

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | MONDAY 8 | FEBRUARY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 30°C
Min: 20°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Thai 26
Tithi: Dwadashi
Star: Moolam
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am
Yamagandam: 110.30 am to 12 noon
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.22 am
Zohar: 12.28 pm
Asar: 3.43 pm
Maghrib: 6.12 pm
Isha: 7.25 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.13 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.34 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 3.24 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 4.00 PM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+11,528)	(+82)
1,08,38,843	1,55,114

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+471)
TN: 8,41,797 12,383

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

10,65,14,949

DEATHS

23,23,928

219
COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
worldometers.info

Thousands protest army takeover in Myanmar

Yangon: As enthusiastic crowds of tens of thousands marched through the streets of Myanmar's biggest city on Sunday to protest last week's coup, their spirits were lifted by the return of internet services that had been blocked a day earlier. Separate protests that began in various parts of Yangon converged at Sule Pagoda, situated in the center of a roundabout in the city's downtown area. Protesters chanted 'Long live Mother Suu' and "Down with military dictatorship."

Kerala: Sunny Leone booked in cheating case

Kochi: A cheating case has been registered against Bollywood actor Sunny Leone following a complaint from an Event management company that the actress had failed to attend a Valentine Day function in Kochi in 2019, after accepting a payment of around Rs 29 lakh. Leone was questioned on Saturday and her statement recorded by the Kochi crime branch unit while she was at nearby Poovar resort.

COUNTER

POINT



Not chakka jam, it is a regular traffic jam!

Kidnapped sailor burnt alive in Maha

■ Spl team from Maharashtra in city to probe sailor's murder

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 7

A 27-year-old navy sailor, a native of Jharkhand, attached to 'INS Agrani', a navy training establishment in Coimbatore, was abducted allegedly by a three-member gang outside the Chennai airport on January 30. He died of burns after he was set afire on a hillock in Palghar district of Maharashtra, sources said.

The sailor, identified as Suraj Kumar Dubey, sustained 90 per cent burns and died. Police said the victim had informed them of details of the alleged abduction from Chennai and extortion attempt by the unknown trio before his death.

A special police team from Maharashtra arrived in the city on Sunday afternoon to recover CCTV footage outside the airport premises,



Suraj Kumar Dubey

and to investigate the case. As per preliminary information, Suraj Kumar Dubey

loans and the release of those arrested after the Republic Day violence in Delhi.

Asserting the agitation against the farm laws was a people's movement that will not fail, Mr Tikait said there will be no "ghar wapsi" till the farmers' demands are met. He lauded the role of the "khap panchayats" (caste councils) and their leaders in supporting the farmers' stir.

Mr Tikait said two government representatives had come to meet him on Saturday, but he refused to meet them separately.

PM brandishes Ram card against Mamata

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, FEB. 7

Kickstarting his poll campaign in a grand style for the ensuing Assembly Election in West Bengal, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday tore into the dynasty politics of ruling Trinamul Congress in West Bengal with a pitch for Hindutva to bring "Parivartan" (Change).

He asserted that the people of the state would soon remove 'Bua-Bhatijabad' and show 'Ram Card' to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's party for scoring many 'fouls' during its two straight terms in power.

"Bengal is a state that loves football. So in the language of football, I want to say that TMC scored fouls one after another. From misgovernance to attacks on opposition to looting people's money, there are plenty of fouls. People are watching everything. That is why Bengal is going to show 'Ram Card' to TMC soon. Time and situation are changing. You have made up your mind to remove Bua-Bhatijabad from Bengal. Those in the TMC who are tired with Bua-Bhatijabad are also eagerly waiting to dedicate themselves for service of Bengal," he told a BJP rally.

"Every discussion will be held collectively in the presence of the Samyukth Kisan Morcha (an umbrella body of the protesting farmers' unions)."

In Madhya Pradesh, Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar claimed the ongoing protests were limited to a certain area and hoped that the deadlock would end soon. "The farmers' agitation is limited to a certain area. The government is ready for talks with the farmers, and I hope we will be able to break the deadlock very soon." ■P4

AMMA'S RULE WILL BE BACK, SAYS EDAPPADI

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUVALLUR, FEB. 7

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami on Sunday said that he was sure that 'Amma's rule would continue in the state.

Addressing a large gathering resembling a sea of people in Minjur Kadai Veedhi in Tiruvallur district, the Chief Minister came hard on Opposition leader president M.K. Stalin and said women have now started uncomfortable questions to him.

was returning from his native on January 30, when three men abducted him at gunpoint outside Chennai airport around 9 pm.

Narrating his ordeal to the police before his death, Suraj said that he took a flight from Ranchi on the night of January 30. Around 9 pm, he reached Chennai airport. In Chennai, three persons in their forties held him at gunpoint, and took away his mobile phone. ■P2

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Farm loan waiver, trick on the public: Alagiri



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Joe Biden: Won't lift Tehran sanctions

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Bess takes 4/55 as England maintain stranglehold



150 workers feared dead in Uttarakhand avalanche

■ Power project washed away ■ People trapped in tunnel

DC CORRESPONDENTS
NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

About 150 labourers working at a power project in Tapovan-Reni in Uttarakhand are feared dead while several people are missing after a glacier burst in Chamoli region triggered flash floods downstream. Uttarakhand chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat said the bodies of seven persons have been recovered while 125 are missing. Personnel of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) have so far managed to rescue 16 persons trapped in a tunnel while efforts are on to rescue those who are trapped in another tunnel.

The glacial burst led to the rise of water levels in river Rishiganga, which washed away the Rishiganga small hydro project of 13.2 MW near Raini village. The flash flood also affected the downstream hydro project of NTPC at Tapovan on the river Dhauliganga, which is a tributary of the river Alaknanda.

The flash floods have also caused damage to livestock and properties, the exact assessment of which is yet to be made. Uttarakhand director-gen-



■ Rishiganga small hydro project of 13.2 MW near Raini village washed away as glacier burst in Chamoli region triggered flash floods downstream.

■ 150 labourers missing; 16 rescued; 7 bodies recovered.

■ ITBP, NDRF help Uttarakhand in relief and rescue operations.

Avalanche after a glacier broke off in Joshimath in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district causing a massive flood in the Dhaul Ganga river, Sunday. — PTI

R.MOHAN | DC
CHENNAI, FEB. 7

Vivekanandan Krishnaveni Sasikala's return to her home state after four years in a Bengaluru jail has created a sense of anticipation in many and even fear in the minds of the mandarins of the ruling party. If Monday looms like some kind of D-Day for the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu politics, it is a reflection of how the party had become the personal fiefdom of former CM J.Jayalalithaa and even more so that of her confidante, who was the virtual regent operating from her residence in Poes Garden until convicted in a PCA case.

"To give her a warm welcome is our only aim. I trust the Police will remain neutral," said TTV Dhinakaran, Sasikala's nephew and AMMK party's honcho, on Sunday. His comments about the kind of welcome being planned to give Sasikala, who sources say is expected to come in a motorcade of 500 to 1,000 cars from a resort in Bengaluru to her niece's residence in T. Nagar in Chennai, come in the wake of complaints to the DGP by AIADMK ministers about her posing a "threat" to law & order. However, an enthusiastic welcome more than an



armed insurgency can be said to be on the minds of her followers at the moment.

The government's anxiety was transmitted in a strange convoy of ministers dropping in on the Marina Beach office of the DGP and preferring oral complaints about Sasikala's use of the AIADMK Party flag on her car as she emerged from the Victoria Hospital where she was admitted for a touch of Covid-19. A point of interest about her return will be whether that flag will continue to flutter on the bonnet in one of Jayalalithaa's Toyota MUVs which may carry Sasikala on her journey home.

The symbolism of the car and flag was high on her agenda when she came out of hospital. That has pushed the TN minister D. Jayakumar to threaten

action against Sasikala if she continues to use the party flag. The chances are that she will enter TN with the flag on as this is the challenge she can throw at her old party now. When she departed for Bengaluru she was the General Secretary of the party and was subsequently removed by the EPS-OPS combine, but without a notice being served on her. Legal challenges may be planned on these aspects in the future.

Sources say trouble is anticipated if she travels with the party flag on the car when she enters Hosur in Tamil Nadu from Attibelle in Karnataka. Dhinakaran's AMMK party has prepared a big reception there. In Chennai, Sasikala may skip the AIADMK HQ and the (closed) Jaya Memorial on the Marina and head straight to Ramavaram Gardens to pay homage to AIADMK party founder MGR at his old home to convey a political message and try to pin relevance to her coming back to Chennai.

The TN minister Jayakumar has threatened action if Sasikala tries to enter the party HQ on Lloyds Road where heavy security has been beefed up, so too at the old Jaya residence in Poes Garden, which is now a museum and memorial. ■P2

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Zindagi ke saath bhi, Zindagi ke baad bhi.

LIC/AR/19-2027/ENG

OTHER STORIES

Two brothers
drown in pondDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 7

Two brothers aged 14 and 12 drowned while taking a bath in a pond in Adambakkam on Sunday afternoon. The deceased were identified as Vinoth Kumar (14) and Vishal (12), sons of Raja who is a resident of Annai Teresa Nagar in Adambakkam.

According to the police, Vshal fell into the pond and Vinoth Kumar jumped in to try and rescue him. Residents heard their cries but the boys had drowned by the time they reached. The Madipakkam police were alerted and they recovered the bodies.

Wider variety for
coffee loversDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 7

Coffee lovers are legion in India. For years their only choice was varied proportions of blends of chicory and coffee before the instant coffee made life somewhat simpler in quicker preparation. The south Indian would, however, pride himself and his patience in the filter coffee that made from the decoction that would ease down the filter gradually, even overnight.

The Coffee Day and Starbucks culture made a difference in making coffee houses fashionable as Cappuccino and Latte challenged the original Kumbakonam filter coffee. The Karnataka coffee planters and marketers added their innovative ways to increase the choice on offer to the inveterate coffee lover. They brought in the French Press as a simpler alternative to elaborate rituals like the Italian Espresso machines spitting out foaming milk into coffee blends or French and German filter-based coffee percolators.

And now the choice gets even wide for coffee lovers as Levista Coffee, a Bangalore based company that has been four years in the field, launching four variants of 'flavoured coffee' - Vanilla, Caramel, Hazelnut and Choco-Orange. The oomph factor upped the glam quotient in drinking the coffee cuppa with the flavoured instant available in physical stores in the states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka and UT Puducherry, besides India-wide through ecommerce platforms.

Gen-Z and Millennials are the obvious target audience for the new styles of coffee though the flavours could tickle the taste buds of the old filter coffee votaries who may crave for variety. Levista Vice-President K. Shriram sees a great future for innovative coffee blends. Just in case the filter coffee faithful feel left out, they have various proportional blends like 80% and 60% filter coffee powders to get some variety.

The Coffee Day and Starbucks culture made a difference in making coffee houses fashionable as Cappuccino and Latte challenged the original Kumbakonam filter coffee

‘N’samy against DBT mode of transfer to beneficiaries’

Union minister denies charge
Pondy was ignored in Budget

Puducherry, Feb. 7: Union Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal on Sunday denied the allegations levelled by Chief Minister V Narayanasamy that has ignored Puducherry without providing adequate assistance, saying provisions have been made in it for infrastructure projects.

Addressing reporters, Meghwal, who is also in charge of the BJP in poll-bound Puducherry, said Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had presented a 'pro people budget' and for promoting infrastructures across the country.

The Union Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs, Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises, who was on a two day visit to the union territory said, "provisions have been made in the budget for development of infrastructures, port and other sectors. Several demands of Puducherry for textile parks, promotion of fishing activities and other sectors have been getting good response in the budget."

