

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI SUNDAY 31 JANUARY 2021



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WINDOWS



BJP president J.P. Nadda pays tribute to freedom fighter Pasumpun Muthuramalinga Thevar during his visit to Tamil Nadu in view of the forthcoming Assembly polls, in Madurai on Saturday. — PTI

C'garh: Maoists kill cop, lynch healthcare worker

Bhopal: Maoists on Saturday shot dead a policeman in a market in Chhattisgarh's north Bastar district of Kanker. According to Bastar police, a group of armed Maoists opened fire on police constable Suklaram Duggu when he was moving in the weekly market in Pratapur in the district. He died on the spot. In another incident, ultras brutally killed an ambulance driver at Teknar in Chhattisgarh's south Bastar district of Narayanpur late on Friday. ■ **More on Page 4**

50 conned with fake job letters in Bareilly

Bareilly: An inquiry has been ordered after 50 youth were duped with fake appointment letters to posts at a government hospital here allegedly by the clerks posted in the chief medical officer's office and a district women's hospital, police said on Saturday. An inquiry has been ordered by the police. ■ **More on Page 4**

Statue of Gandhi vandalised in US

Washington: A group of unknown people have vandalised, broken and ripped from the base a statue of Mahatma Gandhi in a park in the US state of California, shocking and outraging Indian-Americans across the country, who have demanded that the officials investigate it as an incident of hate crime. ■ **More on Page 6**

COUNTERPOINT



Here is some fast food from farmers for him!

WEATHER

Max: 20°C
Min: 08°C
RH: 61%
Rain: 10%

Forecast: Sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Adhika Ashwayuja
Bahula Ekadasi till 2.29 pm
Star: Magha till 10.49 pm
Varjyam: 11.37 am to 1.06 pm; 6.04 am to 7.31 am (Wednesday)
Durmuhurtam: 8.32 am to 9.19 am; 10.48 pm to 11.37 pm
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm
SUNSET TODAY 5.59 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 7.09 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 9.44 AM
MOONSET TODAY 9.03 PM

■ **Our govt approaching issue of farmers with open mind: Prime Minister**

Offer on farm laws still stands; phone call away for talks: Modi

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, JAN. 30

The Prime Minister on Saturday told leaders of various political parties that the government has been continuously trying to resolve the issues raised by protesting farmers through talks.

Addressing floor leaders of various political parties at the customary all-party meeting convened by the government for the smooth conduct of the Budget Session, the Prime Minister said the that Centre's proposal on the three new agriculture laws still stands.

Virtually addressing the party leaders, Mr Narendra Modi told them that agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar was just a phone call away for protesting farmers and the agriculture minister himself had conveyed the same to farmer leaders earlier this month.

Sharing the details of the meeting chaired by Mr Modi and attended by defence minister Rajnath Singh, parliamentary affairs minister Prahlad Joshi said, “The Prime Minister assured that the Centre is approaching the farmers issue with an open mind.”

Emphasising on the need for smooth functioning of the Parliament, Modi said smaller parties suffer the most due to disruptions as they do not get chance to raise their issues.

“It is for the bigger parties to ensure Parliament functions smoothly, there are no disruptions and thus, the smaller parties are able to voice their views in Parliament,” Mr Joshi said citing Mr

■ **Turn to Page 4**

PM asks allies to respond to Opp. with facts on 3 farm laws

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 30

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday asked NDA leaders not to worry about allegations levelled by the Opposition against the central government, including the three farm sector related laws and counter these allegations with facts. During the meeting of BJP-led NDA alliance leaders, Mr Modi, it was learnt, told members that every action or decision taken by the government is for the people of the country and the Opposition's propaganda cannot change the fact.

With Assembly polls lined up in West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry, Mr Modi, it was learnt, told NDA leaders that the Opposition was spreading propaganda for electoral gains but NDA leaders should counter this with forthright facts. The PM, sources said, also said that all parties are important even those that have only one MP.

