

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI MONDAY 1 FEBRUARY 2021



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MP cop touches BJP state chief V.D. Sharma's feet, stirs controversy



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Big names from non-movie background like Obamas are launching production firms



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A snowman on the National Mall wears a face mask as snow falls in front of the US Capitol in Washington on Sunday. — AP

PM to visit Bengal again Feb. 7; TMC irked at MP invite

Kolkata: Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on his second visit to poll-bound West Bengal within a span of two weeks, will inaugurate three big ticket central industrial projects totalling ₹4,552 crores at Haldia in East Midnapore next week in what appears to be a curtain raiser of his campaign to brighten the BJP's prospect in the ensuing Assembly election. What has however irked the ruling Trinamul Congress, is union petroleum minister Dharmendra Pradhan's invitation to its MP of Tamluk Dibyendu Adhikari to Mr Modi's event on February 7. ■ **More on Page 4**

Israeli embassy blast No suspect found yet

New Delhi: The investigating agencies are yet to identify any suspect in the minor blast near the Israeli Embassy, a source said on Sunday, but stressed that all angles were being covered in the probe. They said the material used in the bomb will be known after the report of the forensic science laboratory. ■ **More on Page 2**

Temp dips to 3.1°C as Delhi cold wave stays

New Delhi: A cold wave swept the national capital on Sunday morning, with the minimum temperature dipping to 3.1 degrees Celsius, the IMD said. However, clear skies and plenty of sunshine are expected to provide some relief. The maximum temperature is likely to settle around 22 degrees Celsius, an IMD official said. ■ **More on Page 2**



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

WEATHER

Max: 22°C
Min: 08°C
RH: 63%
Rain: 0%

Forecast: Sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Pushya Bahula Chavithi till 6.23 pm
Star: Uttara till 11.56 pm
Variyam: 8.04 am to 9.34 am
Durmuhurtam: 12.52 pm to 1.37 pm; 3.07 pm to 3.52 pm
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am
SUNSET TODAY 6.00 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 7.08 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 10.47 PM
MOONSET TODAY 9.40 AM

■ **Tikait:** Centre should probe 'conspiracy' behind Jan. 26 violence
■ **Punjab CM** calls all-party meet ■ **More mahapanchayats** ahead

Farmers seek a 'middle way'; want a solution with 'respect'

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

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

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

Mr Tikait, who is camping at the Ghazipur border and has now become the face of the agitation, also urged the government to release all those farmers who were arrested in connection with the tractor



Shiromani Akali Dal president Sukhbir Singh Badal presents a sword to Bharatiya Kisan Union spokesperson Rakesh Tikait at Ghazipur during the ongoing farmers' protest, in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

rally. "The government should release our men and prepare an environment conducive for the talks," he said, adding: "We will honour and respect the dignity of the Prime Minister. Farmers don't want that the government or Parliament to bow down before them... But we will also ensure that the self-respect of farmers is protected. A middle way should be found. Talks should be held."

After the mahapanchay-

Farmers don't want the government or Parliament to bow down before them... But we will also ensure the self-respect of farmers is protected. A middle way should be found. Talks should be held.

— **Rakesh Tikait, BKU leader**

Shah attacks Mamata over 'Bhatija Kalyan'

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, JAN. 31

Making dynasty politics and nepotism the BJP's prime weapons against West Bengal's ruling Trinamul Congress in the coming Assembly polls, Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday tore into chief minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee over her "Bhatija Kalyan" (nephew welfare) focus over "Jan Kalyan" (public welfare), in a clear reference to her nephew Abhishek Banerjee, a party MP.

The BJP second in com-

mand also accused the state government of trying hard to make the young Diamond Harbour MP Ms Banerjee's successor as the next West Bengal CM.

Mr Shah told a BJP rally at Dumurjola Stadium in Howrah, which he was earlier supposed to attend in person, virtually from New Delhi: "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, wherever the NDA has formed its governments, it is undertaking work for public welfare and development so that each and every village and household gets all services But



Amit Shah

here, no agenda other than making Bhatija a CM exists. The Modi government is committed to all types of public welfare. But the Mamata Banerjee government is only busy in Bhatija Kalyan. It has no agenda of public welfare here."

Buoyed by the induction of former TMC minister Rajib Banerjee, Bally MLA Baishali Dalmiya, Uttarpara MLA Prabir Ghoshal, former Howrah mayor Rathin Chakraborty, former Ranaghat civic chief Partha Sarathi Chatterjee and actor Rudranil Ghosh into the BJP a day earlier, the home minister, in a direct warning to Ms Banerjee, also reiterated: "The way the bright TMC, Communist and Congress leaders in large numbers have been joining the BJP, Mamataadi, if she looks back as the polls will come

closer, will find herself standing alone. There will be no one else to give her company because she has meted out only injustice to the people of Bengal on every count."

