties in a global sense in view of the change in the White House, which Joe Biden signalled with a tough sounding phone call to Chinese President Xi Jinping. It would be a great development for world peace if indeed China is willing to negotiate even from its stronger position post-Covid vis-a-vis economic recovery from worldwide lows imposed by the pandemic.

The trust deficit, including between China and its largest trading partner, the United States, has been enlarged by suspicions over the origin of the coronavirus being Wuhan. A sliver of hope is to be spotted in China seeking peace while agreeing to try and resolve the border issue, even if it did so only on facing India's strong position on its capturing of the Kailash range heights. Doubts will remain over whether China will remobilise quickly as it has the advantage over India in terms of infrastructure capabilities, which is why abundant caution is advised as well as the highest vigil on friction points beyond Eastern Ladakh. Negotiations over easing punitive economic actions taken by India can wait until it is established that the push for peace is real.

Kamal's black humour

There is never a dull moment in Tamil Nadu's political scene, particularly when the state gears up for an Assembly election. But when a celebrated actor like Kamal Haasan tickles the funny bone, the entire realm turns a theatre of the absurd. When the general council of Mr Haasan's party, named differently as the Makkal Needhi Maiam (People's Justice Centre), made him the "permanent president" by passing a resolution, his detractors, who never miss an opportunity to pick holes in whatever he does or says, raised serious questions, quite out of sync with the prevailing mirth.

What's that general council? How were those members elected? By whom? So wondered the dirty disparagers without realising that it's an internal matter of the party that others should not poke their noses into. They also asked if someone could remain permanently on a high pedestal in a domain where there are no permanent friends or enemies. But Mr Haasan, who hails from a world of make-belief, perhaps believes in the juxtaposition of surrealism with harsh political realities, hoping that it would provide relief from the ennui caused by the ubiquitous harangue and pageantry.

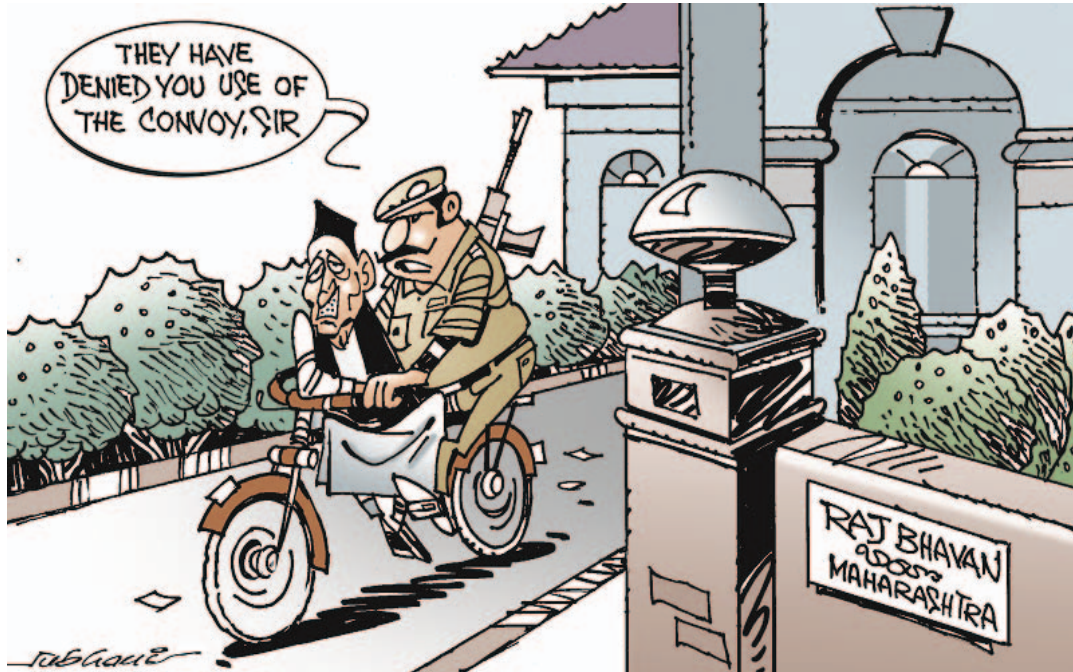
Whatever it was, he made the people laugh though they had heard of even "permanent chief ministers", as hailed in the rhetoric of fawning sycophants, in the past. Displaying a similar sentiment, those who inherited the mantle of running the government from the late J. Jayalalithaa accorded her the exalted status of "permanent general secretary" of the AIADMK posthumously and kept the post vacant "permanently" after throwing out V.K. Sasikala, who had succeeded her. Perhaps it was the spectacular return of Ms Sasikala to reclaim the post that inspired Mr Haasan to look for permanency in the party president's job. Anyway, the same general council's resolution to make Mr Haasan the chief minister of the state did not evoke any laughter.

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Subhani



Why China 'disengaged': Always carry a big stick



Syed Ata Hasnain

After nine rounds of talks at the military theatre level which appeared to be tapering off without any results, we find a positive development announced by the Raksha Mantri in Parliament on Thursday: a decision to disengage between the Indian Army and China's People's Liberation Army in the over nine-month-long standoff in eastern Ladakh. The issues worth examining are the triggers which created a positive sentiment, the modalities involved in the disengagement and the strategic dynamics for the future.

Why has China accepted a mutual disengagement? There is speculation that its strategic objectives having been met, it was willing to disengage; but this many not entirely be true. The objectives have been analysed to a great extent. My belief veers on the coercion theory; that India's soaring strategic confidence through the past five years deeply worried China. The feasibility of India actually becoming a part of military equations and alliances and thus upsetting the strategic balance in Asia was not too appealing for China. India's talk about regaining all territories of J&K was perceived as becoming a national obsession, emboldening beyond acceptable limits. Limited military coercion to force India back to the starting line was felt necessary. However, China was surprised by India's push-back and deep sense of resolve to stick it out. A border conflict or even general war was not the intent as it was unwinnable for China without a major redeployment. It couldn't afford creation of near permanent voids elsewhere. A continuing standoff gave

no real advantage to China except the projection of threat of a two-front war for India, which too sounded hollow given Pakistan's precarious internal economic, political and social health.

With the world slowly recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic, shaking into a reset and a potential new order emerging, China cannot miss the opportunity to draw favourably from it. Remaining in confrontation mode with committed troops paid no real dividends. By agreeing to disengage it is attempting to project a sense of reason and political maturity; in reality it is an exit that is giving it face. No one should expect that the agreement to disengage will be achieved overnight or that conflict resolution is on the cards. There are likely to be many revisits, especially because India just cannot trust China to implement what it has agreed upon.

The Indian government invested in a new strategy of trusting its military leadership to undertake negotiations which were really in the political-diplomatic-military domain. In nine rounds, the military stood its ground well, reflecting an intellectual and pragmatic approach. Of course, it runs the risk of coming up against obstacles in implementation. The last time it tried implementing what was agreed upon in theatre level border meetings, it led to the Galwan incident. The Indian Army is not one which will simply move back to implement an agreement with a country with whom there is virtually zero trust. It will verify and verify, just like its officers and soldiers did in June 2020, which led to Galwan. With caution and the lessons learnt, that procedure has to be implemented all over again.

It is unlikely we have

seen anything close to a final agreement. I do perceive it is incomplete at present as it primarily relates only to the northern and southern banks of Pangong Tso. While the actions in north Pangong Tso have been spelt out more specifically, the same is absent in relation to the south. The details of this will need to be probably thrashed out when the stage for the pullback of forward deployed infantry comes up. Limits have been put on patrolling north of the lake to avoid physical contact between the troops of both sides. The theatre-level military-diplomatic talks will at some stage have to come down to border meetings at lower levels to restore trust and confidence.