Backing the farm sector related laws, over which farmer unions, mostly from Punjab and western UP, had been protesting for more than two months at Delhi borders, one of the NDA constituents, JD(U), said that Bihar had implemented farm reforms in 2006 and since then both the production and storage have increased and the state never witnessed any agitation from farmers. ■ **Turn to Page 4**



Prime Minister Narendra Modi pays tribute to Mahatma Gandhi at Rajghat on the occasion of Martyrs' Day observed to mark the death anniversary of the Father of the Nation in New Delhi on Saturday. — PTI

Protesting farmers observe 1-day fast & refuse to relent

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JAN. 30

Farmers protesting at the three sites at Delhi's borders held a day-long fast, between 9 am and 5 pm, as they observed “Sadbhavna Divas” to mark the death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. Meanwhile hundreds of farmers stayed put at the Ghazipur border on Saturday morning, as more supporters poured in at the protest site on the Delhi-Meerut Expressway in Ghaziabad following which Delhi Police shut down NH-24 highway and all roads leading to Ghazipur border. Union home ministry temporari-

ly suspended internet services in Singhu, Ghazipur, Tikri borders and their adjoining areas from 11 pm of 29 January to 11 pm of 31 January to “maintain public safety and averting public emergency” amid the ongoing farmers' protest.

Meanwhile, the Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the crime branch of Delhi Police has issued a second notice to nine farmer leaders, including Rakesh Tikait.

The Delhi police carried out raids in Punjab's Jalandhar on Friday to arrest Jugraj Singh and Navpreet Singh who hoisted the Nishan Sahib flag at

Red Fort on January 26. Meanwhile, 38 cases have been registered till now in farmer's rally matter and 84 persons have been arrested, according to the police.

Security personnel, including from anti-riot police and paramilitary forces, were deployed in massive strength. Multiple layers of barricades, including concrete blocks, were being put at the protest sites.

The farmer leaders on Saturday morning, wearing garlands, observed “Sadbhavna Diwas” (Harmony Day) and observed fast on Saturday ■ **Turn to Page 4**

Serum applies for trials of another vaccine

New Delhi, Jan. 30: The Serum Institute of India (SII), the world's biggest vaccine maker, has applied to local authorities to conduct a small domestic trial of Novavax Inc's Covid-19 vaccine, which was found to be 89.3% effective in a UK trial. Serum expected a decision on an Indian trial of Novavax's vaccine soon, chief executive Adar Poonawalla told Reuters on Friday, hours after the US company reported the efficacy data.

“We have already applied to the drug controller's office for the bridging trial, a few days ago,” Mr Poonawalla said. “So they should also give that approval soon now.” — PTI

■ **More on Page 3**

Kolkata/New Delhi, Jan. 30: Former West Bengal minister Rajib Banerjee, who recently quit the Trinamul Congress, joined the BJP in the national capital on Saturday along with a few other leaders of the state's ruling party after meeting senior BJP leader and Union home minister Amit Shah.

Mr Banerjee and MLAs Prabir Ghosal and Baishali Dalmiya, who was recently expelled from the TMC, former Howrah Mayor Rathin Chakraborty and actor Rudranil Ghosh flew to the national capital on a special plane, and met central BJP leaders.

They have joined the BJP, party general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya told PTI following the meeting.

Later, Shah tweeted, “Former TMC leaders Mr Rajib Banerjee, Ms Baishali Dalmiya, Mr Prabir Ghoshal, Mr Rathin Chakraborti and Mr Rudranil Ghosh joined BJP on Saturday in New Delhi. I am sure their induction will further strengthen BJP's fight for Sonar Bangla.”

Former TMC MLA Parthasarathi Chattopadhyay had also accompanied the leaders to Delhi.

BJP national vice-president Mukul Roy and Vijayvargiya arrived in Delhi with them. — PTI



Rajib Banerjee

■ **BANERJEE AND MLAs Prabir Ghosal and Baishali Dalmiya, who was recently expelled from the TMC, former Howrah Mayor Rathin Chakraborty and actor Rudranil Ghosh flew to the national capital on a special plane, and met central BJP leaders**

The TMC, which has been facing dissent from a number of leaders ahead of the assembly election due in April-May, said that those who are leaving do not have long political history. Earlier in the day, Mr Banerjee said he had a word with Union Home Minister Amit Shah who called him to the national capital.