Optimistic about the BJP coming to power this time, he even declared: "I ask the people of Bengal not to worry any more. There is hardly any time left. After the BJP government comes to power, it will propose the Centre's health insurance scheme Ayushman Bharat in its first Cabinet meeting for implementation so that

■ **Turn to Page 2**



The WHO team is briefed outside of the Huanan Seafood Market on the third day of their field visit in Wuhan, China, on Sunday. Scientists initially suspected the coronavirus came from wild animals sold in the market. The market has since been largely ruled out but for the visiting WHO team of international researchers it could still provide hints to how the virus spread so widely. — AP

Afghan govt team warns Taliban to resume talks in Qatar quickly

Kabul, Jan. 31: A member of the Afghan government's peace negotiating team on Sunday warned the Taliban that if they don't resume peace talks in Qatar soon, the government could recall the team before a deal is reached. Government negotiator Rasul Talib said in a news conference the team is waiting for the return of the Taliban leadership to Doha, where a second

round of peace talks began this month but have made little progress. He asked the Taliban to "stop spreading baseless remarks" and return to the negotiating table, adding "The Taliban does not have the guts for peace, they are spreading nonsense around." There was no immediate response from the Taliban. Talib's comments came as the Taliban leadership

has recently been in Iran and Russia for discussions on the negotiations, and as President Joe Biden's new administration has said it plans to review the peace agreement signed last February between the US and the Taliban. The Pentagon said last week that the Taliban's refusal to meet commitments to reduce violence in Afghanistan is raising questions. — AP



PM Narendra Modi addresses during the 125th anniversary celebrations of *Prabuddha Bharata*, a monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order, started by Swami Vivekananda, in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

Cong hits out at govt over arrest of jourmos, case against Tharoor

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

The Congress on Sunday launched a scathing attack on the arrest of a journalist who was covering the farmer protest at the Singhu border. Senior leader Rahul Gandhi tweeted, "Those who fear truth arrest honest journalists." He also tagged a video purportedly showing journalist Mandeep Punia being held by police at the border protest site.

Supreme Court. Mr Modi said on Sunday: "The country was saddened by the insult to the tricolour on January 26 in Delhi. We have to infuse

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi said journalists covering the farmers' movement are being arrested, cases are being slapped against them and the internet is being shut down in many places. On Saturday, the Congress also had hit out against BJP governments for filing cases against journalists like Rajdeep Sardesai and Congress Lok Sabha MP Shashi Tharoor. ■ **More on Page 2**

the times to come with new hope and novelty. Last year, we displayed exemplary patience and courage. This year too, we

Sasikala out of hospital, AIADMK gets clear warning

Expelled leader puts party flag on her car

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR
CHENNAI, JAN. 31

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

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

As an augury to what might happen in Tamil Nadu politics, Sasikala's nephew and Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam founder T.T.V. Dhinakaran explained in Bengaluru her use of the AIADMK flag by saying that she was indeed the general secretary of the AIADMK. It was a clear warning to all leaders holding the reins of the AIADMK as many of them had openly said Sasikala would have no place in the party any longer by reminding everyone that she had already been expelled after she had been sent to jail.

But going by the hype and hoopla over her

■ **Turn to Page 2**

Ex-C'garh mantri's kin found dead

Raipur: The bodies of a former Chhattisgarh minister's daughter-in-law and granddaughter were found at their house in Raipur, the police said on Sunday, noting two suspects, including a relative, were taken into custody. The bodies of Neha Dhritlahre (30) and her daughter Ananya (9) were found in the box of the bed in a room of their house located in Shankar Nagar area on Saturday night, SHO Mamta Sharma Ali said. Neha was the wife of Tarun Dhritlahre, the son of late D.P. Dhritlahre, who was a minister in the Ajit Jogi-led Congress government (2000-2003). As per preliminary information, Tarun was out of Raipur on Saturday and when Neha's brother reached to take his sister and niece along with him, he found the house locked, Ali said. "When Neha did not answer his phone calls, he contacted his another sister who lives nearby. The two broke open the door of the house. They spotted Tarun's brother-in-law (the husband of Tarun's sister) and another man inside the house," she said. They immediately informed the police. — PTI

Part of old building collapses in Delhi

New Delhi: A portion of an old three-storey building in Turkman Gate area of the city collapsed on Sunday, but there was no loss of life, North Delhi mayor Jai Prakash said. The mayor said people in the building had been evacuated on Saturday itself after it was identified as a "dangerous structure". "A portion of the building, which is about 20-25 years collapsed at 11 am. Teams from the NDMC, fire department and civil defence were on the job to remove debris," he said. Necessary instructions have been issued to examine this incident, he said. Mr Prakash said people from some of the nearby buildings had also been evacuated by Saturday in view of the danger this building had posed. An official of the fire department also said that the civic body had declared it a dangerous structure.

ALERT ISSUED AS LEOPARD SIGHTED IN NAJAFGARH

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

The forest department has sounded an alert after an official confirmed the presence of a leopard in Najafgarh in Southwest Delhi. Deputy conservator of forest, Delhi (West) Navneet Shrivastava said a cage with a live bait has been placed in the area to catch the feline. Videos showing a leopard moving around in a residential area triggered panic on Thursday, following which forest department teams were rushed in. A senior official of the department said the leopard was first caught on CCTV camera on January 27. Later, a forest officer confirmed its presence in the area. "It was sighted again in Ghumanhera village on January 28 and near the Najafgarh drain on January 29," the official said. Forest department officials are patrolling the area. They have found pugmarks but the animal has not been traced yet, he said. "It is a shy animal. Maybe it is hiding somewhere in the area. We received a report that it was seen again in Ghumanhera village," Mr Shrivastava said.

Sasikala out of hospital

■ Continued from Page 1
first whiff of freedom after four years of incarceration, Sasikala's next long drive to Chennai in a motorcade, probably by February 7, could attract more supporters and her entry into Chennai too could be marked by more dramatic scenes.