Charging Narayanasamy with 'always fighting' with Lt Governor Kiran Bedi, Meghwal said the CM was opposed to the

Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system to transfer benefits of welfare schemes to the bank accounts of beneficiaries. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was encouraging DBT so that there would be transparency and would help eliminate middlemen.

"Narayanasamy is opposed to the DBT mode although several states have accepted the system," Meghwal claimed. He further said Modi was backing the principle of 'nation first' and this cardinal principle is the underlying spirit of the Central budget presented

in the Parliament recently. The Union Territory would have a government by the BJP and its allies as people would be benefitted by several progressive policies programmes of Modi.

Rajya Sabha MP Rajeev Chandrasekhar, who accompanied the Central Minister said the allegation of Narayanasamy that the Centre was trying to merge Union Territory with the neighbouring state was a 'clear case of the Congress-DMK attempt to distract people from the performance of the NDA government at the Centre.'

One-kg gold
worth ₹48.9L
seized in
airportDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 7

Customs officials at the Chennai airport on Saturday seized 1.01 kg gold worth ₹48.9 lakh. According to a statement from the department, based on intelligence inputs that gold was likely to be smuggled from Dubai, one Abubakar Sithik (38) of Ramanathapuram who arrived from Dubai by a FlyDubai flight was intercepted at the exit. Two bundles of gold paste weighing 416 grams valued at Rs 19.9 lakhs were found concealed in his person. The same was recovered and seized.

In another case, during a search on an Indigo flight, three rectangular heavy pieces wrapped with black adhesive tape in a cotton pouch, were recovered from a hollow pipe under one of the seats. On opening it, six gold bars bearing foreign markings and each weighing 100 grams were recovered. A total of 600 grams of gold valued at Rs 29 lakh was seized as unclaimed gold under the Customs Act.

In both cases, a total of 1.01 kg gold worth Rs. 48.9 lakhs was seized by the Chennai air customs personnel. Further investigation is under progress.



Chennai Corporation (GCC) organised a smart bikes rally on Sunday morning. — DC

1,000 more smart bikes
are ready for city ridesDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 7

Chennai city, which has been promoting diversified transportation systems, has now made a service fleet of an additional 1,000 Electric and Gen Next bikes that will be available to commuters from 100 SmartBike Stations in various parts of the city.

In an attempt to create awareness on environment friendly, efficient and economical smart bike commuting, the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) organised a mass cycling event on Sunday morning. The rally was flagged off by Commissioner G. Prakash at Egmore Metro station. The ride was joined by over 500 cycling enthusiasts.

The civic body organised the event after Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami launched the bikes officially at an event held at Kamarajar Salai, Marina Beach on January 28. GCC launched

world class E-Bikes and shaft transmission (no chain) NextGen bicycles in collaboration with Public Bike Sharing Company SmartBike Mobility, and Chennai Smart City Ltd

Mr. D.V. Manohar, Chairman, SmartBike Mobility said that a total of 1,000 Electric Bikes and NextGen Bikes were being deployed at about 100 SmartBike Stations in various parts of the city. SmartBike is operating a fleet of 500 SmartBikes in Chennai successfully. With the induction of 1,000 Electric Bikes and NextGen Bikes, SmartBike's total fleet size shoots up to 1,500 SmartBikes. "It is our earnest endeavor to make cycling the preferred mode of travel and thereby contribute to more environment friendly Chennai," he said.

Mr. Dharmin Dontamsetti, Managing Director, pointed out that they would increase the number of SmartBike sta-

tions to 500 from 100 with 5,000 SmartBikes covering all parts of the city in near future. "Our Ebike enables the citizens of Chennai to cover longer distances faster. By using SmartBike, our customers do not have to go through the struggles of finding a parking spot or struggle to secure an Uber ride or unnecessary expense on petrol. We see our new smart bikes as the perfect alternative to using a regular motorbike for travel within the city. The detailed information and addresses on smart bike stations is available in application Smart Bike," he said

The Electric SmartBikes are with the pedal-assist feature which helps riders accelerate. These E-bikes also have a throttle. The E-bike's rental is Rs 10 for the first 10 minutes and Rs 1 every minute thereafter plus GST. The NextGen bike's rental is Rs 5.50 for the first hour and Rs 9.90 for half-an-hour thereafter plus GST.

AIADMK may face threat
if Sasi fans change loyalty

R. MOHAN

From P1

What the AIADAK fears is unknown. Their biggest threat would not be lengthy legal challenges in court but a rebellion from within the ranks with Jaya-Sasi loyalists walking off on being tempted by the old 'Poes Garden' path of allegiance.

Sources have it that a challenge could be mounted for the party headquarters on Lloyds Road that could be in the names of old trustees and complications could arise if legal questions are raised now. Right now, Sasikala is not a legal entity in the party and her fight would have to begin from nil in terms of occupation. An AIADMK minister has been quoted as saying that the AMMK and Sasikala are "DMK's B Team" in the current political scene as her role could be disruptive of the parent party AIADMK now fighting for re-election after two terms.

Sasikala's controversial role in party affairs was well established as she was the puppet master who moved the strings to the extent of making her Thevar caste mate O. Panneerselvam chief minister and then brought in Edappadi Palaniswami when OPS rebelled. Her control of party plenipotentiaries

Security beefed up at AIADMK HQ

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 7

Security arrangements have been beefed at AIADMK headquarters in Chennai ahead of the visit of V.K. Sasikala on Monday. Following AIADMK leaders' complaint lodged with the DGP that Sasikala's Chennai arrival may cause law and order issues, security at AIADMK's headquarters in Royapettah has been heightened, police sources said.

Led by the party's pre-

sidium chairman E. Madhusudhanan, senior leaders had lodged a complaint with DGP on Thursday regarding Sasikala sporting the AIADMK flag on her car upon her release from hospital in Bengaluru last week.

Once again Law Minister C. Ve. Shanmugam, Fisheries Minister Jayakumar, Electricity Minister Thangamani with Madhusudhanan filed a complaint with the police seeking to ensure law and order in the state upon her arrival.

made her a parallel source of power that often exceeded that of Jaya and even in interceding in the administration of the state through the bureaucracy.

The obsequious manner in which the State's male politicians kowtowed to the woman on the throne and her aide behind it came to an end only on the day Sasikala motored to Parpanna Agharaha in February 2017. The two — CM and Dy CM — would often rush to New Delhi and complain to the Prime Minister who once rebuked one of them while reminding him that he was in fact the CM of a State and he had the Home Department and the Police with him. Their past behaviour was in keeping with how behol-

den they were to the all powerful regent who changed things only when she tried to ascend the throne herself.

The last four years and a bit since the demise of Jayalalithaa in December 2016 and the incarceration of Sasikala were a sea change from the de facto and de jure Jaya-Sasikala regimes. All that will change soon as Sasikala comes back to the TN capital and begins another innings in politics in which she is forbidden to stand for elections for six years more as she was convicted under PCA for four years but could still continue to play her old role as the power behind the throne.

(With inputs from D. Sekar)

Auxiliary polling booths will
be created, says collectorDC CORRESPONDENT
THANJAVUR, FEB. 7

Auxiliary polling stations will be created in the district by dividing booths which have more than 1,000 votes as per guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in view of the pandemic, said Collector M. Govinda Rao, here on

After dividing them, the number of polling booths will go up to 3,018 in the district, the collector said in a press release

Saturday, at a meeting attended by representatives of all political parties.

The collector said that

the idea was to maintain social distancing. The ECI has asked us to create auxiliary polling stations by dividing booths with more than 1,000 votes, the collector said. There are 2,291 booths in the district. Of them, 727 booths have over 1,000 votes. These will be divided and auxiliary polling stations will be created. After dividing

them, the number of polling booths will go up to 3,018 in the district, the collector said in a press release.

Representatives of the AIADMK, DMK, BJP, Congress, Communists and other parties participated in the meeting. They suggested forming separate auxiliary polling stations for men and women.

Farm loan waiver, trick
on the public: AlagiriDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, FEB. 7

The Tamil Nadu Congress Committee (TNCC) president K. S. Alagiri slammed both the BJP government at the Centre and the AIADMK government in the state for their anti-people, especially anti-farmers attitude.

Addressing the party's 'Sangamam Yerkalappai' rally cum public meet at Musiri near here on Saturday night, Alagiri attacked the TN government's decision to write off cooperative farm loans as a ruse to hoodwink the public, and counter the opposition, which for the last one year, had been demanding the government to write off farm loans.

For such a long period, the government did not take any action, but now with an eye on the elections, it has announced



the waiver. He said that the Congress party was working to strengthen its base across the country on the basis of ideologies and policies, in which party leader Rahul Gandhi is approaching the people directly.

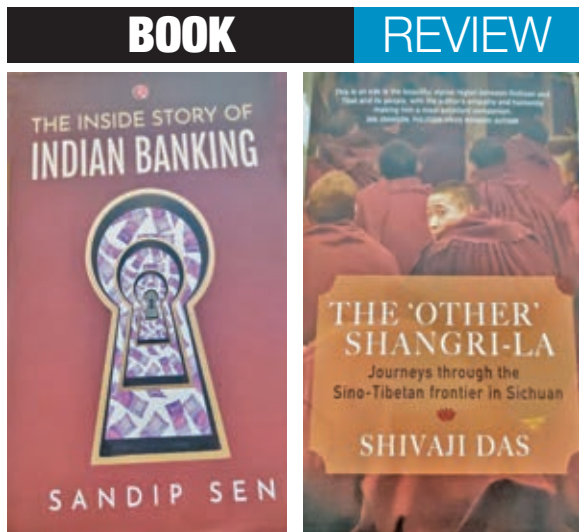
He further said although the alliance partners in the BJP opposed the new farm bills, the Centre did not bother about it, but is very keen on implementing them for the sake of the corporates.

Inside Indian banking & Sichuan ode to nature

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 7

Two interesting books landed recently on DC shelves for review. The first is 'The Inside Story of Indian Banking' by Sandip Sen that goes in detail into various bank frauds committed in India. Those tycoons who have managed to "game the banking industry with possible assistance from bankers, auditors, regulators, bureaucrats and politicians," are in the book. The author concludes that a sordid saga of banking frauds and defaults has become the mainstay of news today.

The story of bank frauds runs like a thriller but then bank frauds are not new and date back to at least the 18th century according to the journalist and author. Presenting irrefutable data on the ease with which lenders



have been taken for a ride. The problem has only ballooned with diamond merchants also defrauding banks and fleeing abroad while slow moving investigating agencies are invariably trying to repatriate

them in the face of complicated international treaties.

With the Covid-19 pandemic striking India as well as the world, India's banking story is about to get uglier with huge NPAs

The story of bank frauds runs like a thriller but then bank frauds are not new and date back to at least the 18th century according to the journalist and author

hiding in the shadow the pandemic bound to surface soon. Feedback from 60 bankers makes the tales lends authenticity to the saga of frauds and how they were perpetrated, whether the central figures were Nirav Modi, Chanda Kochhar or Rana Kapoor.

The author's conclusions to a future with better regulations gel well with what should be the ideal scenario even if we know that achieving it would be a monumental task — "There is no doubt that the

RBI needs to create a new route map for banking supervision. It has to carry other geultrors and rating agencies together and get its hands dirty to ensure that frauds like IL&FS, PMC Bank, HDIL, DHFL and Yes Bank don't happen."