“After I resigned from the TMC, I received a call from the BJP leadership.... Amit Shah ji told me to come over to Delhi. He also requested me to pass on the information to five other important public figures who wanted to serve people in a better way to accompany me,” he said. — PTI

NSG, NIA probe IED blast near Israel embassy

No concrete evidence yet as most of CCTVs near spot ‘non-functional’

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JAN 30

The sleuths of Delhi police special cell and other investigating agencies on Saturday visited the blast site near the Israeli embassy to collect more evidence as part of its ongoing probe. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) also reached the IED blast spot and inspected the area. Meanwhile, the Centre has roped in the National Security Guard (NSG) to examine characteristics of the explosives used in the explosion.

The sleuths however have not come across anything concrete yet as most of the CCTV cameras near the site of the explosion were non-functional at the time of incident. The CCTV footage of the Israel embassy blast site obtained by the special cell team has revealed that a cab had dropped two persons who walked towards the spot near the embassy where the minor IED explosion took place on Friday evening. The cops have contacted the driver of the vehicle and sketches of the two people are being prepared.

“We have recovered some CCTV footage but have not obtained anything concrete yet as most of the CCTV cameras in the area near the embassy are non-functional,” an official source said.

The footage retrieved from some CCTV cameras showed a vehicle moving suspiciously near the embassy just before the explosion, sources said.

It was claimed that, the cab driver himself had

Attack not surprising, we were on alert: Envoy

New Delhi: A day after a blast outside its Embassy here, Israel's ambassador to India Ron Malka said there are enough reasons to believe it was a terrorist attack but they are not surprised at the event as the alert level had been increased for past few weeks following intelligence inputs.

He also said the investigations will look into all possible angles, including whether there are any links to the 2012 attack on Israeli diplomats here while events around the world are also being examined to find any related operations or activities at any destination.

“These attacks by those seeking destabilisation in the (West Asia) region cannot stop us or scare us. Our peace efforts will continue uninterrupted,” he said. — PTI

called the police, he has been identified and is being questioned and the police is verifying his statements.

The sources said that the conspiracy of this blast was hatched abroad and the conspirators wanted

■ **Turn to Page 4**

Delhi govt relaxes rules for passengers from UK

No institutional quarantine for Covid negative flyers

New Delhi, Jan. 30: The

Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) has relaxed institutional quarantine norms for fliers from the United Kingdom, which were introduced in December in the light of a new strain of Covid-19, which had emerged there, senior government officials said on Saturday.

The DDMA issued an order on Friday which said that fliers from UK who test negative for Covid-19 on arrival in Delhi would no longer have to complete a seven-day institutional quarantine.

The order said that the

▶ **THE DDMA issued an order on Friday which said that fliers from UK who test negative for Covid-19 on arrival in Delhi would no longer have to complete a seven-day institutional quarantine.**

step was taken after a review meeting which noted “low positivity rate” among UK returnees.

Under the old rule, people who arrived in Delhi from the UK had to complete seven days of institutional quarantine followed by another seven days of home quarantine even if they tested negative for Covid-19 on arrival, as a

precautionary step against the new strain of the virus which is believed to have a higher transmission rate.

However, the fliers will still have to comply with seven days of home quarantine. “The situation has now been reviewed and considering the low positivity rate of UK returnees, it has been decided that the additional measure of compulsory institutional quarantine of travellers who test negative may not be required furthermore... (But) strict surveillance (is) to be kept on persons who tested positive at the airport and kept in home quarantine,” said the order. — Agencies

■ **Beneficiaries include scientists, doctors and their families**

UAE to grant citizenship to investors, others

Dubai, Jan. 30: The United Arab Emirates has adopted

amendments that would allow the Gulf state to grant citizenship to investors and other professionals including scientists, doctors and their families, the government said on Saturday.