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

In the event of the present AIADMK honchos giving way to her to take over the party's reins, as she expects them to do, the party's prospects in the polls that are due in about three months could be jeopardised in view of her unpopularity among ordinary people.

If AIADMK leaders resist her

'AAP will take legal action on BJP over CM's doctored video'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

AAP leader and Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia on Sunday said that his party will take legal action against BJP for allegedly sharing a doctored video of chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on social media. A BJP spokesperson had tweeted a video claiming that Mr Kejriwal has supported the three contentious farm laws. Addressing a press conference, he said, "The BJP knows that Kejriwal is the only leader with credibility and hence they have used his doctored interview to create a false impression among the people."

"This doctored video was created by selectively editing a long interview of Kejriwal and placing fake bytes in some places. The AAP will not allow such machinations by the BJP and will take legal action against them," he said.

Mr Sisodia claimed that since the BJP has "failed in all its machinations" against the farmers, they plotted a new scheme riding on Mr Kejriwal's popularity. "We pity the BJP's tactics who despite having their government at the Centre and in many states, have lost people's trust and hence have to use Kejriwal's doctored video to save the farm laws," he said.

Meanwhile, Mr Kejriwal on Sunday reiterated his support to the protesting farmers and said he will offer any help possible to them.

Farm stir: Cong slams govt over FIR against journalists

Priyanka targets Centre ■ Those who fear truth arrest honest journalists: Rahul

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

The Congress on Sunday launched a scathing attack on the arrest of a journalist who was covering the farmer protest at the Singhu border.

Senior leader Rahul Gandhi tweeted, "Those who fear truth arrest honest journalists."

He also tagged a video purportedly showing journalist Mandeep Punia being held by the police at the border protest site.

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi said journalists covering the farmers' movement are being arrested, cases are being slapped against them, and the internet is being shut down in many places.

She tweeted, "The BJP

Freelance scribe held for 'misbehaving' with police

New Delhi, Jan. 31: A freelance journalist was arrested from the Singhu border on Sunday for allegedly misbehaving with the police personnel on duty at the farmers' protest site there, officials said. A case was registered against him and he has been arrested now, a senior police officer said, a day after the scribe was detained.

The police had earlier said that they placed barricades at the border following the violence on Friday to ensure that no one could get through.

However, some people, including the journalist, were trying to remove the barricades, the police had alleged, adding the scribe also misbehaved with the police personnel. — PTI

government wants to trample upon the voice of the farmers but they have forgotten that the more

you suppress, the more voices will rise against your atrocities."

On Saturday also the



Heavy security deployment at the Ghazipur border in New Delhi on Sunday during the farmers' protest against the Centre's new farm laws. — PTI

Forensic team reaches ITO to probe violence

New Delhi, Jan. 31: A team of Forensic Science Laboratory reached Delhi's ITO area on Sunday, days after the farmers' tractor parade turned violent, leaving 394 security personnel injured and one agitator dead, officials said.

The team is collecting forensic evidences from the ITO and nearby areas, they said.

A protester died near ITO during the violence on Republic Day.

An FSL team had visited the Red Fort on Saturday and Ghazipur protest site on Friday.

— PTI

Clear skies likely to provide relief Cold wave in Delhi as temp dips to 3°C

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

A cold wave swept the national capital on Sunday morning, with the minimum temperature dipping to 3.1 degrees Celsius, the India Meteorological Department said.

However, clear skies and plenty of sunshine are expected to provide some relief. The maximum temperature is likely to settle around 22 degrees Celsius, an IMD official said.

This is the fourth cold-wave day in Delhi in a week. In the plains, the IMD declares a cold wave if the minimum temperature dips to 4 degrees Celsius. A severe cold wave is when the minimum is 2 degrees Celsius or less.

The minimum temperature on Tuesday and Thursday had settled at 2.1 degrees Celsius and 3.8 degrees Celsius, respectively, due to the cold and dry northwesterly winds barreling through the plains, the IMD said. Cold wave conditions had pre-

vailed in Delhi on Friday, too, with the minimum temperature settling at four degrees Celsius, five notches below normal.

On Saturday, the minimum temperature in the national capital rose slightly to 5.4 degrees Celsius.

On New Year's Day, the city had recorded a minimum of 1.1 degrees Celsius, the lowest for the month in 15 years.

Delhi recorded seven "cold wave" days in January, the maximum in the month since 2008, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) added.

In the plains, the IMD declares a cold wave if the minimum temperature dips to four degrees Celsius. A severe cold wave is when the minimum temperature is two degrees Celsius or less.

"The number of cold wave days in January this year was the maximum since 2008, when 12 such days were recorded," Kuldeep Srivastava, the head of the IMD's regional forecasting centre here, said.

DU set to open for final year students today with full staff

New Delhi, Jan. 31: The Delhi University announced on Sunday that it will allow final year students at all its colleges with 100 per cent staff strength from February 1.

The decision was taken after a meeting with the heads of the departments of the university and principals of colleges.

"Only final year students, in small batches, are allowed to visit their respective colleges, cen-

tres and departments for their laboratory, practicals, skill, library and related activities, as per the discretion of the respective principal, director or head in line with the UGC guidelines and SOPs," it said in a notification.