The 'Other Shangri-La' — Journeys through the Sino-Tibetan border in Sichuan by Shivaji Das is narrative non-fiction based on the author and his wife's journey through the western Sichuan. Staying with nomad families, debating with monks on reviving Buddhism in China and many other adventures are humorously told. There may be nothing quite like looking firsthand at the rugged landscapes, mountains touching the sky, deep gorges and vast grasslands but reading about it as captured by Shivaji Das is the next best thing.

‘Advocate
couple’
attack cop
on patrolDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 7

A traffic inspector in the city was allegedly attacked by an advocate couple near Nandanam on Saturday night, after they were stopped for drunk driving. The couple later went on to attack a television cameraman who tried to record the incident.

On Saturday night, traffic personnel attached to Saidapet police station were checking vehicles near Nandanam junction on Venkatanarayana Salai.

By 11 pm, they intercepted a car and found the person behind the wheel to be drunk. When police tried to register a case, the man and his wife, who both claimed themselves to be advocates, allegedly picked up a quarrel with them. They allegedly attacked traffic inspector, Jayam of Saidapet station, police said.

A television cameraman who tried to shoot the incident was also abused by the couple. Videos of the incident, reportedly captured by onlookers, were widely shared on social media.

Saidapet traffic wing police are investigating, police sources said.

By 11 pm, they intercepted a car and found the person behind the wheel to be drunk. When police tried to register a case, the man and his wife, who both claimed themselves to be advocates, allegedly picked up a quarrel with them

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SHORT TAKES

HAVE FULL FAITH IN JUDICIARY, SAYS FARUQUI

Indore, Feb. 7: Stand-up comedian Munawar Faruqui, who has been released from jail after 35 days in a case of allegedly hurting religious sentiments, has said he has full faith in the judiciary and hopes to get justice.

Faruqui was released from the Indore Central Jail late on Saturday night after prison authorities checked Friday's bail order of the Supreme Court on its website, a jail official earlier said.

In a brief video message after he was set free, the 32-year-old comedian said, "I don't want to comment (on the case against him) now. But, I have full faith in the judiciary and I am hopeful of getting justice."

Arrested for allegedly hurting religious sentiments, Faruqui was in the jail since January 1.

On Friday, the Supreme Court granted him interim bail after the Madhya Pradesh High Court rejected his bail plea on January 28.

FARMERS CURATE NURSERIES AT STRIKE VENUES

New Delhi, Feb. 7: Land plots filled with wild grasses near Ghazipur, Tikri and Singhu protest sites have been converted into well-curated nurseries with a variety of flowers like marigold and rose.

The protesting farmers have also sowed seeds for potatoes and sugarcane in the nurseries surrounded by concertina wires that came up as part of stringent security installation at the agitation sites to hinder the protestors' movement to Delhi.

"Our motivation is simple. The government had fixed iron nails. But we are planting flowers, fruits and crops. We are farmers, this is what we do," Ramraji, who hails from Jind in Haryana, said at UP Gate (Ghazipur).

Another protester volunteering for the work said the nursery has flowers like rose and marigold besides varieties of plants like palm, pine and others set in planters. "We had also planted flowers next to the iron nails," he said.

MOU FOR 1ST-EVER GEOTHERMAL FIELD SIGNED IN LEH

Leh, Feb. 7: A historic tripartite agreement for establishing India's first-ever geothermal field development project here has been signed, with Ladakh Lieutenant Governor R.K. Mathur terming it a step towards achieving the goal of carbon-neutral Ladakh.

The pact was signed between Union Territory Administration, Ladakh, Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC)-Leh and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) Energy Centre in presence of Mathur and MP Jamyang Tsering Namgyal on the sidelines of the first developmental conclave here on Saturday, an official spokesperson said.

Ladakh Power Development Department Administrative Secretary Ravinder Kumar and LAHDC Chief Executive Officer Sachin Kumar Vaishya signed the memorandum of understanding (MoU) with ONGC Energy Centre.



ITBP personnel carry out search and rescue operation at Tapovan Tunnel on Sunday.



Locals inspect site near damaged Dhauliganga hydropower project at Reni village on Sunday.

Tranquil morning turns tragic for villagers

Horrorific memories of 2013 Kedarnath deluge that killed thousands returns to haunt locals

Raini (U'khand), Feb. 7: It was a tranquil winter morning in Raini village until the residents were jolted at around 10 am on Sunday by a loud sound and the sight of huge torrents of water and sludge in the Rishi Ganga river hurtling towards them.

"Before we could make out what was happening, the raging muddy waters of Rishi Ganga had devastated the landscape," says 50-year-old Dharam Singh, a resident of the village.

The scenes brought back to the people horrifying memories of the 2013 Kedarnath deluge that killed thousands.

Many were feared swept away in the sudden floods on Sunday including those who were working near the river.

Three residents of the village including a 75-year-old woman identified as Amrita Devi who had gone out to work in her field close to the bridge on Rishi Ganga are missing since the avalanche struck after the Nanda Devi glacier burst. Others missing include Yashpal Singh of Valli Raini who had gone to the fields to graze his livestock and disappeared along with them.

Ranjit Singh, 25, of the village who worked in the Rishi Ganga hydel project is also missing after the avalanche.

The avalanche destroyed the project commissioned in 2020. A major motorable bridge on the main border road was also washed away.

Pradeep Rana of Juwa Gwan village said Sanjay Singh, a resident of the



Rescue operations underway near Dhauliganga hydropower project on Sunday.

same village who had gone out to the fields to graze his goats, is also missing. Some ancient temples built about 20 metres above the confluence of Rishi Ganga and Dhauliganga rivers have also been swept away by the violent avalanche.

Umeli Devi, 34, who had come from Nepal to work in the Rishi Ganga hydel project said ten of her colleagues had been swept away in the avalanche.

She said male members of her family who worked as labourers in the power project are all missing.

Dharam Singh of Raini said as the deluge came gurgling loudly it sent a chill down the spine of people living in the area who find it hard to forget the 2013 tragedy.

The forest area of Nanda Devi National Park has

also suffered great devastation due to the avalanche, he said.

Meanwhile, the MeT department on Sunday said no adverse weather events are expected over Chamoli, Tapovan and Joshimath in Uttarakhand on February 7 and 8, in a relief for the area hit by a major glacier burst.

India Meteorological Department (IMD) Additional Director General Anand Sharma said Chamoli, Tapovan and Joshimath are likely to witness dry weather during the two days.

"No snowfall/rainfall is likely on February 7-8," the IMD said in its special weather advisory for the state. However, light rainfall/snowfall is likely in the northern parts of the Chamoli district on February 9-10, the advisory added.

Himalayan glaciers melting twice as fast, finds 2019 study

New Delhi, Feb. 7: Melting of Himalayan glaciers has doubled since the start of the 21st century due to rising temperatures, losing over a vertical foot and half of ice each year since 2000 — double the amount of melting that took place from 1975 to 2000.

The study, published in the journal Science Advances in June 2019, shows that glaciers have been losing the equivalent of more than a vertical foot and half of ice each year since 2000 — double the amount of melting that took place from 1975 to 2000.

"This is the clearest picture yet of how fast Himalayan glaciers are melting over this time interval, and why," said Joshua Maurer, a PhD candidate at Columbia University in the US.

While not specifically calculated in the study, the glaciers may have lost as

much as a quarter of their enormous mass over the last four decades, said Maurer, lead author of the study. The study synthesised data from across the region, stretching from early satellite observations to the present.

The data indicates that the melting is consistent in time and space, and that rising temperatures are to blame, the researchers said. Temperatures vary from place to place, but from 2000 to 2016 they have averaged one degree Celsius higher than those from 1975 to 2000, they said.

— PTI

NTPC: TAPOVAN HYDRO PROJECT DAMAGED

New Delhi, Feb. 7: State-run power giant NTPC on Sunday said that an avalanche near Tapovan in Uttarakhand has damaged its under-construction hydropower project.

NTPC tweeted, "An avalanche near Tapovan in Uttarakhand has damaged a part of our under-construction hydropower project in the region. While rescue operation is on, situation is being monitored continuously with the help of district administration and police."

ITBP RESCUES WORKERS STUCK IN TUNNEL

Dehradun, Feb. 7: Covered in mud, several men were safely pulled out one after the other from a slush-covered tunnel by ITBP personnel in the Tapovan power project area on Sunday.

In a video of the operation shared by the border force, the rescuers can be seen raising slogans of 'dum lagakey haisha' while retrieving a couple of men through the vertical and narrow snout of the tunnel with the help of a rope line.

UP MONITORS WATER LEVEL OF RIVER GANGA

Lucknow, Feb. 7: The UP on Sunday asked authorities in all districts on the banks of river Ganga to be on high alert and continuously monitor the water level. In the disaster alert issued on Sunday, the Relief Commissioner said, "Report of breaking of a part of Nandadevi Glacier in Uttarakhand has been received. The districts on the Ganga river (banks) need to be on a high alert."

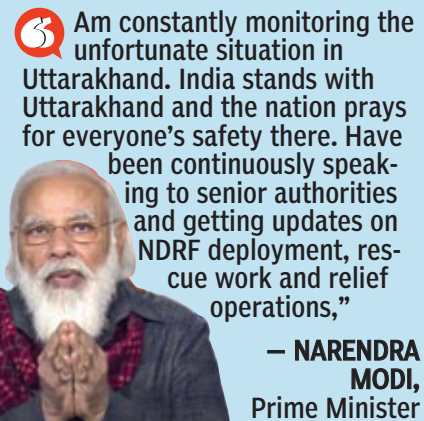
MAJOR NATURAL DISASTERS IN UTTARAKHAND

1991 UTTARKASHI EARTHQUAKE: An earthquake of 6.8 magnitude hit the undivided state of Uttar Pradesh in October 1991 in which at least 768 people were killed and thousands of homes destroyed.

1998 MALPA LANDSLIDE: The small village of Malpa in Pithoragarh district was wiped in the landslide in which about 255 people, including 55 Kailash Mansarovar pilgrims, were killed. The resulting debris partially blocked the Sharda river.

1999 CHAMOLI EARTHQUAKE: An earthquake of 6.8 magnitude hit Chamoli district killing over 100 people. The adjoining Rudrapur district was also heavily affected. Several ground deformations were reported as a result of the earthquake, and landslides and changes in water flow were also recorded. Cracks were observed in roads and on the ground.

2013 NORTH INDIA FLOODS: In June 2013, a multi-day cloud-burst centered on U'khand caused devastating floods and landslides. According to state government, more than 5,700 people were presumed dead in the disaster. As bridges and roads were destroyed more than 3 lakh people were trapped in the valleys leading to the Char Dham pilgrimage sites.



Am constantly monitoring the unfortunate situation in Uttarakhand. India stands with Uttarakhand and the nation prays for everyone's safety there. Have been continuously speaking to senior authorities and getting updates on NDRF deployment, rescue work and relief operations,"

— NARENDRA MODI, Prime Minister

Mahapanchayat stands firm on ryots' demands

FROM PG 1

Railway minister Piyush Goyal said in New Delhi the Centre was ready to resume talks with the farmers' unions if they (farmers) have some new proposals. He said the Narendra Modi government was sensitive towards the farmers' concerns and was ready to resolve the issue via dialogue. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said the government is a phone call away, but someone has to call to talk or move ahead. If the farmers have any objection to the laws, let us know, and the government is willing to address it."

As the protests against the new laws entered Day 74, a farmer from Jind who was supporting the agitation allegedly hanged himself from a tree 2 km from the

Tikri border protest site. A handwritten suicide note purportedly left behind by the 52-year-old deceased said: "Dear farmer brethren, Modi government is giving date after date... No one knows when these black farm laws will be rolled back."