What India should be insisting upon is the physical delineation of the LAC without prejudice to anything permanent. It will get rid of the one issue which is the bane of the LAC's management: that is, the perception about where ours or the Chinese claim line exists. This is unlikely, of course, but must remain the pressure point on the Chinese side as a terminal objective of the current talks, the tenth round of which is likely to come up soon. The Raksha Mantri in his Rajya Sabha statement laid it out clearly: "The House should also know that there are still some outstanding issues with regard to deployment and patrolling at some other points along the LAC in eastern Ladakh. These will be the focus of further discussions with the Chinese side". The reference was to other areas in contention, especially Depsang, where a much greater threat exists to our defences, as also an

opportunity for us to threaten the main Chinese highway to Xinjiang. Without an operational-tactical advantage, if this is vacated at the Kailash heights, it is difficult to foresee any further concessions by the Chinese. Perhaps there is more to it and will emerge in due course as understandably full transparency on military operational issues is not currently possible.

Progress on the agreement and subsequent moves towards more positive signs is not contingent upon only the events in eastern Ladakh. Everything here is linked to geopolitical issues relating to Chinese and Indian interests elsewhere in South Asia; relations with countries such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka being an example. It would be helpful if India can detach the developments in eastern Ladakh from the dynamics of Sino-Indian relations elsewhere. India will find itself under increasing pressure from China regarding its strategic equations with the Quad nations. Having come thus far and also having received fair importance from the United States in its perception of India's role in the Indo Pacific region, New Delhi may feel it's in a dilemma. However, its interests clearly lie where it has established greater trust and identified commonality of interests. It cannot afford to be seen to be submitting unreasonably to Chinese demands. The inevitability in India's approach towards the emerging situation should be to waste little time in enhancing its conventional military capability through the self-reliance route towards modernisation. As far as its northern borders are concerned, all disengagements and de-escalation will always be a temporary phenomenon. While remaining positive in its stance, India will always need to carry a big stick, as big or bigger than all its adversaries.

The writer, a retired lieutenant-general, is a former GOC of the Srinagar-based 15 Corps

The inevitability in India's approach should be to waste little time in enhancing its conventional military capability through the self-reliance route towards modernisation

LETTERS

POISONING THE GAME

Unfortunately, communal intolerance has spread its tentacles into the gentleman's game with the Cricket Association of Uttarakhand (CAU) alleging that former India opening batsman Wasim Jaffer had tried to force religion-based selection as the state team's coach. Jaffer has refuted the allegations by CAU and put in his papers. Several former players such as Anil Kumble, Irfan Pathan, and Manoj Tiwary have done well to bat for Jaffer in the Uttarakhand row. As coach, he has done a good job in the past year. What a shame!

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

DINESH STUNNER

IN A MAJOR SETBACK for West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, Trinamul Congress MP Dinesh Trivedi on Thursday resigned from the Rajya Sabha. Mr Trivedi's resignation comes just ahead of the Assembly polls in the eastern state. West Bengal will go to polls in April-May later this year. Mr Trivedi said that he is upset over the political violence in West Bengal and felt it was better to resign than keep silent. But perhaps he is in search of greener pastures. He was snubbed by Ms Banerjee when, as railway minister, he had raised fares marginally.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

'PARASITE'S IDENTITY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "PM's red herring" (Feb. 11). Were the leaders and participants of the Ramjanmabhoomi Andolan, who accomplished the "divine job" of demolishing Babri Masjid, on December 6, 1992, to pave the way for the construction of the much-cherished Ram Mandir, also "Andolan jeevis" and "parasites" on a mission of hatching a "conspiracy" against the country? Surely, the nation wants to know!

Kajal Chatterjee
Kolkata

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



"Oh Bachchoo let's have due regard For the story-telling genius of Scheherazade Who over a thousand and one nights Scaled creation's narrative heights

She held a king under her spell Assuring him there was more to tell And so, with each inventive breath Do story-tellers stave off death."

— From *Lamby Laments* by Bachchoo

To: UK Home Office, 2 Marsham Street, London SW

My dear Priti Patelli,
I am writing to apply for the post of Chief Speechwriter for which you advertised this week.

Your advertisement specifies that "the successful candidate will be someone who can imitate the Home Secretary's personal style".

Let me start by saying, Pritiji, that I have closely followed your career, from the time you were thrown out of your job by the then PM Theresa May, for attempting unofficial deals and private contact with Israeli officials and businesswallas, to when you favoured

hanging and capital punishment, to your generous policies regarding police pay, illegal entrants to Britain and your speeches attacking anti-terrorism and the Covid crisis.

I am sure that, being a Parsi with a knowledge of fluent Gujarati, I am best qualified for the job. Please tear up and bin any applications from Goras, Punjabis, Pakistanis, Bengalis, etc. None of them will understand the prejudices you have imbued as a child of immigrant shopkeepers from Uganda. I must confess never having been to Uganda or kept a shop, but as a writer of stage plays, etc, I constantly think myself into the mentality, prejudices, and styles of thought and speech of different characters. I am sure you will consider this my Trump card (I know you got the joke. Ha ha!)

Of course, I don't expect you to call me instantly and offer me the job without testing my abilities to deliver superb text in your voice, so I am setting out some samples below:

The first is a sample address to the Tory Conference.

"Comrades, Lords and Ladies, I stand before you as your new Home Secretary appointed by our brilliant

elected Prime Minister Doris Bronson who has very perceptively recognised my fantastic talents for this job. I am fully aware of the heavy responsibility that this places on my head such as keeping the wogs out of the country (loud cheers and standing ovation), making the police more effective by cutting their numbers and pay (shuffling in the audience), zero tolerance for criminals with a lock-up-and-throw-away-the-key approach, with the building of five thousand more jails and bringing back hanging (second standing ovation) — er um... I didn't mean by ropes, I meant hanging as in suspending people, like my Chief Civil Servants if they express any opinions...."

I guarantee Pritiji, these thoughts of yours which I have humbly attempted to put into words will get you to be PM after this fellow —whose name you characteristically forget.

Secondly, here is a sample address to the Police Federation as you are now in charge of all PC Plods.

"My brave and dedicated servants of the law, let me start by announcing that I intend to immediately boost police pay (huge applause and cat

calls). I have instructed my office to see that every police officer gets paid at least £3 and 12 shillings per week (total silence). This is in recognition of the fantastic work your forces are doing in fighting and combatting anti-terrorism, which must be wiped off the face of this planet. (Huge cheers from Islamicist policemen)

And next, Pritiji, your address to the House of Commons on immigration.

"Mr Speaker, the gravest crisis facing this country is not the shortage of grave-diggers caused by the Covid virus, but the illegal entry of immigrants and so-called asylum seekers across our land-borders with Europe. The previous Labour government under Terrestrial May lived up to its Prime Minister's name by declaring that these criminals May use the Terrestrial tunnels to enter our country (Here you pause for the laughter that will certainly follow this joke!). I propose, Mr Speaker, to build a wall across these borders with barbed wire on top to stop people coming in. We shall have a Ugandan and Cayman Island style immigration policy by which all Asians will have to leave the country and only tax-

dodgers and drug lords will be admitted to the free ports declared by our hedgey-boy chancellor Wishy Anorak. Doris has already told me that he will get the Norwegians to pay for this wall...."