The university said the section incharge or unit head may plan the timings of the staff in a staggered manner to avoid crowding at entry and exit gates. — PTI

R-DAY VIOLENCE

50 new notices sent to people, including farm leaders

Cops get 2K messages from public

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

The Delhi police had received around 2,000 WhatsApp messages from residents of the national capital after it appealed to people to share videos and information regarding the violence on Republic Day.

Meanwhile, a police team, during its probe, had found that around 200 groups were active before and during the violence and they had played a vital role in fuelling the fire during the tractor parade.

The police said that these WhatsApp groups

were mobilising people and asking them to assemble at certain points. Sources said that the Delhi police has also blocked several groups on social media which were active during the violence.

The police, on Sunday, also sent over 50 new notices to people, including farmer leaders, in connection with the violence.

A police team is also raiding places in Punjab to nab Deep Sidhu who disappeared on the night after the violence in the city. The police said that a notice was also sent to him to appear for investigation.

According to the police, some of the tractors have also been identified and notices are also being sent, or are in the process of being sent, as many of them were from outside the national capital and the police is sending letters to their addresses.

"The police has received more than 2,500 video clips, CCTV footage, and several photos from the public so far related to the violence. Police teams are taking help from forensic experts to analyse the material and identify the culprits," said a senior police official.

The investigators are also analysing footage and photos taken from drone-mounted cameras and carrying out 3D mapping of the area vandalised at the Red Fort.

The Crime Branch, which is investigating 10 cases related to the violence including at the Red Fort and ITO, is also examining dump data of mobile phone calls and registration number of tractors.

The Delhi police teams are investigating in several locations, including Punjab and Haryana, to apprehend the people who indulged in the violence.

ED to begin separate inquiry against Cambridge Analytica

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

Days after the CBI registered a case against Cambridge Analytica and Global Science Research for the alleged illegal harvesting of data of 5.62 lakh Indian Facebook users for profiteering and manipulating elections, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is set to initiate its separate probe against the UK based firm under the provisions of

the money laundering act.

Sources said, "ED officials are in touch with the CBI sleuths, who are investigating the case. ED officials are scrutinizing documents pertaining to the case and also examining FIR registered by the CBI". The Enforcement Directorate will register a money laundering case under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), they added.

No suspect found yet in embassy blast case

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

The investigating agencies are yet to identify any suspect in the minor blast near the Israeli embassy.

Meanwhile, two days after the blast, APJ Abdul Kalam Road was opened for the general public. The Delhi police has covered the blast spot with a white coloured tent to preserve the place of the incident.

The police also faced some challenges as most of the CCTV cameras were

not functional at the time of the incident.

Sources said that the material used in the bomb will be ascertained after the report of the forensic science laboratory.

However, according to sources, the possible material of the bomb could be PETN, "Hi-Watt" 9 volt battery, ball bearings.

Earlier, the special cell of the Delhi police had received such input regarding some untoward incident around a month ago and it wrote a letter

too to the top brass officials that the property of Israel was on the radar of unknown persons/suspected terrorists or their enemies.

The letter also read that the special cell had inputs that citizens of Israel, who live in India, could also be targeted.

The intelligence officials had given a letter to the Israeli embassy that there could be a threat. In fact the threat could be all over the world, sources claimed.

Three international

flights were put on hold immediately after the blast took place because last time, in 2012, when a diplomat was attacked with a sticker bomb the suspect had run away abroad, sources said, adding that the agencies have also met Mossad officials and have shared details.

According to the sources, the investigating agencies are probing the matter from all angles. However, no suspect has been identified yet.

The letter, which was

recovered from the spot, was addressed to the Israeli ambassador and referred to the deaths of two Iranians.

The letter, which was written in English, mentioned the names of Gen. Qassem Soleimani, head of Iran's elite Quds Force who was killed in a US airstrike and Iran's top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, who played a crucial role in Iran's nuclear programme and was assassinated near Tehran in November 2020.

'Nation sad at insult to tricolour'

■ Continued from Page 1
have to work hard to attain our resolves. We have to take our country forward at a faster pace."

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

He added: "These days, I too receive similar messages from Presidents and PMs of different countries... You must also have seen recently how the President of Brazil, in a tweet, thanked India --

every Indian was gladdened at that... During the moment of crisis, India is able to serve the world today, since she is capable, self-reliant in the field of medicines, vaccines. The same thought underpins the Atma Nirbhar Bharat campaign. The more India is capable, the more will she serve humanity; correspondingly the world will benefit more!"

On the Padma awards, Mr Modi said: "The nation honoured people doing extraordinary work; for their achievements and contribution to humanity. This year too, the recipients comprise people who have done excellent work in myriad fields; through their endeavour, they've changed someone's life, taking the country forward. Thus, the tradition of conferring the Padma honour on unsung heroes that was started a few years ago

has been maintained this time too."

Commenting on an interesting event in West Bengal, Mr Modi said: "Just a few days ago I watched a video. That video was of Sarmuddin, a painter from Naya Pingla village in West Midnapore, West Bengal. He was expressing happiness that his painting based on the Ramayan had sold for two lakh rupees. This brought great happiness to his fellow villagers too. After watching this video, I was curious to know more about it. In this very context, I came to know about a very good initiative related to West Bengal, which I would definitely like to share with you."

Praising a local vegetable market in Hyderabad, Mr Modi said: "I felt very happy on reading about how a local vegetable market in Boinpalli of Hyderabad is fulfilling its responsibility".