“The UAE cabinet, local Emiri courts and executive councils will nominate those eligible for the citizenship under clear criteria set for each category,” Dubai's ruler and UAE Vice President

▶ **FOREIGNERS IN the UAE usually have renewable visas valid for only a few years tied to employment. The government in recent has made its visa policy more flexible, offering longer residencies**

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum said in a twitter post.

“The law allows receivers of the UAE passport to keep their existing citizenship,” Sheikh Mohammed added.

It was unclear if new passport holders would benefit from the public welfare system. The UAE spends billions of dollars each year on free education, healthcare, housing loans and grants for its estimated 1.4 million citizens.

Foreigners in the UAE usually have renewable visas valid for only a few years tied to employment. The government in recent has made its visa policy more flexible, offering longer residencies for cer-

tain types of investors, students and professionals.

Last year, the government extended its “golden” visa system — which grants 10-year residency in the Gulf state — to certain professionals, specialised degree-holders and others.

An oil and gas producer, the UAE's economy has been hit by the coronavirus pandemic and low oil prices, prompting tens of thousands of expatriates to leave. — Reuters

■ **More on Page 6**



SHORT TAKES

AAP MP moves SC for quashing of FIRs against him in UP

New Delhi: Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh has moved the Supreme Court seeking quashing of multiple FIRs lodged against him in various districts of Uttar Pradesh after his press conference in August, last year saying they have been maliciously instituted to unleash political vendetta. In a separate petition, Mr Singh has also challenged the Allahabad high court order of January 21, by which it had refused to quash the FIR lodged in Lucknow after the August 12, 2020, press conference. Mr Singh said he had conducted a press conference at Lucknow of Uttar Pradesh on August 12, last year wherein he had alleged that the state government was favouring one particular caste over the others. In the said press conference, the petitioner had merely raised certain social issues, namely neglect and apathy of the government towards a certain class of society, he said in his writ petition filed through advocate Sumeer Sodhi. Both the petitions will be taken up for hearing by a bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan on February 2. Senior advocate Vivek Tankha is likely to appear for Mr Singh in the matter. — PTI

National Herald case: Criminal trial against Vora abated

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 30
A Delhi court has abated criminal proceedings against Congress leader Moti Lal Vora in the National Herald case in view of his demise in December last year. The court was hearing a private criminal complaint filed by BJP MP Subramanian Swamy against Vora, Congress leaders Sonia and Rahul Gandhi and others. The court passed the order after advocate Tarannum Cheema, appearing for the accused, filed the original hard copy of the application for placing on record the death certificate of Vora, and as a consequence prayed for abatement of proceedings qua him. The court issued notice to the SHO concerned to file death verification report of Vora, who submitted that the veteran Congress leader died on December 21, 2020. In view of the aforesaid and report filed, proceedings in the present case qua the accused Motilal Lal Vora stands abated, additional chief metropolitan magistrate Sachin Gupta said in an order passed on January 28. The case will continue against other accused people. The court will further hear the matter on February 11. The case is scheduled for the cross examination of the complainant, Swamy, as a part of pre-charge evidence.

President Kovind launches pulse polio programme

New Delhi: President Ram Nath Kovind on Saturday launched the pulse polio programme for 2021 by administering polio drops to children below five years of age at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. In a statement, the health ministry said President Kovind and First Lady Savita Kovind administered polio drops to children on the eve of the Polio National Immunization Day, which is observed on January 31 and is also popularly known as Polio Ravivar. Around 17 crore children of less than 5 years of age will be given polio drops as part of the drive of Government of India to sustain polio free status of the country. The countrywide drive will be supported by about 24 lakh volunteers, 1.5 lakh supervisors and many Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), WHO, Unicef, Rotary etc, it said. Healthcare workers will be visiting as many as 2 crore households to ensure that no child is left without the protection of the polio vaccine, the statement said. Health minister Harsh Vardhan also attended the event. He highlighted the mitigation measures and the efforts in strengthening routine immunization by the government. While we are making efforts to protect our children from more and more diseases, it is important that all vaccines under the programme reach every last child of our country," Dr Vardhan said. — PTI

Day after violence, Singhu turns into fortress

Entry to protest venue was closely guarded

38 cases, more than 80 arrests so far

New Delhi, Jan. 30: The Delhi police has so far registered 38 cases and arrested 84 people in connection with the violence during a tractor parade by farmers here on Republic Day, officials said.