And then perhaps Pritiji, the PM may ask you to take to the TV lectern to address the nation on the Covid crisis and the government's efforts to combat it in accordance to the science. So, here's what you might say:

"It is with great sadness that the statistics today reveal that Britain has suffered 66 million deaths in the last 24 hours. My thoughts and condolences go out to all these deaths' families. Now despite some mother lovers opposing lockdown, what the epicologists, etc tell us that not only is lockdown a good thing, we should also have lock-up — which means anyone who tests positive for Covid should be locked up and the key thrown away. And if any scientist or civil servant opposes my sane policies they can bloody-well F-off and die — effing wankers — I know where you live...."

Your future ventriloquist,
Obsequiously,
Farrukh Dhondy

How to apply for a job to home secy of Blunderland!

SHORT TAKES

DANISH INTEL
ARRESTS 14 FOR
TERROR PLOT

Copenhagen, Feb. 12: Fourteen people arrested in Denmark and Germany suspected of planning an attack with explosives had “militant Islamist” motives, Danish intelligence services said on Friday.

Thirteen people were arrested at the weekend in a suburb outside Copenhagen, Denmark’s PET intelligence service said Thursday, confirming another arrest had been made in Germany.

“The operation took place due to suspicions that a terror attack motivated by militant Islamism was being prepared,” PET said in a statement.

The 13 arrested in Denmark were remanded in custody suspected of “planning one or more terrorist attacks or being accessory to attempted terrorism,” PET said.

TIANWEN-1
PROBE SENDS
VIDEO OF MARS

Beijing, Feb. 12: China’s space agency released video footage from its spacecraft circling Mars on Friday, two days after it successfully entered the planet’s orbit in Beijing’s latest ambitious space mission.

In the video, published by state broadcaster CCTV, the surface of the planet is seen coming into view out of a pitch black sky against the outside of the Tianwen-1, which entered the orbit of the Red Planet on Wednesday.

White craters are visible on the planet’s surface, which fades from white to black through the video as the probe flies over the course of one Martian day, said official news agency Xinhua.

The five-tonne Tianwen-1 — which translates as “Questions to Heaven” — includes a Mars orbiter, a lander and a solar-powered rover and launched from southern China last July.

UK DEVELOPS
TEST TO DETECT
WOMB CANCER

London, Feb. 12: British scientists announced on Friday they had developed a test to detect womb cancer using urine samples, explaining the method could replace a painful and invasive procedure currently in use.

At present, clinicians diagnose the cancer by taking a biopsy, a process which requires a narrow telescope called a hysteroscope, to examine inside of the uterus and remove cells. Nearly a third of women who undergo the procedure have the process repeated because of technical difficulties or intolerable pain, the research showed.

Thousands of women in Britain who do not have womb cancer also undergo the procedure, with huge financial implications for the country’s state-run National Health Service (NHS).

The study from Manchester University has developed a new detection tool which examines urine or vaginal samples that can be collected by women on their own at home.

The findings, published in the journal Nature Communications, showed analysis of the samples correctly diagnosed 91.7 percent of women with womb cancer.

18 BAGS OF
HACKED-UP BODY
PARTS FOUND

Mexico City, Feb. 12: Prosecutors in the western Mexico state of Jalisco said that police have found 18 plastic bags full of hacked-up body parts on the outskirts of the city of Guadalajara. Police found one human limb near a highway overpass, which led them to the heap of taped-up bags in a gully nearby, the agency said late Thursday. The severed limbs are being examined to determine how many corpses the parts belonged to.

In November, authorities recovered 113 bodies and additional human remains from a secret grave in the town of El Salto, just outside Guadalajara. A total of 189 corpses were discovered in the town throughout 2020.

The state is home to the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, one of Mexico’s most violent and powerful. More bodies have been found in secret graves there than in any other state in recent years. The cartel has been fighting a breakaway faction in and around Guadalajara for years.

Myanmar protests swell as
US sanctions coup leaders

Over 23,000 prisoners released as part of prison amnesty, no word on Suu Kyi

Yangon, Feb. 12: Huge crowds thronged cities around Myanmar to demand the return of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Friday for a seventh straight day of protests, after Washington announced sanctions on the generals behind last week’s coup.

A torrent of anger and defiance has brought hundreds of thousands of people out in nationwide rallies demanding the country’s generals relinquish power.

Demonstrations have so far largely been peaceful, but police fired rubber bullets on students while dispersing a sit-down protest in the city of Mawlamyine, arresting at least five.

With teachers, bureaucrats and air traffic controllers among the government employees walking off the job to demand an end to junta rule, the country’s new military leader Min Aung Hlaing told striking workers to return to their offices.

“Those who are away from their duties are requested to return to their duties immediately for the interests of the country and people without focusing on the emotion,” he said, in a speech reported by state media.

The new US sanctions target Min Aung Hlaing and other top generals, after President Joe Biden



Protesters holding signs with the image of detained Myanmar civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi take part in a demonstration against the military coup in front of the Chinese embassy in Yangon on Friday.

announced his administration was cutting off the military’s access to \$1 billion in funds.

Ahead of another day of mass rallies, state media announced the release of more than 23,000 inmates as part of a prison amnesty. Friday was a public holiday in Myanmar and mass pardons to empty the coun-

try’s overcrowded prison system are common on significant local dates.

More than 260 people have been detained in the days since the coup and about 20 released, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners monitoring group.

But there was no indication that Suu Kyi or any of

her allies were among those set to be freed.

“There is a serious concern that the sudden release... is to clear space for the detention of political prisoners,” the AAPP said. Massive rallies were back underway in the commercial hub of Yangon on Friday, including a contingent of Premier League fans who

put aside their club rivalries to protest the coup.

“I hate the military coup more than Manchester United!” read one sign.

But further east in the port city of Mawlamyine, police moved quickly to clear a sit-in protest by university students, and footage showed officers hauling away several demonstrators.

Trump impeachment trial
lawyers to urge his acquittalTwitter suspends pro-Trump
activist group for violations

Washington, Feb. 12: Lawyers for Donald Trump take the Senate floor on Friday to rebut the Democratic-led impeachment of the former president for inciting insurrection, with Republican lawmakers then widely expected to vote to acquit.

Democratic impeachment managers rested their case on Thursday after two days of often emotional presentations.

Now the Republican property tycoon’s lawyers will get a chance to respond. They are expected to make arguments brief, hastening the Senate verdict.

“There’s no reason for us to be out there a long time. As I said from the start of this thing, this trial never should have happened,” one of the lawyers, David Schoen, told Fox News.

The impeachment team charged Trump with stoking an insurrection after losing re-election to Joe Biden on November 3.

According to the case against him, the former president began to lay the groundwork for the riot within weeks of refusing to concede with claims

San Francisco, Feb. 12: A conservative activist group notorious for its use of undercover footage and publicity stunts was permanently suspended from Twitter on Thursday, after the group reportedly violated the platform’s policies on sharing private information.

Project Veritas, a brash team of right-wing activists which has long been one of former US President Donald Trump’s most fervent backers, was banned for “repeated vio-

lations of the companies anti-doxing policies”, the group’s founder James O’Keefe said in a tweet.

The suspension came a day after the group posted a video in which its journalists confronted Guy Rosen, Facebook’s head of integrity and security, outside his home.

In a statement shared to multiple US outlets, Twitter said the group had been “permanently suspended for repeated violations of Twitter’s private information policy”, but

did not specify which tweets had broken those rules. The group had over 7,00,000 followers on Twitter at the time of its suspension.