CHHATTISGARH

New Paradigms of Excellence

IN THE STATE



Highest
Quantity of
Paddy Procurement
at MSP in
20 YEARS



Highest
Employment Generation
under MGNREGA in
15 YEARS



Shri Bhupesh Baghel
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Chhattisgarh

Highest
Minor Forest Produce
Procurement Accounting for
73%
of Country's
Total Procurement



IN THE COUNTRY



Leading State
in the Allotment of
Individual & Community
FOREST RIGHTS CERTIFICATES

4,35,000 Individual &
35,000 Community Certificates on
52 Lakh Acre Forest Land



Pro Active
Pro People

SHORT TAKES

MP COP TOUCHES BJP LEADER'S FEET, STIRS ROW

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, JAN. 31

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MAOIST LEADER GUNNED DOWN IN ODISHA'S DIST

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, JAN. 31

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

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

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

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

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

DIGITAL EXHIBITION ON BANGABANDHU, BAPU CONCLUDES

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

The "Bangabandhu-Bapu Digital Exhibition," which provides a historical glimpse into the lives and struggles of two iconic leaders, Mahatma Gandhi or Bapu and Bangladesh's founder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman or Bangabandhu, concluded on Sunday at the Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi.

The exhibition, which was organised by the ministry of external affairs (MEA) in cooperation with the Bangladesh government, is now expected to re-open in Bangladesh's capital Dhaka on March 1.

The digital exhibition comprised a 'genocide tunnel,' a reminder of the horrific massacres and rapes committed in 1971 in the erstwhile East Pakistan by Pakistan Army personnel who tried their level best to crush the Independence movement there but to no avail. It was also a reminder of the huge sacrifices made by the people of Bangladesh to carve out their new nation that year.

A "holographic time machine" comprising historical photos relating to the two iconic leaders, the 'triangle of engagement' that provides a "360° view of the historic locations" of events in the lives of the two leaders, recordings of favourite songs of both, and the 'robotic signatures' of the two icons were some of the other interesting draws at the digital exhibition.

■ Naresh Tikait says government must prepare an environment conducive for talks

Don't want govt to bow down: Tikait

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tikait said, the violence on January 26 was part of a conspiracy. The tricolor is over and above everything. We will never let anyone disrespect it. It will not be tolerated, he said.

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



BJP will come to power in Puducherry, claims Nadda

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

— PTI

Sena hits out at PM, Ex-MLA quits BJP over new farm laws

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, JAN. 31

Shiv Sena on Sunday slammed Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah for their silence on the 26 January violence in Delhi. The issue of protesting farmers at Delhi is connected to Punjab and nothing should be done to make that state turbulent again, Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut said.

"Both Mr Modi and Mr Shah are ruling the country by occupying two major constitutional posts. But they did not speak on the large scale violence that took place in Delhi on January 26. Do they have any responsibility?" asked Mr Raut on Sunday in his weekly column Rokhthok (forthright) in the Sena mouthpiece Saamana.

The senior Sena leader also warned that ignoring the Punjab farmers' protest will stoke fresh unrest in the country. "The issue of protesting farmers at Delhi is connected to Punjab. The country has once witnessed the consequences of revolt in the Punjab's prosperous Sikh community, which is placed worldwide. Sikhs in Canada, Los Angeles, New York have supported the protesting farmers in Delhi. Hence, nothing should be done to make Punjab turbulent again," he said.

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

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

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

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

Meanwhile, some villagers in Sonipat's Rai block took out a "tractor march" in support of the farmers protesting against the farm laws. A "Kisan Mazdoor Mahapanchayat" was organised by "Arhitiyas Association" in Palwal on the farm laws issue.

A mahapanchayat will be held in Jind early next month to mobilise support for the farmers agitating.

— PTI

PM to launch 3 projects in WB

RAJIB CHOWDHURI DC
KOLKATA, JAN. 31

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

— PTI

TMC looted rations given by PM: Irani

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

Irani deputised for Union home minister Amit Shah at the programme in Howrah district. Shah's two-day visit to the state was cancelled at the last minute due to the ongoing protest by farmers in Delhi and an explosion near the Israeli Embassy on Friday. He addressed the rally through video-conferencing.

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

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

— PTI

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Fish from farms not safe: Report

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

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

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

"We have found shocking conditions in this growing sector. Fish are kept in cramped, filthy enclosures, with no waste management. They are cut up alive. The contaminated water from these fish farms is released into local water bodies and estuaries that spread the parasites further, causing harm to the fish population as well as humans", Verda Mehrotra, executive director of FIAPO, said in a release.

She said in Bihar, the investigation was carried out in the districts of East Champaran, Muzaffarpur, Begusarai and Patna covering 20 fish farms.

100 per cent of the fish farms had toxic levels of lead and cadmium, scoring extremely poor on the public health hazard scale (0.25/1).

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

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

— PTI

RJD says in talks with TMC to fight Bengal polls

Didi's party denies

Kolkata, Jan. 31: Bihar's main Opposition party RJD said on Sunday that it is in talks with the Trinamul Congress to fight the upcoming West Bengal elections together, but leaders of chief minister Mamata Banerjee's party claimed that no such discussions are underway.

RJD principal general secretary Abdul Bari Siddiqui and national general secretary Shyam Rajak are in Kolkata to hammer a tie-up with the TMC for the Bengal polls, RJD leaders claimed.