At Charkhi Dadri, Mr Tikait claimed the campaign against the three laws was going strong. Independent Dadri MLA Sombir Sangwan, chief of the Sangwan khap, who in December withdrew his support to the BJP-JJP government in Haryana, dubbing it "anti-farmer", was present. The mahapanchayat was attended by representatives of over 50 khaps.

Earlier, on February 3, Mr Tikait addressed his first mahapanchayat in Haryana's Kandela village. The BKU leader from UP has been

camping at Ghazipur as part of a campaign by the farmers' unions against the laws enacted by the Centre in September.

Mr Tikait said the "khaps" go back to the days of King Harshvardhana and have played a role in society ever since. He said when the farmers' stir began, attempts were made to divide it by calling it the agitation of Punjab and Haryana.

Seeking to project unity among the farmers' unions, Mr Tikait said the "manch (stage) and panch (leaders leading the stir) will not change". The BKU leader, whose emotional appeal had recently revived the protest that was losing momentum after the January 26 violence in Delhi, said people from different sections of society were part of the stir.

150 WORKERS FEARED DEAD IN UTTARAKHAND AVALANCHE

FROM PG 1

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), no rainfall is expected in the region for the next two days.

Expressing grief over the loss of life, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the Centre had approved ex-gratia relief of Rs 2 lakhs each from PMNRF for the next of kin of those who lost their lives and Rs 50,000 would be given to those seriously injured. Earlier in the day, he tweeted: "(I) Am constantly monitoring the unfortunate situation in Uttarakhand. India stands with Uttarakhand and the nation prays for everyone's safety there. Have been continuously speaking to senior authorities and getting updates on NDRF deployment, rescue work and relief operations."

Union home ministry officials said there was no danger of downstream flooding and the rise in water levels has been contained. "There is also no threat to the neighbouring villages. At the same time, the concerned agencies of the Centre and the state were asked to keep a strict vigil on the situation, and a team from Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), which monitors avalanches, is being flown in for surveillance and reconnaissance. The managing director of NTPC has been asked to reach the affected site immediately," officials said.

People of Bengal victims of 'Nirmamata', says PM

FROM PG 1

Referring to TMC turncoats including Shubhendu Adhikari and Rajib Banerjee on the dais, Mr Modi said, "That is why they have come here to chant 'Jai Shree Ram' after bidding adieu to the TMC with 'Ram Ram'. Those who want real development for the poor and are seasoned with the culture and norms are joining us. The Tolabaj (extortionist) and syndicate of the TMC will remain guests only for few more days. I hope that the state administration will work with respect to the Constitution. No one needs to be scared of Tolabaj of TMC. The sacrifice of the BJP rank and file will ensure Parivartan here."

He also slammed the chief minister for blocking central schemes like PM Kisan Samman Nidhi and Aayushman Bharat while patronis-

FORCES ABROAD CONSPIRING TO DESTROY INDIAN TEA, WILL NOT LET IT HAPPEN: PM

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, FEB. 7

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said that some forces abroad have been conspiring to defame and tarnish the image of Indian tea at global level.

Addressing a massive public rally in central Assam's Dhekiajuli, a tea growing belt, Modi said, "I want to tell you about a conspiracy

hatched to defame the country. The conspirators have not even spared Indian tea. They are trying to defame the image of Indian tea worldwide, systematically."

The Prime Minister further said, "The evidence that we have suggests that the forces are seated abroad, ready to launch an attack on India's tea-based identity." He however asserted, "We will not let this happen."

people of the state have been victim of 'nirmamata' though the Trinamul Congress supremo has 'Mamata' in her name. He also questioned Ms Banerjee's silence on the "international conspiracy" to tarnish the image of the country.

SHORT TAKES

2ND SNOWSTORM
BLANKETS
NORTHEAST

New York, Feb. 7: The Northeastern United States braced for a major snowstorm on Sunday, less than a week after a storm dumped as much as 2 feet on the region.

The National Weather Service predicted around up to 8 inches of snow New York City and 2 to 4 inches in Washington, D.C. Forecasters predicted several inches of snow would fall along the New England coast, saying the precise amount would depend on how quickly the storm moved through the region.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said Sunday's snowfall, which started at around 9 a.m. in the city, would not close Covid-19 vaccination sites. The massive snowstorm that hit the region on Feb. 1 forced the postponement of hundreds of vaccination appointments in New York and elsewhere.

FOUR SKIERS
KILLED IN U.S.
AVALANCHE

Washington, Feb. 7: Four skiers were killed and four others wounded after an avalanche struck in a canyon in the US state of Utah, local authorities and media said Friday.

The Utah Avalanche Center, which documents avalanches in the region, said it was the highest toll since 1992.

"We are overwhelmed with sadness to report four skiers killed today in an avalanche near Wilson Peak in upper Mill Creek Canyon," the Center tweeted.

Local TV station KSTU reported police first received a faint distress call around 11.40 am (1840 GMT).

Four other skiers were also caught in the avalanche but managed to dig themselves out and were rescued, the station reported. The extent of their injuries was unknown.

"This is a terrible tragedy and our prayers go out to the victims and families involved," tweeted Utah Governor Spencer Cox.

6.0-MAGNITUDE
QUAKE HITS
PHILIPPINES

Manila, Feb. 7: A strong earthquake hit the southern Philippines on Sunday, though there were no immediate reports of casualties or damage, the US Geological Survey and local officials said.

The 6.0-magnitude quake struck the town of Bansalan on Mindanao island at 12:22 pm (0422 GMT), the USGS said in a bulletin.

The quake was recorded at a depth of 15.6 kilometres (9.7 miles), it said, slightly shallower than at first reported by the agency.

"It was strong, but things did not topple or fall off," Major Peter Glenn Ipong, the police chief of Bansalan, said by telephone from the epicentre.

Ipong and civil defence officials in the region reported strong shaking but said there were no immediate reports of casualties or damage.

The USGS in an earlier bulletin put the epicentre two kilometres east of the neighbouring town of Magsaysay before revising the location to Bansalan.

INTERCEPTED
HUTHI-LAUNCHED
DRONE: S ARABIA

Riyadh, Feb. 7: Saudi Arabia intercepted an armed drone launched towards the kingdom by Yemen's Huthis, state media said Sunday, a day after the US moved to delist the rebels as a terrorist group.

The Saudi-led military coalition "intercepted and destroyed an armed drone," said spokesman Turki al-Maliki in a statement carried by the official Saudi Press Agency.

"It was launched systematically and deliberately by the terrorist Huthi militia to target civilians and civilian objects in the south of the region."

The incident was not immediately claimed by the Iran-backed Huthis. The US State Department on Friday said it had formally notified Congress of its intention to revoke a terrorist designation against the rebels, which had been announced at the end of the administration of former president Donald Trump.

The delisting move came a day after US President Joe Biden announced an end to US support for Saudi-led offensive operations in Yemen.

Humanitarian groups were deeply opposed to the designation.

Biden: Won't lift
Tehran sanctions

These to be in force till Iran does not adhere to its N-deal commitments, says US Prez

Washington/Tehran, Feb. 7: US President Joe Biden said he won't lift sanctions against Iran as long as the Islamic republic is not adhering to its nuclear deal commitments. Asked whether he would halt sanctions to convince Iran to return to the bargaining table, Biden offered a clear reply in a CBS interview aired Sunday: "No."

The journalist then asked if the Iranians would first have to stop enriching uranium, which drew an affirmative nod from Biden.

The 2015 landmark deal has been hanging by a thread since Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from it in 2018 and reimpose sanctions on Tehran. Tehran a year later suspended its compliance with most key nuclear commitments to the deal.

The Biden administration has expressed willingness to return to the deal, but insisted that Tehran first resume full compliance.

On January 4, Iran announced it has stepped up its uranium enrichment process to 20 percent purity, far above the 3.67 percent level permitted by the deal, but far below the amount required for an atomic bomb.

Earlier, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Sunday the US must "completely lift" sanctions first, followed by verification by Tehran, before the Islamic republic returns to its nuclear deal commitments.

"If they want Iran to

return to its commitments ... America must completely lift sanctions, and not just in words or on paper," Khamenei said in a televised speech to air force commanders.

"They must be lifted in action, and then we will verify and see if they have been properly lifted, and then return," he added.

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On January 4, Iran announced it has stepped up its uranium enrichment process to 20 percent purity, far above the 3.67 percent level permitted by the deal. —AFP

UN's YEMEN
ENVOY MAKES
1ST VISIT TO IRAN

Tehran, Feb. 7: The United Nations special envoy for Yemen arrived on his first visit to Iran Sunday for talks on the grinding war in the Arab world's poorest country, Iranian state TV reported.

Martin Griffiths was set to meet with Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif and other officials during his two-day visit, his office said. The sessions are part of a broader effort to negotiate a political solution to the nearly six-year conflict pitting Iran-allied Houthi rebels against Yemeni government forces supported by a Saudi-led military coalition.

The trip comes just days after President Joe Biden announced that the US will end its support, including some arms sales, of the Saudi-led coalition's war against the Houthis.

The long-awaited move refocused a spotlight on the world's worst humanitarian crisis and was welcomed by many Yemenis and aid groups that hope the policy change might add to momentum for peace talks. Griffiths' immediate priority in Tehran is to push a nationwide ceasefire, urgent humanitarian measures and the resumption of the political process, his office added. —AP

PLA gives Covid
vax to Pak Army

Beijing, Feb. 7: Chinese military delivered a batch of Covid-19 vaccines to the Pakistan Army on Sunday, days after Islamabad received 500,000 doses of the Coronavirus vaccine from its all-weather ally Beijing.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) said in a statement that the Pakistan Army has become the first foreign military to receive the Covid-19 vaccine aid from the Chinese military.

The statement, however, did not mention the number of vaccines supplied to the Pakistan Army. The PLA also delivered a batch of Covid-19 vaccines to the Cambodian military after receiving a request for it.

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The move comes as the number of Covid-19 cases in Pakistan reached 554,474. With 53 new deaths, the number of fatalities has gone up to 11,967, according to the

Copenhagen, Feb. 7: Hundreds of people took to the streets of Copenhagen on Saturday night to protest Denmark's Covid-19 restrictions and the country's plans for a digital vaccination certificate. Organised by a group calling itself "Men in Black Denmark," some 600 people gathered in the bitter cold in front of the parliament building to protest the "dictatorship" of Denmark's partial lockdown.

Plans for a digital vaccine "passport" were a main target of their anger. Like other European countries, Denmark intends to develop a digital certificate for Covid-19 vaccination for travel.

It could also potentially be used for sports and cultural events as well as restaurants. —AFP

Ministry of National Health Services. China has granted conditional approval for its second Covid-19 vaccine, ahead of the expected emergency approval from the World Health Organisation for two of its jabs that would enable the country to step-up global supplies of the shots. —PTI



Protesters hold up the three finger salute as they demonstrate against the Myanmar military coup outside the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok on Sunday. — AFP

Thousands protest Myanmar
coup on the streets of Yangon

Yangon, Feb. 7: Tens of thousands of protesters poured on to the streets of Yangon Sunday in the biggest rally yet against the Myanmar coup, as an internet blackout failed to stifle growing outrage at the military's ouster of elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Some estimates put the number of protesters in Yangon at 100,000 and there were reports of large demonstrations in other cities, with rallies condemning the coup that brought Myanmar's 10-year experiment with democracy to a crashing halt.

Backed by a din of car horns, chanting protesters in Yangon held up banners saying "Justice for Myanmar", while others waved the signature red flags of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party as they marched to City Hall. "I completely despise the military coup and I am not afraid of a crack-down," said Kyi Phyu Kyaw, a 20-year-old university student.