O’Keefe’s account was also removed from the platform, though it returned after only a few hours. Project Veritas and O’Keefe came to prominence for their provocative sting efforts aimed at exposing “corruption” among progressive activists or liberal elected officials.

— AFP

Biden in ‘dilemma’ on Afghan pullout

Kabul, Feb. 12: US President Joe Biden faces “serious dilemmas” in Afghanistan as a deadline to withdraw troops nears and the Taliban show no sign of ending their bloodshed, a top US official warned.

The new US leader has ordered a review of the deal Washington cut with the Taliban last year,

which promised the withdrawal of all foreign forces by May 1 in return for security guarantees from the militants and a commitment to peace talks with the Afghan government.

The talks are progressing painfully slowly, but scarcely a day goes by without a bomb blast, attack on government

forces, or a targeted assassination somewhere in the country.

“Violence level remains very, very high... which is shocking and deeply disappointing,” a senior US State Department official told AFP this week on condition of anonymity.

“It is unquestionably damaging the atmosphere for any kind of a settle-

ment of Afghanistan’s conflict.” The Taliban routinely deny responsibility for the attacks — and many are claimed by the rival jihadist group Islamic State — but Washington has no doubt who is to blame.

“In our view, the Taliban are responsible for the vast majority of the targeted killings that we have

seen,” the official said, adding they had created “an ecosystem of violence”.

“It is clearly intended, I think, to demoralise citizens... to add to doubts that people have about their government and to add to the aura of inevitability of (a Taliban) victory,” he added.

— AFP

Americans to be
vaccinated with
200 mn doses

Washington, Feb. 12: US President Joe Biden announced plans to vaccinate most Americans by the end of July with the help of 200 million newly acquired doses, as the country’s inoculation campaign kicked off a new phase in drugstores and supermarket pharmacies, some of which will offer shots as of Friday.

Even as the Biden administration inked deals to acquire “100 million more Moderna and 100 million more Pfizer vaccines” and Covid-19 cases fall in Europe, the World Health Organisation warned against rash reopenings, in a sobering reminder of the long global battle ahead in taming the pandemic.

“The decline in cases conceals increasing numbers of outbreaks and community spread involving variants of concern,” said WHO Europe director Hans Kluge.

“At this point, the overwhelming majority of European countries remain vulnerable,” he added, pointing out the “thin line between the hope of a vaccine and a false sense of security.” More than a million cases are still registered every week across the 53 member states in the UN agency’s European region, which includes several Central Asian countries.

With the latest vaccine purchases, the United States — the world’s hardest-hit country with more than 4,70,000 deaths — is on track “to have enough supply for 300 million Americans by the end of July,” Biden said, meaning enough inoculations for all eligible people.

He made the announcement Thursday after touring the National Institutes of Health near Washington, with a million previously acquired vaccine doses already headed to around 6,500 drugstores and supermarket pharmacies.

The US immunisation

OZ ORDERS CITY
WITH 6 MILLION
INTO EMERGENCY
LOCKDOWN

Melbourne, Feb. 12: Australia ordered more than six million people into an emergency Coronavirus lockdown on Friday, throwing a showpiece tennis tournament into disarray as the pandemic’s economic cost was laid bare in badly hit Britain.

The decision to confine the people of Melbourne and surrounding areas to their homes for five days illustrates the tough choices faced by many nations as they struggle to balance reopening and keeping infections under control.

“It’s rough. It’s going to be a rough few days for everyone,” said tennis star Serena Williams, reacting to the lockdown news moments after her latest victory.

The move comes as the Covid-19 death toll heads towards 2.4 million, with 107 million people sickened since the virus emerged in China a little over a year ago.

— AFP

campaign got off to a shaky start in December, and even as recently as Thursday, Los Angeles moved to temporarily close five major inoculation centers including its giant Dodger Stadium site, due to vaccine shortage.

Mass Covid-19 vaccination programs are being ramped up in many countries in the race against more contagious variants, and governments are urging populations to continue to cope with closures as the inoculation campaigns move forward.

Worldwide deaths now stand at nearly 2.4 million, with the Middle East surpassing 1,00,000 fatalities on Thursday.

— AFP

Ex-EU banker to
be Italy’s new PM

Rome, Feb. 12: With almost all the political parties behind him, Mario Draghi on Friday entered the final straight in his bid to form a new government to lead Italy through the Coronavirus pandemic.

The former European Central Bank chief, called in after the outgoing centre-left coalition collapsed, could visit President Sergio Mattarella as early as Friday evening to be officially named prime minister.

Draghi has spent the last nine days assembling a government of national unity to manage the deadly pandemic that hit Italy almost exactly one year ago, triggering a deep recession.

After securing the support late Thursday of the final key player, the populist Five Star Movement (M5S), Draghi has almost all the main parties on board, from leftists to the far-right League.

“The Draghi government is born,” headlined Rome-based daily Il Messaggero, while Milan’s Corriere Della Sera added: “Draghi in

the home stretch.” The 73-year-old economist must present a list of ministers when he visits Mattarella, but he has kept extremely coy, speaking in public only once since being asked to form a government.

With the outgoing government due to hold one last cabinet meeting on Friday, there was speculation that Draghi might wait until Saturday before heading to the presidential palace.

Italy has high hopes for its new leader, dubbed Super Mario after vowing to do “whatever it takes” to save the euro single currency in the 2010s debt crisis.

Mattarella asked him to step in on February 3 after outgoing premier Giuseppe Conte resigned following weeks of political turmoil in his M5S-led coalition.

The president emphasised the urgency of moving quickly to fill the political vacuum as Italy’s Covid-19 death toll approaches 1,00,000 and the country battles its worst recession since World War II.

— AFP

COVID | IMPACT

Match, the group says it added more than a million users in the last quarter of 2020

Paris, Feb. 12: Dating apps are booming in lockdown — no longer just a way of hooking up but also of simple interaction at a time when the Coronavirus inflicts loneliness on millions.

Rodrigo, 18, had never considered joining a dating app until the months of lockdown boredom finally forced his hand.

“At the start, we told ourselves the crisis will pass, that we just have to have a

bit patience. But when temporary becomes permanent, you have to try new things,” he said.

With school mostly online and limited options for going out with friends, “I had the feeling I was spending my entire life with my parents.” Rodrigo now visits dating apps every day. More than just chasing the thrill of a hook-up, they have become a place to simply hang out. He has made friends with

four people his age through the apps and chats with them daily — a way of “relieving the stress and frustration” of the pandemic, he says.

“It’s all we have left,” he sighs, especially since Portugal was plunged back into lockdown last month. Match, the group that includes several leading apps such as Tinder, Hinge and Meetic, says it added more than a million users in the last quarter of

2020, up some 12 percent to around 11 million worldwide.

“It sounds like a cliché, but the apps have really kept me from sinking,” said Sebastian, a 19-year-old student in France.

“When we can’t go to college, and the bars, restaurants, and cinemas are all closed, we spend entire days on our own, stewing. It’s horrific,” he said.

Exchanges start by text before moving on to video

chats — a function that dating apps have increasingly focused on since the pandemic ruled out the usual next step of a physical date. Martha, a 41-year-old Londoner, has found Zoom dating a bit of a slog, even if it saves her having to bother with perfume.

“The biggest challenge I found with Zoom dating... was how strange it is to watch yourself talking and laughing,” she said.

— AFP



A Valentine's Day decoration, signed by first lady Jill Biden, sits on the North Lawn of the White House, on Friday, in Washington.