The tractor march by farmers protesting against the three recent agriculture laws had turned violent, leading to chaotic scenes on the streets of the national capital on Republic Day. Thousands of protesting farmers had clashed with

the police during the parade. Many of them, driving tractors, reached the Red Fort and entered the monument.

They also hoisted flags on the domes and placed a flagstaff at the ramparts of the national monument, where the national flag is unfurled by the Prime Minister on Independence Day.

The police had asked nine farmer leaders to join the investigation in the case on Friday, but no one turned up. — PTI

▶ **THE POLICE** had to fired teargas and baton charged on Friday to break up a clash between farmers and a large group of men claiming to be local residents who hurled stones at each other at the Singhu border

that were manned by large numbers of police and para military personnel.

The final barricade near a toll booth at Singhu border was further buttressed with inland containers and concrete blocks and soil was being dumped there to prevent movement of vehicles.

Even a street along the highway was dug up to 8-10 feet and rimmed with concrete blocks to prevent any vehicular movement to and from the farmers' protest venue.

The protesting farmers expressed their resolve to continue the agitation

against the Centre's farm laws, saying it will gather momentum in the coming days.

"The presence of farmers had dipped after the incident of violence and vandalism on Republic Day but now more are coming from Punjab and Haryana to join in," said a protester from Patiala refusing to be named.

Randhir Singh, a social activist from Nabha said the farmers were determined to continue their struggle against the farm laws till the Centre repealed it.

The 'langars' at the protest site were seen to be less crowded, as umbrella organisation of the protesting farmers-Sanyukta Kisan Morcha had given call for a one day fast to observe Sadbhavna (Harmony day) on the death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi on Saturday. — PTI

AAP wants Punjab cops for farmers' protection

Chandigarh, Jan. 30: The AAP Saturday asked the Punjab government to deploy the state police to provide security to farmers protesting at Delhi borders, alleging the agitators were being "attacked" as the BJP was trying to "suppress" their movement with the help of its aides.

However, the ruling Congress ridiculed the demand of the main opposition party, saying there was not an "anarchist" government in the state, "like Arvind Kejriwal (was) in Delhi".

AAP leader and the party's Punjab co-incharge Raghav Chadha alleged the BJP was attempting to "suppress" the ongoing farmers' movement with the help of its aides and claimed that farmers were being "attacked" at the protest sites, charges coming after violent clashes between farmers and "locals" at the Ghazipur border and stone-pelting at the Singhu border.

Questioning the role of the Delhi police, Mr Chadha accused it of not taking action against miscreants involved in violent incidents at the Singhu border, where the farmers have been sitting in protest for over two months now.

— PTI



Farmers during their protest over Centre's farm laws at Ghazipur border in New Delhi on Saturday.

— PTI

Media bodies slam FIRs against journalists over R-Day violence

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, JAN. 30

Several mediapersons on Saturday came together to protest the criminal charges being slapped on senior journalists following their social media posts with regard to the farmers' agitation on Republic Day.

The protest meeting was called by the Editors Guild, Press Association, Press Club of India, Indian Women's Press Corps, Delhi Union of Journalists, and Indian Journalists Union. A similar protest meeting was also held in the Mumbai Press Club condemning FIRs against journalists.

FIRs have been filed against journalists Mrinal Pande, Rajdeep Sardesai, Vinod Jose, Zafar Agha, Paresh Nath, and Anant Nath in BJP ruled states for their social media posts on the events that took place on January 26 in New Delhi. Apart from criminal charges, the UP government has also booked them for sedition.

Journalists' bodies felt that filing FIRs against media persons has now



Press Club of India president Anand Sahay, senior journalists T.N. Ninan, S.K. Pandey, Jaishankar Gupta, Editors Guild of India, Press Association, IWPC and DUJ at a press conference in New Delhi on Saturday.

become a routine matter and is being used as a tool by the state to intimidate journalists and prevent them from doing their job.