"We will be meeting CM Mamata Banerjee on Monday to fight Bengal polls together," Mr Rajak told PTI. Mr Siddiqui and Mr Rajak met RJD leaders in the state ahead of the discussions with Ms Banerjee.

However, the TMC leaders said that no talks of any tieup with the RJD for the West Bengal polls are underway.

RJD spokesperson Mrityunjay Tiwary said over the phone from Patna that the party is exploring the possibility of contesting some seats on the Bengal-Bihar border.

He, however, did not give any numbers on which the party is planning to fight the state elections, likely in April-May.

Ms Banerjee has cordial relation with RJD supremo Lalu Prasad and the party wishes to strengthen her hands in the Bengal polls, Tiwary said.

The primary objective of the RJD is to stop the "communal" BJP from increasing its influence in West Bengal, he added.

— PTI



THE ASIAN AGE

1 FEBRUARY 2021

Pass a resolution on MSP, drop cases against farmers

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

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

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

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

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

Judicial correction

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

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

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

THE ASIAN AGE

T. VENKATRAM REDDY

Editor in Chief

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Subhani



Elite clubs bastions of hereditary entitlement



Mohan Guruswamy

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

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

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

sahibs". The brown sahibs too have long gone and cannot aspire to memberships. Unlike the clubs of the past, which were extensions of a ruling hierarchy, today's clubs are mostly watering holes for the well-born, and more for card games than field games.

Generally speaking, an elite means a more capable group of people. In sociological terms, an elite is a group of people who control a disproportionate share of wealth or power. C. Wright Mills in *The Power Elite* describes the power elite as "those political, economic, and military circles, which as an intricate set of overlapping small but dominant groups share decisions having at least national consequences". But most of our "elite" clubs defy such descriptions and have ceased to be based on social or official hierarchical or professional considerations, where membership was dependent on attainments and achievements. They are increasingly an association of neither the more capable people or a social elite or a power elite. They are just social clubs where membership is dependent on birth. The term "*parivarvaad*" used by the government in its petition describes a uniquely Indian system that combines dynastic succession and clan nepotism.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS

GOVT STAND HARDENS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserting that the government will not do away with its proposal to stay farm laws and that any resolution of the issue "should be found through dialogue" must come as a setback for the protesting farmers. On the violence during the tractor rally by farmers on Republic Day and the Red Fort siege, the Prime Minister said that the law would take its own course. The statement coming even as the farm unions expressed a certain willingness to resume talks shows that the government is keen to harden its stance.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

CHEER FOR VOTERS

THE ELECTION COMMISSION of India has launched the e-EPIC (Electronic Electoral Photo Identity Card) programme on January 25, National Voters' Day. The e-EPIC was launched in two phases. In the first phase from January 25 to 31, all who have applied for the voter-ID card and registered their mobile numbers in Form-6 will be able to download e-EPIC by simply authenticating their number. The second phase will start on February 1. It will be open to all voters. Those who have given their mobile numbers can also download their e-EPIC. The digitalisation of the voter ID card will have a special significance in the upcoming polls in five states, namely, Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

RELEASE MANDEEP

OUR COUNTRYMEN and women should rise in support of digital media journalists Mandee Punia and Dharmendra Singh who risked a confrontation with police in order to expose their role as well as that of BJP leaders in the violence orchestrated, purportedly by "locals", at the Singhu and Ghazipur borders recently. Both have been arrested. Punia's Facebook Live video showing the photos of those perpetrating the violence at Singhu border and establishing their links with the ruling party has gone viral. Hope both men are released soon.

Priyanka Mathur
Noida

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Shovanlal Chakraborty (Jan. 30). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Kishwar Desai

London Diary



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

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

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

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

stronger and smarter.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHORT TAKES

GUNMEN OPEN FIRE IN PAK, KILL POLICEMAN

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

PALESTINIAN KILLED FOR KNIFE ATTACK

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

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

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

It said no military personnel were wounded in the attack.

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

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

MEXICO: FOUR OF 19 BODIES IDENTIFIED

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

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

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

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

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

CYCLONE IN FIJI: ONE DEAD, FIVE MISSING

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

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

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

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

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

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

New UK visa for HK residents who want to flee

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

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

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

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

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

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

scheme this week.

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

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

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



Daniel Pearl

PEARL'S FAMILY TO CHALLENGE ACQUITTALS

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

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

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

STIMULUS | PROPOSAL

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

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

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

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

3,000 held in pro-Navalny stir

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

changes in locations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

arriving outside Matrosskaya Tishina prison where Navalny was being held.

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

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

— *AFP*

Protesters disrupt vaccination site in LA

Pentagon pauses vax plan for Guantanamo detainees

Los Angeles, Jan. 31: Protesters briefly disrupted a coronavirus vaccination distribution centre at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles, United States media reported Saturday.

Several dozen people carrying signs demanding the end of lockdowns and promoting anti-vaccination conspiracy theories gathered at the entrance to the site, one of the largest in the US, social media posts showed.

"There appears to be only about 30 protesters total. It's not clear why they've shut off the whole facility," tweeted social media user Mikel Jollet.

Officials shut the site down for nearly an hour; US media reported, citing fire department officials — though the Los Angeles police department later insisted that the site had not been shut down and that all the vaccines would be distributed.

The incident represents just the latest challenge to the vaccine rollout in the US, which has the highest number of cases and deaths in the world from Covid-19.