"I will join every day until Amay Suu (Mother Suu) is freed." Protesters announced that they would return to the streets at

Internet access
partially restored

Yangon, Feb. 7: Internet access was partially restored in Myanmar on Sunday, Netblocks reported, as a nationwide web blockade failed to curb public outrage and protests against the coup that ousted elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

"Partial restoration of internet connectivity confirmed in #Myanmar from 2PM local time on multiple providers following information blacko-

ut," the internet monitoring service said on Twitter. Myanmar was plunged into cyber darkness on Saturday at the military's orders. Netblocks said social media platforms remained off limits on Sunday afternoon.

But mobile phone customers using services with MPT, Ooredoo, Telcel and Mytel are now able to access mobile internet data and Wi-Fi. —AFP

presence there, while tens of thousands rallied against the coup in Mandalay, Myanmar's second-biggest city. Both those protests included people on armadas of motorcycles, waving flags and banners as they rode through the cities.

There were also demonstrations in Mawlamyine city and the Magway region. The surge in popular dissent over the weekend overcame a nationwide internet blockade, similar in magnitude to an earlier shutdown that coincided with the arrest of Suu Kyi and other senior leaders on Monday.

Online calls to protest have prompted bold displays of defiance, including the nightly deafening clamour of people banging pots and pans - a practice traditionally associated with driving out evil spirits. Monitoring service NetBlocks said internet access was partially restored on some mobile networks in Myanmar Sunday afternoon, but social media platforms remained blocked and it was unclear how long the connectivity would last. —AFP

Move Pearl killer to
rest house: Sindh govt

Karachi, Feb. 7: Pakistani authorities have issued a notification to shift British-born al-Qaeda terrorist Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, the main accused in the sensational kidnapping and murder of US journalist Daniel Pearl in 2002, from jail to a newly-built facility within the boundaries of the Central Prison in Karachi.

The notification on Saturday came days after a three-member bench of the Supreme Court headed by Justice Umar Ata Bandial ordered to shift 46-year-old Sheikh from the death row cell to a rest house run by the government. All suspects "are to be shifted to the newly constricted Rooms for meeting of spouses with Prisoners situated outside of main prison and within boundary of Central Prison Karachi, the *Express Tribune* newspaper reported,

citing the notification issued by the Sindh Home Department on February 6. However, "NO internet, telephone and for that matter any device/ means of communicating with outside world is to be provided," the notification read.

It allowed only suspects' families access to them from 8am to 5pm everyday but restricted them from bringing anything from outside of the prison, the paper said.

To maintain maximum security, however, a list of family members is to be provided by the counsel of detainees to the advocate general Sindh, secretary home or IG prison, Sindh and only the ones mentioned in the list will be allowed access to the detainees during permitted hours.

The families of the suspects will also be offered space in Qasr-e-Naz, a federal government owned building in the city along with transport to and from the place of detention, the notification said.

The apex court had rejected the government's appeal to suspend the Sindh High Court's verdict on the acquittal of the accused and asked it to file an appeal against the high court's decision.

Pearl, the 38-year-old South Asia bureau chief for *The Wall Street Journal*, was abducted and beheaded while he was in Pakistan investigating a story in 2002 on the links between the country's powerful spy agency ISI and al-Qaeda.

In April 2020, a two-judge Sindh High Court bench commuted the death sentence of Sheikh to seven years imprisonment. The court also acquitted his three aides. —PTI

POPE APPOINTS
1ST WOMAN TO
SR. SYNOD POST

Vatican City, Feb. 7: Pope Francis has broken with Catholic tradition to appoint a woman as an undersecretary of the synod of bishops, the first to hold the post with voting rights in a body that studies major questions of doctrine.

Frenchwoman Nathalie Bequaert is one of the two new undersecretaries named to the synod, where she has been a consultant since 2019. The appointment signals the pontiff's desire "for a greater participation of women in the process of discernment and decision-making in the church", said Cardinal Mario Grech, the secretary-general of the synod.

"During previous synods, the number of women participating as experts and listeners has increased," he said. "With the nomination and her possibility of participating in voting, a door has opened." —AFP

TURNING UP | THE HEAT

Prez Alexander Lukashenko doesn't have a clear strategy to overcome the unrest

In winter's quiet, Belarus Oppn prepares new protests

Kyiv, Feb. 7: Winter's cold and harsh police actions in Belarus have put a chill on the protests against President Alexander Lukashenko that gripped the Eastern European nation for months. But opposition forces are preparing to turn up the heat in the spring and observers say Lukashenko doesn't have a clear strategy to overcome new unrest.

Here's a look at the country's situation six months after the start of an unprecedented wave of protests that attracted world atten-

tion. Protests broke out after the Aug. 9 presidential election, the official results of which gave Lukashenko a sixth term in office. Opposition figures and some poll workers, however, said those results were fraudulent.

The nationwide demonstrations, some of which attracted up to 200,000 people, were the largest and most sustained challenge to Lukashenko in his 26 years of repressive rule. The protests withered away as severe cold set in and Belarusians became

wearied by police repression that were often violent. Some relatively small and scattered protests took place in late January and about 250 people were arrested. Human rights activists say, more than 30,000 people have been arrested in the monthlong wave of protests, and many of them were beaten. While opposition leaders chose peaceful tactics, police intensified their repression and began to use water cannons, gas and rubber bullets to disperse demonstrations.

● HUMAN RIGHTS activists say, more than 30,000 people have been arrested in the monthlong wave of protests, and many of them were beaten. While opposition leaders chose peaceful tactics, police in Belarus intensified their repression and began to use water cannons, gas and rubber bullets to disperse demonstrations.

"The protests ceased to be an existential threat to Lukashenko's power when

it became clear that people were not ready for violent resistance," said Artem Shraibman, an independent analyst. "Lukashenko opened a new portal to violence — we were shocked and not ready," said Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Lukashenko's main challenger on the presidential ballot who fled to Lithuania under pressure just after the election. At one point, as protesters demanding his resignation massed outside the presidential palace, Lukashenko strode the grounds carrying an

automatic rifle.

That moment "exposed the tragedy of the situation — he is ready to shoot back, but not to leave," Tsikhanouskaya said. Barbed wire, water cannons, soldiers on the streets, and internet shutdowns have become common in Minsk over the past six months.

Thousands of Belarusians were forced to flee the country. But harsh actions by security forces have only temporarily muted the protests, Shraibman said. "Lukashenko does not have a clear vision of a

future strategy. He doesn't know what to do with the majority of the urban population who have turned their backs on him," he said. A \$1.5 billion loan from the Kremlin and a promise to send in Russian security forces if Lukashenko requests them helped Lukashenko maintain control over the security forces and officials. In return, Lukashenko promised to reform the constitution and transfer a significant part of his powers to parliament and the government, and then leave. —AP

DECCAN Chronicle

8 FEBRUARY 2021

Delay in Faruqui release exposes rot in executive

The delay in the release of comedian Munawar Faruqui from a jail in Indore following an order granting him bail by the Supreme Court of India betrays the rot that has spread in the executive wing of the government that has taken aim at personal liberty in this country. The whole episode, which started with the arrest of the comedian based on “vague charges”, as the apex court mentioned, smacks of vengeance by the rightist forces against the idea of freedom.

Mr Faruqui was arrested on New Year’s Day for his alleged remarks that “hurt the sentiments of Hindus” in a stand-up comedy show. The police wasted no time in arresting him based on a complaint lodged by the chief of Hindu Rakshak Sangatan, a Hindutva group, even though later they said there is no electronic evidence that he had indeed made those remarks; in fact he show had not started when they arrested him. That such an allegation with no proof whatsoever has resulted in the incarceration of a citizen for more than a month during the Covid period shows that the government in Madhya Pradesh has little or no idea about the rule of law. The Madhya Pradesh high court, too, showed an equally disdainful disregard for personal liberty when it denied him bail saying there are limits to freedom of speech and expression. It took the Supreme Court to discover that not only were the charges vague but also that the police had not followed the norms the court had laid out while arresting a person and order his release on bail. It also stayed the operation of a production warrant issued by the Uttar Pradesh police in a similar case.

The Supreme Court order was not enough for the jail authorities to release him; they cited the production warrant, feigning ignorance about the order. Reports say it took a call by a Supreme Court judge to the local magistrate to get its order enforced and release him. The picture is clear: the government machinery and even the judiciary in Madhya Pradesh are on a mission to hound an individual; they have no qualms citing “technical issues” to stop justice in its course.

The rot must be stemmed, and the Supreme Court must take the lead in getting it done. It should not brook the temerity of the executive to defy its orders whatever may be the pretext. It must hold the officials who stand in the way of justice personally accountable. It is silly and outright nonsense in this day and age for the jail authorities to wait for the postman to deliver the copy of a Supreme Court order; there are lighting fast methods to do that. The court must also look into the rules, archaic as they may be, and make changes wherever necessary.

The judiciary is the weakest of the pillars of democratic governance when it comes to physical force; its authority comes from its moral force. It cannot be allowed to be trampled by vested interests. Its writs on citizens’ liberty must run, whatever it takes.

4G in J&K: Long overdue

In a long overdue decision, the authorities in Jammu and Kashmir last Friday revoked their earlier order to cut 4G Internet in the Union territory taken on August 4, 2020, as the government prepared to overturn history and end J&K’s constitutional autonomy. Indeed, the decision to cut Net speed should not have been taken in the first place.

It served no purpose. It brought India a bad name in quarters around the world that value democracy. Since Kashmir has been in the eye of the storm for long, international attention was especially drawn to denial of 4G speed and other harsh measures taken after the ending of its constitutional autonomy.

To deprive J&K of 4G speed was unconscionable in the extreme. It constituted a clear violation of the basic rights of the people. Education, health, business, tourism and apple trade (Kashmir’s twin lifeline) suffered incalculable harm, leading to rampant loss of employment and other miseries which have been extensively recorded by the Forum for Human Rights in Jammu and Kashmir, and others.

The work of the media to bring out the facts on the ground came to a grinding halt since technological change has ensured that low-speed Net connectivity makes news production a near impossibility. Free speech remains a casualty in Kashmir.

The intent of the decision to cut Net speed over 18 long months appeared calculated to punish ordinary people for the sins of the few — the minuscule section of the population influenced by Pakistani and jihadist propaganda. It will be recalled for long that the Supreme Court, from the tone of its pronouncements, appeared all too ready to swallow the government line on harsh measures, including cutting Net speed, being necessitated by security imperatives.

Security in the Valley was pretty normal when Kashmir’s autonomy was snatched. Mocking official justifications, it appears to have slipped somewhat. With a Democratic President taking office in the US, in its dealings with Kashmir it would seem that New Delhi would hardly desire to be placed alongside Myanmar’s military junta or the Chinese autocracy, especially since its handling of the farmers’ agitation is also raising concerns. These offer real clues to the sudden restoration of 4G in J&K, which is correcting a wrong.

Subhani



Nirmala’s Budget made a virtue out of necessity

Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman had promised a “once in a century” Budget and raised hopes sky high. It is a commentary on the state of expectations in the country that few took her at her word. Despite her hype, the expectations were generally low mainly because it was widely known that the government’s revenues had collapsed due to the Covid-19 pandemic economic lockdown, leaving the finance minister with little fiscal margin for policy manoeuvre. Rather, some people were worried that she would be tempted to raise revenues to be able to redistribute to the victims of the lockdown and enhance support for healthcare. Few were prepared for the fiscal rabbit that Ms Sitharaman pulled out of her Budget folder.