— AP

quick
BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	51,544.30	0.02
Nifty 50	15,163.30	-0.07
S&P 500*	3,924.27	0.20
Dollar (₹)	72.74	0.17
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.42	0.38
Euro (₹)	88.14	0.27
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,847.661	1.41
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	62.35	1.98
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.990	0.47
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.195	0.037

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Inflation slows
to 16-month low
of 4.06% in Jan.

Retail inflation eased to a 16-month low of 4.06 per cent in January mainly on account of softening of food and vegetable prices. It is for the second consecutive month that retail inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) has remained within the target range of RBI which is 4 per cent (+/-2 per cent). The retail inflation stood at 4.59 per cent in December 2020 and 7.59 per cent in January 2020.

Kumar is advisor
to Kotak's \$1-bn
bad assets fund



Former SBI chairman Rajnish Kumar was appointed as the exclusive advisor to a \$1 billion-stressed assets fund floated by the Kotak Mahindra Bank Group. Kumar retired from SBI in October last year. Kotak Investment Advisors said Kumar will be the "exclusive advisor for its \$1 billion special situation fund". It had announced a fund raise of \$1 billion in August 2019, anchored by \$500 million from Abu Dhabi Investment Authority.

SC rejects plea
against Franklin
schemes' wind-up

The Supreme Court rejected the objections to the result of e-voting process and held that unitholders have given their consent by majority to wind up the six mutual fund schemes of Franklin Templeton. The SC, which said that winding up and disbursement of funds to unitholders would be in terms of its previous directions, directed that disbursement can be made in tranches without waiting for liquidation of all assets.

Jewellers hail
role in gold
monetisation

The Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council welcomed the changes in the Gold Monetisation Scheme (GMS) and said the scheme is a win-win for all. The government's decision to include jewellers as collection and purity testing centres and the introduction of SoP for retailers under GMS is a welcome move, it said. The Centre issued the revamped Gold Monetisation Scheme on Wednesday.

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■ India keeps trade share in pharma, loses in apparels
Global trade recovers
in December quarter

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 12

Global trade recovered in the last quarter of 2020, reducing the overall decline for the year to about 9 per cent, finds an Unctad study. Some of the less competitive countries lost their market share during the pandemic while competitive ones improved their share in global trade. The recovery of Q4 2020 was largely driven by the trade of goods from and to developing countries, especially by the very strong performance of East Asian economies, including China, Taiwan and South Korea. The effect of Covid-19 on global trade was most severe during the first half of 2020, with a drop in value of about 15 per cent. Global trade began to recover in Q3 2020 and more strongly in Q4 2020. The recovery in the second half of 2020 was largely due to the rebound of trade in goods rather than in services.

During the pandemic, Vietnam, Uganda, China, Switzerland, Turkey and Taiwan experienced relatively better export performance. In contrast, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Colombia and Nigeria performed relatively worse.

India lost its global trade share in apparels and minerals, while it managed to retain its share in pharmaceuticals and chemicals during the pandemic. India did not improve its trade share in any of the sectors in one of its most



INCENTIVES SOUGHT FOR SEZs IN FTP

New Delhi, Feb. 12: The Trade Promotion Council of India (TPCI) on Friday suggested the commerce ministry to announce measures such as incentives for special economic zones (SEZs) in the next foreign trade policy (FTP) with a view to boost the country's exports. FTP (2020-25) is under formu-

lation by the ministry.

It said there is a pressing need to allow certain tax incentives in line with the global practice to the exports to Domestic Tariff Area. It also suggested a separate nodal agency as a one-point contact of all queries related to uncleared or rejected Indian shipments. —PTI

challenging years.

India, which had 3.4 per cent share in the global apparel trade in 2019, seems to have lost it significantly during 2020. India is among the top countries in apparels to have lost their competitiveness or market share by more than one per cent. Among India's competitors, Vietnam, Malaysia, Turkey and Cambodia increased their market share during the pandemic and Bangladesh and Indonesia managed to retain their share.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's (Unctad) global trade report assessed the competitive-

ness of different economies by measuring the change in market share between 2019 and 2020. Economies that lost and gained competitiveness saw changes in market share larger than 1 per centage point.

Despite the export growth recorded in pharmaceuticals, India could not improve upon its market share and its global share remained unchanged. In chemicals, too, the country could only retain the trade share.

The report does not find India having gained share in any sector. India had increased agri-food exports during the pandemic. Most of the cereals, including rice and wheat, had witnessed significant

growth in exports. However, this could not improve its share by more than one per cent to find a place in the list. Canada and Mexico are the top two countries to have increased their share in the category.

The report also finds that among India's top export sectors, minerals de-grew by 23 per cent and lost its market share. Various machinery exports too de-grew by 11 per cent.

More worryingly, in 'export volatility' ranking, which indicates exports vulnerability of a country, India is among the worst performers at 0.75 points, with Ethiopia slightly better at 0.74 and Peru and Cameroon worse at 1.05 and 1.27, respectively. In contrast, Indonesia and Taiwan have a strong score of 0.03 each, followed by Australia and Singapore having 0.04 points each. This points to the huge ground that India has to cover on stabilising its exports over the medium-to long-term.

China, meanwhile, improved its share in global trade in different sectors, including chemicals, various machinery, metals, pharmaceuticals, precision instruments, road vehicles, textiles and transport equipment.

The report also noted that exports of services from China and to a lesser extent from India appeared to have fared relatively better than other major economies throughout 2020. —PTI

ISRO, MAPMYINDIA
JOIN HANDS TO
TAKE ON GOOGLE
MAPS/EARTH

Bengaluru, Feb. 12: Indian Space Research Organisation and location and navigation technology solutions provider MapmyIndia announced an initiative to partner together to offer India's best, and fully indigenous, mapping portal and geospatial services.

It combines the power of MapmyIndia's digital maps and technologies with ISRO's catalogue of satellite imagery and earth observation data, according to MapmyIndia's CEO and executive director Rohan Verma.

Verma termed it a path-breaking milestone in India's journey towards 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat', wherein Indian users would not be dependent on foreign organisations for maps, navigation and geospatial services, and leverage made-in-India solutions instead.

"You don't need Google Maps/Earth any longer", Verma said in an article on LinkedIn.

According to ISRO, the Department of Space (DoS) has joined hands with MapmyIndia to combine their geospatial expertise and build holistic solutions by leveraging their geoportals.

The DoS entered into an MoU with geospatial technology company CE Info Systems Pvt Ltd, which owns MapmyIndia, on Thursday.

Under the partnership, the combined geospatial expertise of the DoS and CE Info Systems would be leveraged through their respective Geoportals, according to Bengaluru-headquartered ISRO. —PTI

Clogged courts: Gogoi
says only corporations
ready to try luck at SC

UPMANYU TRIVEDI
FEB. 12

Former chief justice of India Ranjan Gogoi says he won't go to the Supreme Court with his grievances because he would have to wait endlessly for a verdict, a comment that lays bare the nation's clogged legal system.

"You want a \$5 trillion economy but you have a ramshackled judiciary," said Gogoi, who retired as chief justice in November 2019 and is now a member of the Rajya Sabha, at an event.

Gogoi's remarks calling for an overhaul of the judiciary's capacity and efficacy highlights the country's troubles with delayed verdicts and enforcing contracts. Court systems in Asia's third-largest economy are clogged with over 43 million cases and a shortage of judges means that some cases can end up taking years, even decades, to find a resolution. Companies invested in India have a tough time once entangled in a legal dispute.