More than 26 million people have been infected and 439,000 have died in the country since the start of the pandemic, a tally kept by Johns Hopkins University showed Saturday.

President Joe Biden has pledged to have 100 million people vaccinated within his first 100 days — but the rollout began slowly under former President Donald Trump.

Los Angeles county, where Covid-19 cases have surged this winter, is currently only vaccinating frontline medical workers and people aged 65 and over.

Even among those groups, appointments are extremely difficult to obtain, with Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna shots in limited supply. — *AFP*

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

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

Sheikh Mohammed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

VACCINE DELAYS: GERMANY MULLS LEGAL ACTION

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

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

ISRAEL TO GIVE SOME VACCINES TO PALESTINIANS

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

PERTH GOES INTO SNAP LOCKDOWN OVER SINGLE CASE

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

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

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

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

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

Biden, Dems seek hike in US minimum wage

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46,285.77	-1.26
Nifty 50	13,634.60	-1.32
S&P 500*	3,714.24	-1.93
Dollar (₹)	72.94	0.14
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.04	-0.34
Euro (₹)	88.33	0.12
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,690.286	0.002
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	55.04	-0.11
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.949	00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.071	2.14

* As of Friday/Saturday

GST revenues touch record ₹1.20 L cr in Jan.

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

Sitharaman to present Union Budget today



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

Power demand touches all-time high of 189.6 GW

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

back," another source said.

No major oil and gas discovery has been made in the past seven years since the retrospective tax demand was raised.

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

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

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

CEA PITCHES FOR PRIVATE SECTOR-LED BAD BANK



K.V. Subramanian

KUMAR DIPANKAR & CHANDRA SHEKHAR NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

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

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

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

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

Crypto players want to be heard before ban decision

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JAN. 31

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

China giant reports \$10 bn fraud

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

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

listed CCOOP Group Co said late on Friday.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Stocks encounter Budget hurdle

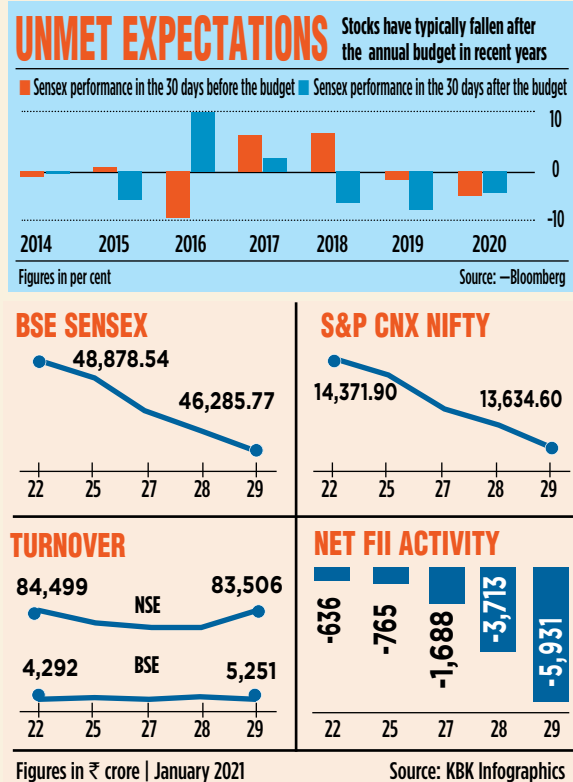
NUPUR ACHARYA & RONJOJ MAZUMDAR JAN. 31

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

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

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

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



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

early May from its peak in January.

—Bloomberg

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

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

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

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

MAKING IN INDIA

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

Mait seeks ₹20K cr PLI for IT hardware

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

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

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

Mait president Nitin Kunkolienker told PTI,



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

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

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

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

Kunkolienker said there is a need to recreate and reposition India's market.

"At least Rs 20,000 crore is required (under PLI). It is based on value addition potential that exists in the country."

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

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

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

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

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

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



MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JAN 31.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Olectra already operates 150 buses in Pune.

SHORT TAKES

Messi's contract biggest in sports

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

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

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

Hyderabad FC too hot for Chennaiyin

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

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

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

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

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

Gill blazes to title in Coimbatore

Coimbatore: Gaurav Gill was in blazing form at the wheels of his Mahindra XUV as he and navigator Musa Sherif showed immense skills and patience to win the Rally of Coimbatore on Sunday and again emerge national champions.

By winning two legs on tarmac in Itanagar last month and coming to the leafy environs of Kethanur, 40km outside Coimbatore, Gill showed he was also the king on gravel as well.

For JK Tyre, the return to the rallying scene with a bang after a long hiatus could not have been sweeter. The comeback to the latest season in a year of the pandemic has been simply captivating.

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

Jesus wins it for Manchester City

London: Manchester City opened up a three-point lead at the top of the Premier League with a game in hand to come as Pep Guardiola's men beat Sheffield United 1-0, while Manchester United played out a goalless draw at Arsenal on Saturday.

Gabriel Jesus scored the only goal inside the first 10 minutes as City extended their winning run to 12 games in all competitions.