To begin with, having fired a salvo at the sovereign credit rating agencies for being out of date and out of step, putting them on the defensive on their fiscal conservatism, the finance minister took a leap of faith and reneged on the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act 2003. Ms Sitharaman was able to dump FRBM with elan thanks to the moral support she got from two other women — Kristalina Georgieva, the Bulgarian managing director of the International Monetary Fund, and Gita Gopinath, the IMF’s liberal-minded chief economist who was briefly an adviser to Kerala’s Communist chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

The IMF has gone through an ideological somersault after the 2008-09 trans-Atlantic financial crisis, when it looked the other way as Western governments chose to spend their way out of crisis. In the post-Covid season the Fund has actively supported growth-promoting fiscal easing by governments. This change in global fashion would have given Ms Sitharaman additional courage to come out of the fiscal closet, so to speak. Declaring boldly to Parliament a fiscal deficit ratio to national income (gross domestic product) of 9.5 per cent, the finance minister made a virtue out of necessity.

This was the one real departure from past practice, apart from the decision to recreate a new development financial institution and an asset reconstruction company. On most other fronts she has done more than her predecessors but walked a well-laid out path — be it increasing the share of foreign direct investment in insurance or planning for a larger disinvestment package. Even outright privatisation has been done before. Ms Sitharaman just wants to do more of it.

The other departure from the past which the middle and business class welcomed was her decision not to levy any new taxes. If the government had raised tax rates after a year like the one gone by it would have been rubbing salt into salary-earners’ wounds. Indeed, the higher fiscal deficit ratio is a direct consequence of both the decision to come clean on facts as well as the decision not to raise revenues through new taxes. The only real impact on consumers this past year has been the increase in fuel prices. That would have raked in some revenue.

A critical assumption of this Budget is that its programme for disinvestment and privatisation would proceed apace with no difficulty. This is easier said than done. While Prime Minister Narendra Modi may not yield to the trade unions’ protests, just as he has refused to yield to the farmers’ protests, the disinvestment-privatisation drive will critically depend on investors’ interest. The inability to sell Air India despite years of trying is a reminder.

So, was the generally positive response of the markets, investors and households a consequence of a “no tax-more spending” Budget? Some of it, yes. But a large part of the positive response had to do with the feeling that finally the Narendra Modi government is coming to grips with the economic reality. The bottom line is that this government’s management of economic policy has been below par.

If Prime Minister Modi had not whipped up nationalist and communal sentiment in the run-up to the 2019 general election and if the Opposition parties had a better strategy for keeping the government’s shortcomings in focus, the Bharatiya Janata Party would not have got the numbers it did purely on the basis of its economic performance during its first term.

In 2014 many hoped that Mr Modi would turn India into a Gujarat, in terms of development, but by 2019 the worry was that the nation was going in the direction of Uttar Pradesh. On top of its poor record of economic management in its first term, Mr Modi began his second

term with budgetary policy initiatives from which he had to quickly withdraw. In the process the Union finance secretary, who was picked by him, had to go, following an earlier exit by a Reserve Bank governor who was also his choice, and a Gujarati to boot. Ms Sitharaman’s second Budget too did not help to lift the economy or her reputation, partly due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown.

So, given the low expectations, the Budget speech came as a pleasant surprise for investors and the markets. Whether it would leave them, the middle classes and the working classes, happier at the end of the year depends crucially on two parameters — employment and inflation. If the positive reaction of businesses and investors translates into new employment opportunities and the inflationary consequences of the liberal fiscal policy are contained, Ms Sitharaman would have left the economy in better shape than what she inherited.

When Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had invited me to write his speeches, he had just two words of caution and advice for me. No hyperbole, he warned, and reminded me of his dictum: “Promise less and deliver more.” Dr Singh gained in stature as a consequence. In the past six years, Prime Minister Modi has promised more and delivered less, in terms of economic growth. He risks losing in stature as a consequence. If the Indian economy has to grow to become a \$5 trillion economy, sooner than later, Mr Modi needs to remain focused on the policies that promote growth, and not allow the base instincts of his core constituency to distract the country.

Declaring boldly a fiscal deficit ratio to national income of 9.5 per cent was the one real departure from past practice, apart from the decision to recreate a new development financial institution and an asset reconstruction company

The writer is an economist, a former newspaper editor, a best-selling author and former adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh

LETTERS

PLAYING SECOND FIDDLE

This has reference to the editorial Govt’s anti-Twitter rage betrays own uncertainty. If people like Sachin Tendulkar, Anil Kumble and Ravi Shastri do not support the government in the ongoing farmers’ protest, what’s the point of Jay Shah (son of Home Minister Amit Shah) being the Secretary of BCCI?

P.G. Menon, Chennai

FARM LOAN WAIVER

Farmers of Tamil Nadu are on cloud nine, thanks to the State government’s announcement of waiving of agriculture loans of ₹12,100 crore they owe to cooperative banks. Politics has taken precedence over economics. However, it’s not a surprise as most State governments do this at the time of elections to garner maximum votes. It must be remembered that the agricultural sector is one of the few sectors that have been doing well during Covid-19. Be that as it may, DMK leader Stalin’s promises are being religiously implemented one by one by the AIADMK government headed by Edappadi K. Palaniswami.

S. Ramakrishnasayee, Chennai

POWERS OF SEC

This refers to the news on the Andhra Pradesh SEC directing the DGP of the state to restrain the Panchayati Raj minister and restrict his movements. The personal fight of the SEC with the government escalating to such levels is totally uncalled for. If the SEC had wanted such curbs, he should have sought legal assistance from the court and not take the law into his hands. Any such act, if not corrected early, will result in a precedence and spread to other states for confrontations by a constitutional authority. The courts should intervene in this suo motu and pass orders to restore sanity in administration.

B. Sundar Raman, Coimbatore

Mail your letters to editor@deccanmail.com

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Leher Sethi



A non-partisan nationalism is the new glue of farmers’ stir

Up until recently, the farmers’ protests were predominantly perceived as a Sikh-led phenomenon, owing to the agitators being largely from Punjab. Their leadership was a standout feature in the media reports of the protest, as was a certain projection of it as being a rising of a particular regional cluster. In a sense, it was true. For, langars are the trademark public kitchens of the Sikh community, which fed not just protesters, but also locals and labourers.

Though, with a series of talks that had yielded no results, a larger collective frustration was building, it wasn’t generally palpable. All that changed on Republic Day.

What started out as a peaceful protest took a violent turn, as the “tractor rally” went rogue. A shocked nation saw images beamed on TV and viraled on social media of a youth going up a flagpole with the *Nishan Sahib*. Even people initially supporting the protests suddenly became wary.

As someone who has visited the protest site before and after the episode, the mood change around me was striking. While it is commendable that Delhi police did not using brute force and showed uncharacteristic calm on a day of great national significance, protesters freely entered the Red Fort and indulged in condemnable vandalism. Within a few hours, public

sympathy shifted from the protesters to the police.

In the next few days, farmer union leaders were booked for various cases and FIRs were registered. The mood at protest sites turned sombre and despondence marked the air. The high spirits of protesters and supporters were dampened. Theories and counters floated in the air. Conspiracies were cooked up. The protesters had let themselves down, and the ball was back in the government’s court.

The action shifted towards the Yogi Adityanath-ruled Uttar Pradesh. Police cleared smaller protest sites with alacrity. The next target was Ghazipur. Electricity and water supply to the demonstration site were cut. The district magistrate issued a notice to protesters to clear out. Many people began returning home. It looked like the movement was over.

But no one could have predicted what happened next.

With a handful of protesters left in Ghazipur, Rakesh Tikait, a 51-year-old police-constable-turned-farmer-leader, broke down in full view of TV cameras. I could be wrong, but it felt like a large section of media covered his tearful speech just to show how farmers had to eat humble pie. It would mark the TV closure to all protests.

“I will drink water only when someone from my village brings it to me,”

claimed Tikait. His willingness to court arrest and resolution of not to vacate the site went viral.

Mr Tikait’s tears struck a chord with farmers. The issue for them changed from being one pertaining to livelihoods to that of honour. Mr Tikait’s humiliation stirred reactions from across north India. Thousands of farmers started moving towards Ghazipur, not just from western UP, but also Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and Delhi.

The scenario was transformed quickly. Officials at Ghazipur met Mr Tikait, electricity was restored and additional police forces that had gathered there retreated.

Interestingly, Mr Tikait admits to have voted for the BJP in the last Lok Sabha elections, as did most people from his Jat community-dominated village of Sisauli in Uttar Pradesh’s Muzaffarnagar district. The BJP candidate and Union minister, Sanjeev Kumar Balyan, belongs to the same Balian *khap* (clan) headed by Rakesh’s elder brother, Naresh Tikait. For a Jat, it is no small matter.

As farmers started pouring in at Ghazipur, there was a call for a Mahapanchayat in Muzaffarnagar. Led by Jats, lakhs of peasants of all castes and communities, including Muslims, took a Namak-Gangajal oath, also called the Num-Lota Kasam, marked by the blowing of a traditional war drum.

It is a pledge to fulfil a task, and it includes the social boycott (*hukka-paani band*) of those who do not participate in this common war.

Jayant Chaudhary, son of Ajit Singh, poured *gangajal* from a bottle into a *lota* (pitcher) of *namak* (salt). A *khap* is a traditional social council representing a community in parts of north India with a *chaudhary* as its titular head. *Khapps*, not limited to Jats, constitute a front of 36 *biradaris*, including Muslim, Jats, Gujars and other OBCs.

In 1857, India’s first revolt or mutiny began with the Namak-Gangajal pledge, taken by the Sarvakhap panchayat of Haryana and the Upper Doab (present-day west UP), against the rule of the British East India Company.

The peasant protest has turned into a movement and its control has shifted from the traditional secular-Left to conservative caste heads invested deeply in *bhaichara*. People are no longer rallying around economic issues, but for honour against a cultural insult, handed out in their thinking by the Narendra Modi-Amit Shah “regime” to all peasant castes. It seems the *kisan* movement has trumped the BJP’s cultural-emotional hypernationalism with its own card of peasant cultural-emotional nationalism.

The *khap* unity between Jats and Muslims, divided during the Muzaffarnagar riots, is significant

because such cultural bonding could never be achieved by the secular ideologies of the Congress, Left or the AAP. It is an invocation of the indigenous cultural ethos of north Indian peasantry. In an amazing spectacle, thousands continue to assemble for Mahapanchayats, despite Internet bans. Post-Muzaffarnagar, there have been Mahapanchayats at Mathura, Bhagpat, Palwal and Bijnore, even as the movement continues to gather momentum.

The BJP has thus far successfully managed to “other-ise” the anti-farm law protesters. But it will be very difficult for them to deal with dissent from a traditional vote bank. The “Khalistani” angle will no longer work either, with protesters here not being predominantly from the religious minority groups, like Muslims and Sikhs, but Hindus from the Hindi heartland.

Prime Minister Modi has reiterated that the government’s offer to suspend the contentious farm laws for 18 months and conduct negotiations. Yet, it seems that the Centre has landed itself in a veritable Catch-22. The sons are not leaving the soil.

With inputs from Amaresh Misra, author, War of Civilizations
Leher Sethi is an entrepreneur and social activist

quick
BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,731.63	0.23
Nifty 50	14,924.30	0.19
S&P 500*	3,886.83	0.39
Dollar (₹)	72.92	0.06
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.84	0.72
Euro (₹)	87.35	0.14
Gold (10gm)*	46,738▼163	0.34
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	59.57	1.24
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.071	-0.05
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.153	0.014

* As of Friday/Saturday

Defence, railways
among largest
buyers on GeM

Ministries of defence and railways and central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) are among the largest buyer organisations on the public procurement portal, GeM. Government e-Marketplace (GeM) portal was launched in August 2016 for online purchases of goods and services by all central government ministries, states and departments. GeM CEO Talleen Kumar said they are introducing a range of new functions.