Only corporations, willing to take chances with their millions of rupees



Ranjan Gogoi

go to the Supreme Court, he said. "If you were to go to the court, you'd be only washing your dirty linen in the court. You won't get a verdict. I have no hesitation in saying it," Gogoi said.

Gogoi made the remarks responding to a question whether he plans to sue a politician who alleged that he presided over a matter that heard allegations of sexual harassment against him during his tenure as the chief justice. The member also alleged that Gogoi was made a parliamentarian after his retirement after he ruled in favour of Hindus seeking a centuries-old disputed site and rejected a probe against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government in graft allegations involving the purchase of fighter jets. —Bloomberg

INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION GROWS 1 %

New Delhi, Feb. 12: The Index of Industrial Production grew by 1 per cent in December, entering the positive territory after a month's gap, mainly due to better performance of the manufacturing sector;

official data showed on Friday. The manufacturing sector—which makes up 77.63 per cent of the IIP—recorded a growth of 1.6 per cent in December 2020. Mining sector output fell by 4.8 per cent. —PTI

LUFTHANSA FIRES
103 INDIAN FLIGHT
ATTENDANTS

Mumbai, Feb. 12: Lufthansa has terminated the services of 103 India-based flight attendants after they allegedly sought "job assurance" from the management while the German airlines group had offered them leave without pay option for two years, sources close to the developments said.

These employees had been working on a fixed-term contract with the airline and some of them were with the carrier for more than 15 years, the sources added. In a statement to PTI, a Lufthansa spokesperson said that severe financial impact of the coronavirus pandemic leaves it with no choice but to restructure the airline and as part of that "it will not be extending the fixed-term employment contracts of its Delhi-based flight attendants".

According to the spokesperson, Indian cabin crew with unlimited contracts remain unaffected from restructuring as it "was able to reach individual agreements with these flight attendants." —PTI

India gifts 62 L vaccine
doses to 13 countries

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 12

The government has gifted 62.7 lakh doses of Covid vaccine to 13 countries and commercially supplied 105 lakh doses to 8 countries.

Covid vaccine is largely being supplied to neighbouring countries, some of the Asian countries, Middle East countries and African countries. Of the total 167.7 lakh doses exported in January and February, 62.7 lakh doses have been supplied as grants and 105 lakh as commercial supply, Ashwini Kumar Choubey, minister of state for health and family welfare informed the Lok Sabha.

External supplies have been made bilaterally through gifts by the government and commercial sales by the manufacturers, he said.

Bangladesh is the largest recipient of Indian vaccines. It has received 20 lakh doses as grant and 50 lakh doses through commercial purchase. Among the countries which have received the vaccine as a grant, Myanmar was given

15 lakh doses, Nepal 10 lakh doses, Sri Lanka 5 lakh, Afghanistan 5 lakh and Bhutan 1.5 lakh doses. Maldives, Mauritius, Bahrain, Oman and Barbados have received 1 lakh doses as grant, Dominica 0.7 lakh and Seychelles 0.5 lakh doses.

Brazil and Morocco are the largest buyers from India. They have purchased 20 lakh doses each from India, South Africa 10 lakh, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates two lakh each and Egypt and Algeria 0.5 lakh doses each.

"External supplies of vaccines are being undertaken with due regard to domestic production and adequate availability for the national vaccination programme," the minister said.

India is a member of Covax facility, which is created by Gavi-Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, CEPI-Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations and WHO, and is both a recipient of vaccines from the facility as well as a supplier of vaccines.

MARKET'S
POST-BUDGET
MOMENTUM
STARTS FADING



RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, FEB. 12

The market's frontline indices Sensex and Nifty-50 gained over one per cent during the week despite directionless trading in latter half of the week.

On Friday, the Nifty-50 fell 10 points to end at 15,163 while the Sensex closed 13 points higher at 51,544.

As the last fortnight's upward momentum has started fading, the market now looks set for more profit taking, said analysts.

Foreign portfolio investors turned net sellers on Friday by just Rs 37.33 crore. Domestic institutions were also net sellers by Rs 597.62 crore. Institutional flows have come back to normal levels after remaining high over the last few weeks, said analysts.

"The market has become overbought in the short term which is why bulls are getting tired and lacking the demand needed to push prices higher. "Based on the chart of large-cap companies, the weakness is increasing in the short term and it would probably lead to a quick correction to the level of 50,500 or 50,600 for the Sensex," Shrikant Chouhan, executive vice president-equity technical research, Kotak Securities said.

With the earning season coming to an end, the market would now look for new triggers. Analysts are hopeful of FPIs flows to be positive in the fourth quarter as well which has dictated the direction of the market so far since in the second half of 2020.

PANDEMIC | PROFIT

Litigation funders buy disputed insurance cases at a discount

Investors eye windfall from rejected Covid claims

LUCCA DE PAOLI &
JEF FEELEY
FEB. 12

A growing market niche where investors profit from others' legal troubles is getting a boost from Covid. Distressed-investing funds and litigation-finance boutiques are likely to be spoiled for choice after a landmark UK court ruling last month rejected pleas from insurers looking to dodge pandemic payouts. They're looking to finance or buy denied Covid-19 insurance claims for policyholders without the means or stomach for taking their insurers to court.

"This is going to be huge," said Steve Cooklin, chief executive officer of London-based litigation



funder Manolete Partners Plc, whose biggest shareholder is veteran distressed investor Jon Moulton. "It's hard to say at this stage how big exactly this issue is, but it's probably going to be in the hundreds of millions of pounds."

Insurers have warned that Covid-19 coverage claims could top as much as \$100 billion-potentially the industry's largest loss in history. Business-inter-

ruption coverage, which protects against losses when companies have to shut for a period of time, has been one of the most costly and contentious policy lines in the pandemic. UK virus-related claims, including on business-interruption policies, could exceed \$2 billion.

For investors in a zero-yield world of spiralling stock prices, the insurance payout battles present opportunities that can pay

off regardless of how debt and equity markets perform – they're "uncorrelated," in the jargon of the trade.

Assets held by litigation funders in the UK hit a record high of 1.9 billion pounds (\$2.6 billion) last year, an analysis by law firm Reynolds Porter Chamberlain LLP shows. It's a market that has lured hedge funds, including DE Shaw & Co, Fortress Investment Group and Elliott Management Corp.

"Sustained tailwinds" are in store for litigation funders, according to Bloomberg Intelligence analyst Tamlin Bason. "The uncorrelated, counter-cyclical nature of those returns could make litigation finance an attractive hedge during periods of

market volatility."

A trade can work like this: First, a company that had business-interruption coverage is rebuffed by its insurer, which argues the policy excludes coverage of pandemics or doesn't cover the type of damages sought. A judge often must parse the policy, and that can take years and hundreds of thousands of dollars – if not millions – in legal fees. Making a pitch to save policyholders time and money, litigation funders offer to immediately buy the Covid-19 claim at a discount, sometimes for less than a third of the total value. The funds make money by taking the dispute to court, betting the ultimate payout will dwarf the purchase price. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

WI take charge as Bangla totter

Dhaka: Shannon Gabriel claimed two wickets and Alzarri Joseph complemented his brilliant batting with a prized scalp to put the West Indies firmly on top in the second Test against Bangladesh in Dhaka on Friday. The West Indies reduced Bangladesh to 105-4 at stumps on the second day after posting 409 runs in their first innings on the back of half-centuries from Joshua Da Silva (92), Nkrumah Bonner (90) and Joseph (82). Mushfiqur Rahim was batting on 27 alongside Mohammad Mithun at the close, helping Bangladesh prevent further embarrassment after the early damage. — *AFP*

Brief scores, Day 2: West Indies 409 in 142.2 overs (N. Bonner 90, Silva 92, Joseph 82; A. Jayed 4/98, T. Islam 4/108) vs Bangladesh 105/4 in 36 overs (T. Iqbal 44; Gabriel 2/31).