Second-placed United could have moved back within one point of their local rivals, but for the second time in four days, after suffering a shock defeat by Sheffield United on Wednesday, their title challenge faltered. — AFP

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Odisha vs Jamshedpur from 7:20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

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MOEEN TARGET

England allrounder Ali looks to get Test career back on track

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR
CHENNAI, JAN. 31

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

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

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

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

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

"That is my biggest motivation. I still feel I've got wickets and runs in me and match-winning performances within me. I have small targets. I want to achieve first. I am not too far away from getting 200 wickets. I know people say they don't look at these things but it would be something I would look at. Then I would set another target after that," said Moeen.

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



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

Moeen said he is fit and raring to go now.

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

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

"How do we get him out? He's obviously an amazing player, world-

class, he's very motivated to do well and I'm sure he'll be even more motivated after they did well in Australia and he had to leave for the birth of his child," said Moeen.

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

SHASTRI SAYS PM'S WORDS WILL BOOST TEAM'S MORALE

New Delhi, Jan. 31: India's head coach Ravi Shastri on Sunday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's words of appreciation on the national cricket team's recent triumph in Australia would strengthen its resolve to perform "under pressure" in future assignments as well.

A depleted Indian cricket team posted a historic come-from-behind 2-1 Test series win against Australia in their own den earlier this month. And the lion-hearted effort of the team was duly appreciated by Prime Minister Modi in his 'Mann Ki Baat' address to the nation on Sunday.

"Is mahine cricket pitch se bhi bahut acchhi khabar mili. Humari cricket team ne shuruati dikkaton ke baad, shaandar wapaasi karte huye Australia mein series

jeeti. Humare khiladiyon ka hardwork aur teamwork prerit karnewala hain," Modi said in his address.

The head coach of the victorious team tweeted: "Thank you, Sir. Your kind words will further strengthen TeamIndia and India's resolve to perform under pressure and in trying circumstances. Jai Hind!"

DADA DISCHARGED
BCCI president Sourav Ganguly, who was discharged from a Kolkata hospital earlier in the day after undergoing a fresh round of angioplasty to clear clogged coronary arteries, also thanked Modi for his appreciation. "Sincere thanks and gratitude to Honourable Prime minister for recognising the performance of the Indian cricket team in australia..." Ganguly tweeted. — PTI

MUSHTAQ ALI | FINAL

TN pip Baroda for second title

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

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

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

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

But Nishaanth continued playing his shots and was joined by Baba Aparajith (29 not out off 35 balls) as

Tamil Nadu reached 61/1 after 10 overs.

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

Skipper Dinesh Karthik played his part to perfection with a 16-ball 22 but perished when his side needed 20 runs off 23 balls.

Aparajith and Shahrulkh Khan (18 not out) then took TN home. Shahrulkh, fittingly, finished the game with a boundary.

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

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

BRIEF SCORES

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

Antonsen, Tai emerge champs

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

The all Danish men's singles final was equally nail biting as Anders Antonsen denied Viktor Axelsen a third tournament win in three weeks. Marin beat the Taiwanese 26-year-old two weeks in a row during the previous Thailand Open tournament finals.

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

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

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

Thailand has hosted three consecutive badminton tournaments in a bio-secure bubble.

Axelsen, ranked fourth, couldn't control his nerves — losing the first game 16-21 — his body language showing immense frustration as errors piled up and shots landed wide. He managed to regroup to win the second game 21-5. But in the decider Antonsen had all the right answers, triumphing 21-17 to claim the game and the hour-long match against an increasingly ruffled Axelsen. — AFP

Ranji survived a World War, freedom struggle but not Covid



Hemant Kenkre
Silly Point

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

What began with 14 teams in the inaugural season has now morphed into a mammoth tourney featuring 38 teams from across the country. The decision taken by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) was after consultation with their stakeholders (teams, players, etc.) is a correct one considering the current situation. The gigantic logistical efforts needed to conduct the national tournament in these times (with the threats still being posed by the pandemic) prompted the BCCI to take this

unfortunate step to put player and public safety on top priority.

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

The recent exploits of the Indian team in Australia in the Test series are ample proof of how the Ranji Trophy has contributed to the growth of Indian cricket.

The way the bench players put their hands up to take India to a convincing win over the Australians just goes to show how deep cricket has penetrated into the country. Performances by members of the team (who started the tour down under as 'net bowlers') wowed audiences in India and also passed a strong message to followers of the game abroad that Indian cricket cannot be

taken lightly. The strength of any team does not lie only in its playing stars but is uncovered when their replacements show their hunger for success. And that's what was on show during the series, particularly in the final Test match at the Gabba.

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

In a summation, Chappell went on to call their young cricketers 'weekend warriors' as compared to their Indian counterparts. He mentioned the cut-throat competition that a young Indian cricketer has to survive from the Under-16 age group level till he reaches the first class level, saying: "As cricket is THE major sport in India, the best athletes in the country are playing the game and competition for state places is fierce."

Indian legend Sunil Gavaskar has often written about the 'hunger' that a young Indian cricketer has as he undertakes the sharp climb, up from the age group level to the Ranji Trophy.

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

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

The tournament survived a World War and the freedom struggle but not the pandemic.

Mujeeb Mir
(1st August 1970 - 1st February 2005)

Like a shivering leaf my heart constantly moan

Beloved left at midnight, where hence?

In our midst like a candle brightly shone

Where hence, alas without us where hence?

My eyes from tears into a river have grown

In this ocean, that pearl where hence?

Like a pearl at the bottom of ocean, drowned

Pearl diver, with a string sought me and found.

Jalal al-Din Rumi.

A.Rashid Mir

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