FPIs purchase net
equities worth
₹10,793 cr in Feb.

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) remained net buyers to the tune of Rs 12,266 crore in the Indian market in the first five trading sessions of February, as positive sentiment post-Union Budget 2021 sparked a rally in investment. As per depositories data, overseas investors pumped in a net Rs 10,793 crore into equities and Rs 1,473 crore in the debt segment between February 1 and February 5.

Sun recalls over
36K cartons of
injection in US

Sun Pharmaceutical Industries is recalling 36,275 cartons of a drug used to treat low testosterone levels in the US market for incorrect labelling. The US arm of the domestic pharma major is recalling Testosterone Cypionate Injection in the American market. The affected lot of the intramuscular injections was manufactured by the drug maker in India and distributed in the US by Sun Pharmaceutical Industries Inc, FDA said.

BHEL reports
₹217-crore loss
in Dec. quarter

BHEL reported a consolidated net loss of Rs 217.86 crore for the December quarter due to lower revenues. The consolidated net profit of the firm was Rs 161.81 crore in the year-ago quarter. Total income dipped to Rs 4,532.39 crore from Rs 5,827.74 crore. The company said, "During the quarter, the group operations recovered as compared to Q2/20-21 but pre-Covid level of operations are yet to be achieved," it said.

■ Sharp asset quality slide now less likely
Banks' earnings
on recovery pathFALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, FEB. 7

Both state-owned and private lenders reported a good set of numbers for the December quarter. The banking sector's asset quality came out better than what was anticipated six months ago in terms of both slippages and restructuring of loans. Almost every bank has taken provisioning to a very high level.

Analysts expect one more quarter of elevated provisioning after which the FY22 earnings growth is expected to be very strong for the banking sector. Strong deposit growth further enhances liquidity and helps reduce funding costs. Deposit growth outpaced loans at most banks through the third quarter of fiscal 2021 as consumers and businesses cut spending amid economic uncertainty, bolstering robust liquidity at these banks.

While most private sector lenders have raised good amounts of capital, the public sector banks too will see an infusion of Rs 20,000 crore from the government, which would take care of stress and support growth. With the RBI deferring the deadline for meeting the last tranche of capital conservation buffer (CCB) by another six months till October 2021 due to continuing stress on account of the pandemic, analysts have a positive outlook on the sector.

Anil Gupta, vice-president financial sector rat-



ings at Iera Ltd said: "Most banks reported a sharp rise in retail slippages, most of which came from unsecured loans but these were lower than anticipated. The RBI's loan moratorium ended in August as a result the December quarter numbers show the bad loans for those borrowers who paid less than one instalment between September to December. For Q4 2021, there will be seven EMIs and the borrower has to pay four EMIs out of seven EMIs. But we rule out further rise in slippages in retail as the collection numbers are upwards of 95 per cent for lenders. So, while system wide overdue will be there and there could be some pain in Q4FY21, we expect it to be relatively lower than what we saw in Q3."

Asutosh Mishra, head of research, institutional equity at Ashika Stock Broking, said, "Both public and private sector banks did extremely well with the asset quality not being as bad as what we had anticipated in the light

of the RBI's recent Financial Stability Report. Almost every bank has taken provisioning to a very high level and so the profit and loss impact of asset quality is mostly behind us. With the government expected to spend around \$400 billion in four-five years, the economy will get a major push and the banking system will be a key beneficiary. We expect one more quarter of elevated provisions post that the FY22 earnings growth is expected to be very strong for the banking sector."

A case in point was State Bank of India (SBI) with asset quality holding up well in 3Q with 97 per cent collection efficiency. Reported proforma slippages of 0.4 per cent of loans in 3QFY21 was below analyst expectations and even adjusted for high proforma bad loans in 2Q it would be 0.8 per cent which is lower than private banks' 1.1-1.2 per cent. This reflected its lower share of retail and unsecured lending.

BIZ CONFIDENCE
IMPROVES WITH
ROLLOUT OF
VACCINES: NCAER

New Delhi, Feb. 7: The Business Confidence Index (BCI) developed by the Delhi-based think-tank NCAER rose 29.6 per cent between second and third quarter of the current financial year on the back of rollout of Covid-19 vaccines in different countries, including India.

The proportion of respondents expecting that 'overall economic conditions will improve in the next six months' increased by 4.8 percentage points, from 29.8 per cent in 2020 21:Q2 to 34.6 per cent in 2020 21:Q3, said the NCAER's Business Expectations Survey (BES).

The proportion of respondents expecting that the 'financial position of firms will improve in the next six months' increased by 3.1 percentage points, from 27.7 per cent in 2020 21:Q2 to 30.8 per cent in 2020 21:Q3.

The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) said the BES findings are based on responses from 500 firms. It said the 115th round of BES was carried out in December 2020, during a period of "both hope and despair".

The Indian economy continued its recovery and was forecast to show positive growth in 2020 21:Q3.

"Business sentiments have shown the same V-shaped pattern of a sharp drop followed by a rise in Q1 and Q2, and then a flattening out in Q3 of 2020 21," NCAER said.

—PTI

Effective tax devolution
to states could be 32%SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 7

Thomas Issac

States estimate that the effective tax devolution to them would be around 32 per cent now against the share of 41 per cent promised by the Centre and the Finance Commission. This is because the divisible pool has been shrinking over the years, with the share of cesses and surcharges increasing steeply in recent years in central revenues.

"While the Finance Commission as well as the government has agreed upon 41 per cent devolution of taxes to the states, effectively states will be receiving around 32 per cent. A large part of the excise duties in the form of cesses and surcharges are outside the divisible pool. In the recent Budget also the Centre has introduced Agriculture and Infrastructure Development Cess (AIDC) by lowering the basic excise duty. This will further shrink the divisible pool," said T. M. Thomas Issac, finance minister of Kerala.

While the basic duties are shared between the states and the Centre, cesses and surcharges are excluded from the divisi-

ble pool and those revenues directly go to the Centre.

According to Rahul Bajoria, chief economist-India, Barclays, the effective tax devolution has been around 34 to 35 per cent in the past few years despite the states' share being 42 per cent. The 14th Finance Commission had raised the share of states from 32 per cent to 42 per cent.

In the recent Budget, the government has reduced the basic excise duty on petrol and diesel and levied AIDC of Rs 2.5 per litre on petrol and Rs 4 per litre on diesel. The AIDC cess will also be levied on imports of items, including alcoholic beverages, gold and silver dore bars, crude palm oil, crude soybean oil, peas, kabi chana, apples and Bengal gram by lowering the

basic customs duty. But, the major chunk of the cess revenue will come from petrol and diesel.

At a press meet in Mumbai on Sunday, Sitharaman said the government stands to get up to Rs 30,000 crore from the agricultural infrastructure development cess.

The 15th Finance Commission in its final report released recently also had raised concerns about the increasing share of cesses and surcharges. As per the report, total cess and surcharge as a percentage of the gross tax revenue was 10.4 per cent in 2011-12 and this has gone up to 19.5 per cent as of FY21.

"FC-XIV had highlighted the somewhat problematic growing share of cesses and surcharges in Union revenues. Article 270 of the Constitution enables the Union Government to levy and retain any cess levied for a specific purpose. Hence, the Union Government merely acts as a custodian of funds so collected in the Public Account till these are appropriated for the mandated purpose. Similarly, surcharges are meant to be levied only for short periods," the Commission pointed out.

MFs withdraw ₹12,980 cr from equities in Jan.

New Delhi, Feb. 7: Continuing the selling spree for the eighth consecutive month, mutual funds pulled out Rs 12,980 crore from equities in January as surge in markets provided an opportunity to

book profits.

MyWealthGrowth.com co-founder Harshad Chetanwala said investors may prefer to book profits for some more time.

Mutual funds withdrew a net of over Rs 56,400 crore

in 2020, Sebi data showed. But the markets have continued to rise as flows from FPIs have been robust, with Rs 19,472 crore net inflow in January after investing Rs 1.7 lakh crore in 2020.

—PTI

FM for scaling up well-run PSUs

Mumbai, Feb. 7: Refuting charges of 'selling family silver', finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday said the government has devised a clear strategy on divestment for the first time so that taxpayers' money is spent wisely.

She said the government wants a few public sector enterprises in the specified sectors to do well, so that "we can ensure that taxpayer money is spent wisely".

Addressing a meeting of business people here, she said, "Family silver should be strengthened, it should be our takat (strength)... Because you've spread it so thinly, there are many of them (PSUs) that are not able to survive; and the few that can perform do not get the due attention."

She also said the government's aim is to prime them through this policy. "You need them, you need them to scale up so that they meet the aspirations of growing India."

Speaking to reporters, she said the government will work with the Reserve Bank for execution of the bank privatisation plan announced in the budget.



Nirmala Sitharaman

MAJOR PORT TRUSTS, AAI NOT
PART OF STRATEGIC SALES PLAN

New Delhi, Feb. 7: Certain classes of entities, like major port trusts, Airport Authority of India, those undertaking security printing and minting, will not fall within the purview of the new PSE policy for strategic disinvestment. The new public sector enterprise (PSE) policy for Aatmanirbhar Bharat, which classifies public sector commercial enterprises as strategic and non-strategic sector,

Sitharaman also said that the government has no plan to form any bank investment company to house the government stakes in banks.

would be limited to CPSEs, public sector banks and public sector insurance companies.

"The policy, however, does not apply to certain classes of public sector entities," according to the scope of the PSE policy announced in the Budget.

The Budget unveiled the Disinvestment/Strategic Disinvestment Policy, which had four strategic sectors in which "bare minimum" number of CPSEs will be retained.

In the Union Budget presented last week, Sitharaman had announced the privatisation of two banks as part of its disinvestment plan.

"The details are being worked out. I have made the announcement but we are working together with the RBI," she said, when asked about the proposal.

She, however, declined to name the candidate chosen for privatisation.

On the bad bank, Sitharaman said the government may have to give some guarantee for the National Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC), but stressed that this is a solution which has come from the banks itself and will also be led by them.

Sitharaman alleged that the banks' non-performing assets, which are to be transferred into the National ARC, are a legacy of the mismanagement in the past.

There is no phone banking happening now, with favours being sought for anyone from New Delhi.

On the Bank Investment Company (BIC), she said no such proposal is on the table and wondered what resulted in the discussion.

"There is no such discussion. I don't know where it is coming from. At least it is not before me. I am not discussing that, she said.

—PTI

Kerala asked to start
getting land for ₹64K-cr
speed rail projectKJ BENNYCHAN
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
FEB. 7

The Union finance ministry has finally approved the revised debt-fund raising plan for the Rs 64,000-crore semi-high speed rail project connecting Kerala capital Thiruvananthapuram with its northern tip Kasaragod, a top state official has said.

The Japanese development agency Jica had earlier committed to provide Rs 33,700 crore, which was approved by the Union finance ministry as well in 2019, but later Jica massively curtailed its exposure, following which the Union finance ministry asked the state to submit a revised debt raising plan.

In a Jan. 5 letter to chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman asked Kerala Rail Development Corporation (K-Rail), the nodal implementation agency, to expedite land acquisition for the most ambitious project of the state till date, the official said.

The Centre has also directed K-Rail to re-engage with Japan International Cooperative Agency (Jica) to finalise the funding for the Rs 63,941 crore semi-high-speed rail Silver Line as it is named, connecting Thiruvananthapuram to Kasaragod and covering the 529.45-km ride in four hours against over 12 hours now. The line will cover Thiruvananthapuram-Ernakulam/Kochi stretch in flat 90 minutes, against over four hours now.