Etienne, Rennes out of French Cup

Paris: Last year's beaten finalist Saint-Etienne and 2019 winner Rennes both went out of the French Cup in the round of 64 on Thursday. Saint-Etienne lost 1-0 at second-tier Sochaux and Rennes followed suit with a 2-1 defeat at fellow first-division team Angers. Midfielder Angelo Fulgini scored two early goals for Angers before striker Serhou Guirassy replied shortly after the break for Rennes, which beat Paris Saint-Germain in the 2019 final. Sochaux, which is seventh in the second division, took advantage of an error to score after five minutes through striker Chris Bedia. Defending champion PSG won 1-0 at second-tier Caen on Wednesday but lost striker Neymar for four weeks with an adductor injury. — *AP*

Six-pack Bayern clinch club WC

Al-Rayyan, Qatar: Bayern Munich won the Club World Cup final in Qatar on Thursday as Benjamin Pavard's second-half winner sealed a 1-0 victory over Mexico's Tigres, the Germans claiming a "six pack" of titles within 12 months. Pavard's close-range tap-in was enough to give European champions Bayern their sixth title in quick succession. This is the eighth year in a row that Bayern have gone on to win the Club World Cup, as Bayern follow in the footsteps of last year's champions Liverpool. Bayern are the second side to win all six available titles within a year after Barca managed the feat in 2009. Bayern had already won the Champions League, Bundesliga, German Cup, UEFA Super Cup and German Super Cup last season. — *AFP*

Lillard blazes in Portland win

Los Angeles: Damian Lillard drained a pair of crucial late free throws and Robert Covington made a clutch defensive play with three seconds left as the Portland Trail Blazers beat the Eastern Conference leading Philadelphia 76ers 118-114 on Thursday. With three seconds to go Portland was ahead by two points, 116-114 when Covington stole the Sixers inbound pass. — *AFP*

Live on TV

TENNIS

Australian Open: First round matches from 5.30 am on Sony Six, from 1.30 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

CRICKET

India vs England: Second Test, Day One, from 9.20 am on Star Sports 1

Pakistan vs South Africa: Second T20 from 6.30 pm on Sony Ten 1

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Leicester City vs Liverpool from 6 pm; Crystal Palace vs Burnley from 8.30 pm; Manchester City vs Tottenham from 11 pm; Brighton vs Aston Villa from 1.30 am (Sunday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

Indian Super League: Chennaiyin vs FC Goa from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

Italian League: Napoli vs Juventus from 10.30 pm; Spezia vs AC Milan from 1.15 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

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Indian captain Virat Kohli during a practice session at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Thursday.

— BCCI

PITCHED BATTLE

Chepauk surface in focus again as India look to hit back

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR
CHENNAI, FEB. 12

The wound hasn't healed. And the dust is yet to settle. Four days after being battered by the visiting England team in their own den, India have the unenviable task of lifting themselves for yet another 'pitched' battle at the same venue. Round two starting here at the M.A. Chidambaram stadium on Saturday will be a test of character for Virat Kohli & Co.

India find themselves in an unexpected situation. It's only the second time this decade that India have started a bilateral series (minimum three Tests) at home on a disappointing note. When it happened last time, against Australia in February 2017, they roared back with vengeance to clinch the series 2-1 eventually.

Much like in the opening game, the focus will once again be on the pitch. A different strip with black clay on the top layer will be used this time around. With just a three-day gap, the groundsmen didn't have much time. Both teams know what to expect — the track will turn from day one.

England skipper Joe Root has already shown the ideal way for countering spin in subcontinental conditions. But this pitch is expected to pose a bigger challenge to Root.

Annoyed with the flat surface, Kohli had blamed his supporting spinners

Shahbaz Nadeem and Washington Sundar for lacking run. But he backed Ajinkya Rahane despite his poor run of form. Rohit Sharma, who has just one half-century



Rohit Sharma plays a shot during a practice session in Chennai on Thursday.

— BCCI

in his last eight innings, hasn't faced much scrutiny either. Kohli still felt "all was well" in his batting unit. If not for the brilliant first innings knocks from Rishabh Pant and Washington, India would have slumped to further embarrassment.

With allrounder Axar Patel deemed fit and set for his Test debut, Shahbaz is back in the standby players' pool. If the team management decides to retain Washington for his batting ability, Kuldeep Yadav will continue cooling his heels. He hasn't played a Test since he took

a five-for at Sydney in January 2019.

England, on the other hand, have made four changes in their team. James Anderson who used reverse swing to rattle the Indian top-order has been rested. With Jofra Archer too being ruled out with an elbow injury and off-spinner Dom Bess to be replaced by Moeen Ali, England's bowling attack will sport a new look. In Anderson's absence, another experienced campaigner, Stuart Broad, will spearhead the attack. Fast bowlers Olly Stone and Chris Woakes will fight for the final spot.

England look at big picture, the series Kevin throws his weight behind misfiring Kohli

AGE CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 12

England's rotation policy in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic has drawn a lot of criticism from former players, but it seems to have worked in favour of the team. England are on a six-match 'away' winning streak and have rattled the formidable Indian side.

The England team management pulled off a surprise on Friday when it announced that James Anderson would be rested for the second Test despite his brilliant performance on day five of the opening Test.

"With Jimmy, it gives him the best opportunity to be fit and available for those last two games. Everyone's heart was in favour of him being available for this game but also you look at the bigger picture and ideally he is available for two of the last three, that's a huge asset for us as a team with the way he is bowling," said Root. Another tough decision England had to deal with was leaving off-

spinner Dom Bess out in favour of Moeen Ali. Bess took four wickets, including Virat Kohli's, in the first innings.

"Dom has contributed fantastically well and has made a real impact. With him missing out, the message for him moving forward is to keep working on his consistency and game, delivering that skill time and again, we talk about building pressure over long periods of time and I think, as well as he has done, that is one area that he can improve on," added Root.

Despite having won the series opener rather convincingly, Root says the visitors can't be complacent. "It certainly provides a stern challenge but it's not going to be as tough as being 1-0 down. We are in a really good position. We played brilliant cricket and will take a lot of confidence forward into this week. But we won't get ahead of ourselves. I think we are very understanding of how much work it's going to take to win in these conditions," he added.

London, Feb. 12: Former England batsman Kevin Pietersen doesn't see any threat to Virat Kohli's captaincy in the foreseeable future but can understand the growing debate over it with India losing four consecutive Tests under his leadership.

"I absolutely don't expect things to change, but it is impossible to avoid the continuing debate around the Indian Test match captaincy," Pietersen wrote in his blog post for Betway. "Virat has now lost four consecutive Test matches as skipper, and has Rahane, who just led India to a famous series win in Australia, in his side," he added. He threw his weight behind Kohli, saying he is perfectly capable to lead his side to victory.

"On social media, every radio station, every news channel, there are very deep discussions around what should happen. Captaining your country is very difficult and unfortunately this is the nature of the beast," he further added. — *PTI*

AGE CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 12

"I am sure it will turn from day one," India vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane said it loud and clear. The flat pitch that offered no assistance to bowlers was one of the talking points after India's eight-match winning streak at home came to a halt in the opening Test against England earlier this week.