Under the revised debt funding plan submitted and approved by the Centre, Kerala has nearly halved the Jica loan to \$2.5 billion from \$4.6 billion earlier. K-Rail is also seeking \$1 billion from the Asian Development Bank, \$500 million from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and \$460 million from the German development agency KfW, K-Rail managing director V. Ajith Kumar told PTI over the weekend.

—PTI

MALAYSIA TO
HOUSE MIGRANT
WORKERS IN
HOTELSCHAN TIEN HIN
FEB. 7

Malaysia's government has kicked off a plan to temporarily house migrant workers in near-empty hotels across the nation to tackle the worsening spread of Covid-19 cases due to workplace clusters.

Malaysia's Tourism, Arts and Culture Ministry said in a statement that the programme will help curb the virus outbreak and indirectly assist hotel operators hurt by the pandemic.

"The initiative is the best alternative at the moment," the ministry said.

Overcrowded conditions in employee dormitories have been a key source of infections, spurring record cases and pressuring Malaysia's health system. The nation has more than 1.5 million documented migrant workers, 91 per cent of whom live in accommodation that doesn't meet minimum housing standards, according to the Ministry of Human Resources.

The government's plan also provides a lifeline for the tourism industry. More than 100 hotels have closed since the outbreak began almost a year ago, according to a February 5 statement by the Malaysian Association of Hotels.

A recent video of a hotel manager selling the hotel's food by the roadside in a popular hawkers area is an example of many who have resorted to scaling down to cover expenses and employees' payroll, the association said.

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Boxing champ
Leon Spinks dead

Las Vegas: Leon Spinks, who won Olympic gold and then shocked the boxing world by beating Muhammad Ali to win the heavyweight title in only his eighth pro fight, has died. He was 67.

Spinks, who lived his later years in Las Vegas, died Friday night, according to a release from a public relations firm. He had been battling prostate and other cancers.

His wife, Brenda Glur Spinks, and a few close friends and other family members were by his side when he passed away. A lovable heavyweight with a drinking problem, Spinks beat Ali by decision in a 15-round fight in 1978 to win the title. He was unranked at the time, and picked as an opponent because Ali was looking for an easy fight. — *AP*

Moseley killed
in road accident

Kingston: Former West Indies pacer Ezra Moseley has died after his bicycle was hit by a car in a tragic road accident.

He was 63 years old. According to a report in *Nationnews*, “Moseley was riding a bicycle along the ABC Highway when he was in a collision with an SUV driven by a teenager at the Balls, Christ Church junction.”

Moseley featured in two Tests against England in 1990 and also played nine ODIs between 1990 and 1991. He went to the rebel tour of South Africa back in 1982-83 and was banned. However he later made a comeback and had a late international debut after plying his trade for Glamorgan in English county cricket.

He was the assistant coach when the West Indies women's team won the T20 World Cup in India in 2016. — *PTI*

EB survive late
scare for a win

Margao: Embattled SC East Bengal tasted victory for the first time in almost a month with a 2-1 win over Jamshedpur FC in an Indian Super League match here on Sunday.

While the Kolkata-based side jumped to ninth on the table with 16 points, Jamshedpur FC's hopes of making the ISL playoffs were dealt with another blow, leaving them at seventh, four points behind the playoff places. Goals from Matti Steinmann (6th) and Anthony Pilkington (68th) secured the victory for SCEB. A late goal from Peter Hartley (83rd) proved to be a mere consolation for Jamshedpur. East Bengal got off to the best start possible with Steinmann putting them ahead in the sixth minute. An early SCEB attack ended with Stephen Eze putting the ball out for a corner. — *PTI*

Maiden ATP Cup
win for Russia

Melbourne: A relentless Russia crushed Italy 2-0 to win their maiden ATP Cup on Sunday with Daniil Medvedev and Andrey Rublev in ruthless, red-hot form leading into the Australian Open. Russia were the only nation in the 12-team event to boast two top 10 players and they had swept past Japan, Argentina and Germany en route to the decider.

Live on TV

TENNIS

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

CRICKET

India vs England: First Test, Day 4 from 9.20 am on Star Sports 1, HD

FOOTBALL

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

English Premier League: Leeds United vs Crystal Palace from 1.30 am (Tuesday) on Star Sports Select 1, Star Sports Select 1 HD

WWE

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

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Eng bring out Bess

Off-spinner Dom takes 4/55 as visitors maintain stranglehold

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR
CHENNAI, FEB. 7

It's difficult to keep Rishabh Pant quiet. The chirpy wicket-keeper-batsman is a bundle of energy and likes to smile in the face of adversity. If not for the left-hander's exuberant knock, India would have ended day three of their first Test against England in further embarrassment.

Pant's counter-attacking 91 off 88 balls and his century stand with Cheteshwar Pujara (73) helped India recover from a precarious position of 73 for four, before ending the day at 257 for six in 74 overs. India still have a mountain to climb as they trail by 321 runs and require 122 to avoid follow on.

After ending their first innings at 578 — adding 23 runs to their overnight total, England consolidated their stranglehold on the match with disciplined bowling and brilliant fielding. Off-spinner Dom Bess (4/55) showed great control to rattle the fancied batting line-up.

With a new ball in hand, Jofra Archer steamed in and spit fire. Consistently clocking 140kmp/h, Archer extracted bounce on a slow surface and accounted for both of India's openers. He induced an edge off short of length ball to remove Rohit Sharma.

Two stunning catches — James Anderson's diving effort at mid-off and skipper Joe Root's one-handed grab at short-cover — saw the backs of Shubman Gill and Ajinkya Rahane, respectively. Rahane was outfoxed by Bess shortly after he scalped Virat Kohli with a peach of a delivery. With a dipping ball, Bess drew Kohli forward and found the inside edge. Ollie Pope took a sharp catch at short-leg.

MAJESTIC MAYERS
LEADS WINDIES
TO EPIC VICTORY

Chittagong (Bangladesh), Feb. 7: Kyle Mayers scored a stunning double hundred on his debut as West Indies shocked Bangladesh by three wickets in the first Test on Sunday.

Mayers hit an unbeaten 210 from 310 balls — with 20 fours and seven sixes — to guide his side to 395-7 with just nine balls left on the final day.

West Indies, who are on tour without most of their first choice players, beat the best run chase in Asia, set by Sri Lanka who hit 388 to beat Zimbabwe by four wickets in Colombo in 2017.

Mayers, the second West Indies player to get a double hundred on his debut after Laurence Rowe and sixth overall, was brilliantly aided by fellow debutant Nkrumah Bonner, who hit 86.

— *AFP*
Brief scores: Bangladesh 430 & 223/8 decl lost to West Indies 259 & 395/7 (Mayers 210 not out, Bonner 86, Miraz 4-113).



England's Dom Bess celebrates the wicket of India captain Virat Kohli on Day Three of the first Test in Chennai on Sunday. — *BCCI*

From 44 for one, India slumped to 73 for four. There were no real demons in the wicket, except for a few odd deliveries that were pitched on the footmark. But Indian batsmen seemed to be in a rush to score and handed over control to England bowlers in the process.

Post-lunch was the most absorbing session where England pinned India down before Pant came and broke the shackles. The way Pujara and Pant went about their job was a study in contrasts. While Pant brought in his half-century in just 40 balls, Pujara, in his element as always, held the other end.

It was a calculated assault from Pant.

Taking a particular liking to Jack Leach, Pant clobbered the left-arm spinner for five sixes. Root had to take Leach off the attack. Against Anderson, Pant stood tall to cut and punch off his back foot.

Pujara was unlucky. His pull shot ricocheted off short-leg fielder and fell straight into the hands of Rory Burns at mid-wicket. Pant fell nine short of what would have been a well-deserved hundred. It was the fourth time he got out in the 90s in his blossoming Test career.

An unbroken 32-run stand between two Chennai boys, Washington Sundar (33 not out) and R. Ashwin (8), steered India safely through to the close.

Dismissing Kohli
was special for Bess

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 7

Off-spinner Dom Bess' four-wicket haul helped England tighten the screws on India after pacer Jofra Archer removed both openers. Bess, who broke India's backbone by taking the wickets of Virat Kohli, Ajinkya Rahane,

Cheteshwar Pujara and Rishabh Pant, said dismissing the Indian captain was special.

It had some planning going into it, explained Bess. “It was a special

SCORECARD

England 1st Innings (overnight 555/8): Rory Burns c Pant b Ashwin 33, Dominic Sibley lbw Bumrah 87, Daniel Lawrence lbw Bumrah 0, Joe Root lbw Nadeem 218, Ben Stokes c Pujara b Nadeem 82, Ollie Pope lbw Ashwin 34, Jos Buttler b Ishant 30, Dominic Bess lbw Bumrah 34, Jofra Archer b Ishant 0, Jack Leach not out 14, James Anderson b Ashwin. Extras (b-7, lb-17, w-1, nb-20) 45. **Total (all out in 190.1 over) 578.**

PoW: 1-63, 2-63, 3-263, 4-387, 5-473, 6-477, 7-525, 8-525, 9-567. **Bowling:** Ishant Sharma 27-7-52-2, Jasprit Bumrah 36-7-84-3, Ravichandran Ashwin 55.1-5-146-3, Shahbaz Nadeem 44-4-167-2, Washington Sundar 26-2-98-0, Rohit Sharma 2-0-7-0.

India 1st Innings: Rohit Sharma c Buttler b Archer 6, Shubman Gill c Anderson b Archer 29, Cheteshwar Pujara c Rory Burns b Dom Bess 73, Virat Kohli c Ollie Pope b Dom Bess 11, Ajinkya Rahane c Root b Dom Bess 1, Rishabh Pant c Jack Leach b Dom Bess 91, Washington Sundar (not out) 33, Ravichandran Ashwin (not out) 8. Extras (b-4, lb-1) 5. **Total (for 6 wks, in 74 overs) 257.**

FoW: 19-1, 44-2, 71-3, 73-4, 192-5, 225-6.

Bowling: James Anderson 11-3-34-0, Jofra Archer 16-3-52-2, Ben Stokes 6-1-16-0, Jack Leach 17-2-94-0, Dominic Bess 23-5-55-4, Joe Root 1-0-1-0.

Thiem came agonisingly close to victory last year and, buoyed by his first Grand Slam title at the US Open, will be confident against anyone in the draw — including Djokovic, against whom he has won five of their last seven meetings.

The Spaniard also has fitness concerns after he pulled out of the ATP Cup during warm-up week with a sore back.

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— *AFP*

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Djokovic targets
ninth Oz crown

Melbourne, Feb. 7: Novak Djokovic has not endeared himself to fans over the past year, but the Australian Open's undisputed king will take some stopping as he targets a record-extending ninth title at Melbourne Park.

Djokovic claimed his 17th Grand Slam crown in last year's gripping final, when he came back from 2-1 down to edge Austria's Dominic Thiem in five sets.

The Serbian's eighth victory in 16 visits reinforced his dominance in Melbourne's Rod Laver Arena, where he claimed his first Grand Slam title in 2008 and has won seven of the last 10 editions.

Rafael Nadal and Thiem look to be his biggest rivals at this year's tournament, with six-time Australian Open champion Roger Federer sidelined as he recovers from double knee surgery.

The Australian Open was the highlight of a mesmerising early 2020 season for Djokovic, who won his first four tournaments of the year.

Nadal will undoubtedly figure prominently in the tournament but it is now 12 years since he won his lone title in Melbourne, despite four more trips to the final.

The Spaniard also has fitness concerns after he pulled out of the ATP Cup during warm-up week with a sore back.

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— *AFP*

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