As India prepare to bounce back in the series, it's no surprise that "the wicket looks completely different."

"However, we have to wait and see how it behaves in the first session. We have to forget what happened in the first Test and focus on the job at hand. We know these conditions really well, so we have to put our best foot forward and move on," said Rahane.

Rahane's average of 37.35 in 28 Tests at home is not as impressive as his away numbers — 44.44 in 42 Tests. His last two innings of 1 and 0 have put him under the scanner. However, the Mumbai batsman doesn't want to read too much into the stats. "We are playing at home after two years. The last big home Test series was against South Africa. If you take the records out, I'm sure you will find something there. And, it's not about individuals, it's always about the team. My focus is always on con-

tributing to the team's success. If you take out the last 10-15 Tests, you will see my performance. I don't worry about what happened in the first Test. I only worry about what the team wants from me," said Rahane.

England batsmen not only looked comfortable, but also played efficiently by employing sweep shots against the Indian spinners, but the same cannot be said of the hosts.

"It (shots that we play) depends on how they bowl. We play according to their line and length. England have come up with a plan to play sweep and reverse sweep. It's not necessary we have to copy them," further added Rahane.

When queried about the team's negative body language in the first Test, Rahane said: "There are moments when you don't have that energy but that doesn't mean it has happened because of a change in captaincy. As I have said earlier, Virat is our captain and will remain our captain. If you are trying to dig and find some masala, unfortunately you will not get it."

The second Test will allow 50 per cent spectators in the 45,000 capacity stadium. Rahane is excited to have the crowds back.

"We know how much that means for us. I hope people will come enjoy the cricket," added the seasoned Test batsman.

Karatsev shocks Schwartzmann

Melbourne, Feb. 12:

Russian qualifier Aslan Karatsev pulled off the biggest shock of this year's Australian Open when the world number 114 blitzed eighth seed Diego Schwartzmann into submission 6-3, 6-3, 6-3 Friday with a barrage of winners.

Karatsev is making his Grand Slam debut at Melbourne Park and is incredibly yet to drop a set as he set up a fourth-round meeting with one of the Canadian pair Denis Shapovalov or Felix Auger-Aliassime, who clash later.

The 27-year-old Russian secret weapon powered 50 winners, including nine aces, past the shell-shocked Argentine who could muster only five of his own in return in a 1hr 52min drubbing.

Meanwhile, ice-cool Dominic Thiem rallied from two sets down to tame flamboyant Nick Kyrgios.

Kyrgios produced a virtuoso performance in the first two sets, using every trick in the book, including underarm serves and tweeners but he couldn't sustain the intensity as US Open champion Thiem, last year's runner-up, found his groove with some dominant serving to fight back and outlast the 25-year-old 4-6, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-4.

In women's singles, Naomi Osaka had to deal with a butterfly landing on her nose but was otherwise little bothered as she breezed into the last 16 of

SELECTED RESULTS

Men's singles third round: Novak Djokovic (SRB x1) bt Taylor Fritz (USA x27) 7-6 (7/1), 6-4, 3-6, 4-6, 6-2; Milos Raonic (CAN x14) bt Marton Fucsovics (HUN) 7-6 (7/2), 5-7, 6-2, 6-2; Dusan Lajovic (SRB x23) bt Pedro Martinez (ESP) 6-7 (6/8), 7-5, 6-1, 6-4; Alexander Zverev (GER x6) bt Adrian Mannarino (FRA x32) 6-3, 6-3, 6-1; Dominic Thiem (AUT x3) bt Nick Kyrgios (AUS) 4-6, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-4; Grigor Dimitrov (BUL x18) bt Pablo Carreno-Busta (ESP x15) 6-0, 1-0 abandon; Felix Auger-Aliassime (CAN x20) bt Denis Shapovalov (CAN x11) 7-5, 7-5, 6-3; Aslan Karatsev (RUS) bt Diego Schwartzman (ARG x8) 6-3, 6-3, 6-3.

Women's singles third round: Hsieh Su-wei (TPE) bt Sara Errani (ITA) 6-4, 2-6, 7-5; Marketa Vondrousova (CZE x19) bt Sorana Cirstea (ROM) 6-2, 6-4; Garbine Muguruza (ESP x14) bt Zarina Diyas (KAZ) 6-1, 6-1; Naomi Osaka (JPN x3) bt Ons Jabeur (TUN x27) 6-3, 6-2; Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x7) bt Ann Li (USA) 6-3, 6-1; Serena Williams (USA x10) bt Anastasia Potapova (RUS) 7-6 (7/5), 6-2; Iga Swiatek (POL x15) bt Fiona Ferro (FRA) 6-4, 6-3; Simona Halep (ROM x2) bt Veronika Kudermetova (RUS x32) 6-1, 6-3.

the Australian Open and a showdown with last year's runner-up Garbine Muguruza.

The third seed clinched an easy 6-3, 6-2 victory over Tunisian 27th seed Ons Jabeur in 1hr 18min.

Also, Serena Williams said a deep love of tennis kept her motivated in pursuit of a 24th Grand Slam title as she wore down Anastasia Potapova 7-6 (7/5), 6-2. — *Agencies*



Naomi Osaka of Japan serves to Tunisia's Ons Jabeur during their third round match at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne on Friday.

— AP

INJURED DJOKER HINTS AT AUSTRALIAN OPEN OUSTER

Melbourne, Feb. 12: Defending champion Novak Djokovic admitted his Australian Open might be over after an injury-hit win on Friday as fans were kicked out ahead of a state-wide Coronavirus lockdown.

In extraordinary scenes, the eight-time winner's night match against Taylor Fritz was suspended at 11:30 pm (1230 GMT) to clear Rod Laver Arena before Victoria state's six million residents were locked down at midnight. The five-day lockdown, during which fans are barred and players go into a biosecure "bubble", follows an outbreak of the highly contagious UK Coronavirus strain stemming from an airport hotel.

In the now-empty stadium, a grimacing Djokovic, who needed repeated treatment on an abdominal injury, recovered from losing the third and fourth sets to beat Fritz 7-6 (7/1), 6-4, 3-6, 4-6, 6-2.

"I know it's a tear, definitely, of the muscle so I don't know if I'll manage to recover from that in less than two days. I don't know if I'm going to step out on the court or not, I'm just very proud of this achievement tonight," said the Serb. — *AFP*

Blues, Saints make FA Cup Last Eight

Wolverhampton (United Kingdom), Feb. 12:

Chelsea's impressive start to Thomas Tuchel's reign continued with a 1-0 win at Barnsley to move into the FA Cup quarterfinals on Thursday, while Southampton put their miserable Premier League form behind them to reach the last eight by beating Wolves.

Tuchel has won four and drawn one of his five games in charge since replacing the sacked Frank Lampard, but the Blues were lucky to escape after a lacklustre first-half display at Oakwell against the Championship side.

Tuchel introduced Reece James as one of two substitutions at the break and the right-back created the winning goal as his low

cross on 64 minutes left Tammy Abraham with a simple tap-in for his 12th goal of the season.

Meanwhile, Southampton's reward for seeing off Wolves 2-0 is a south coast derby against the only non-Premier League side left in the competition, Bournemouth, in the last eight. Goals from Danny Ings and Stuart Armstrong offered some relief for Ralph Hasenhuttl's men after five consecutive league defeats, including a 9-0 thrashing by Manchester United.

Elsewhere in Madrid, in its first Copa del Rey semifinal in 86 years, Levante held host Athletic Bilbao to a 1-1 draw in the first leg on Thursday. — *Agencies*