"The meeting expressed deep disapproval of the action of the governments to seek to disrupt the work of journalists to inform the people. This meeting demands that governments withdraw the criminal charges, including that of sedition, against the editors and publications brought on January 28, 2021, and all the journalists in the country in recent years.

"We also seek that gov-

ernments stop pressurising news organisations. We further demand the scrapping of the anti-democratic sedition law and the ending of the dangerous, motivated, and misguided use of laws like UAPA against journalists as these are meant for terrorists. We resolve to carry out a campaign in this regard if the plainly motivated charges against journalists are not immediately dropped. Our struggle will be within the ambit of the Constitution. In this endeavour, we shall bring to bear all strength at our command," said a resolution passed at the protest

Cops get 1,700 video, CCTV clips

ANJALI PILLAI
NEW DELHI, JAN. 30

The Delhi police has received 1,700 video clips and CCTV footage from public so far related to the violence during farmers' Republic Day tractor rally and is taking help from forensic experts to analyse the material and identify the culprits, joint commissioner of police (crime) B.K. Singh said Saturday.

Mr Singh said the crime branch, which is investigating the nine cases related to the violence including at the Red Fort and ITO, is also examining dump data of mobile phone calls and registration numbers of tractors. He said a team from the



Security personnel take part in a drill near the site of farmers' protest at Singhu border.

— PTI

National Forensic Sciences University has been called to analyse the video clips and CCTV footage related to the violence that left 394 police personnel injured and one

protester dead.

On Friday, the Delhi police had issued an appeal in leading newspapers asking people to share any evidence or information about the vio-

lence. "After our appeal, Delhi police has received 1,700 video clips and CCTV footage from public related to the violence that took place during the tractor parade on Republic Day. Through videos, we will identify culprits who indulged in the violence," Mr Singh said.

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

Delhi witnessed violence during the January 26 tractor rally organised by protesting farmer unions to highlight their demand for repeal of the Centre's three farm laws. — PTI

■ Private firm exec faces money laundering charges Bizman held in VVIP copter case

New Delhi, Jan. 30: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested businessman Anoop Kumar Gupta in connection with a money laundering probe into the over ₹3,600-crore VVIP choppers purchase scam case, official sources said on Saturday.

They said Gupta, the joint managing director of KRBL Limited that sells India Gate basmati rice, has been sent to five-day custody of the Central probe agency after he was produced before a special court for cases under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

ED sources said Mr Gupta was arrested in the AgustaWestland VVIP

choppers deal case and alleged he was not cooperating in the ongoing probe.

His custodial interrogation was necessary in light of some fresh evidence gathered by the Enforcement Directorate that pertains to "proceeds of crime" or alleged kickbacks of the deal being paid to a firm "controlled" by Mr Gupta, they said.

Mr Gupta's lawyers told the court that his arrest was "not justified" and pleaded that he should not be sent to ED custody owing to his medical condition as he suffers from diabetes and other ailments.

The agency, in its remand application, said two streams were used for

channelling about Euro 70 million worth "proceeds of crime" or bribe money to various political persons, bureaucrats and IAF officials in return of swinging the 12 helicopters deal in favour of AgustaWestland.

"It is submitted that IDS Information Technology and Engineering Sarl, Tunisia has received proceeds of crime to the tune of Euro 24.37 million from AgustaWestland and out of this about Euro 12.4 million were further transferred to Interstellar Technologies Limited, Mauritius."

"The proceeds of crime were further transferred to various companies including Rawasi Al

Khaleej General Trading (RAKGT) LLC Dubai which was incorporated in 2007 by KRBL DMCC, Dubai and accused Anoop Gupta was one of the director of this company," the ED alleged. This company (KRBL DMCC) was a subsidiary of KRBL Limited (India), it said.

The ED said that "in 2009, the entire stake (49% shareholding) of KRBL DMCC held in RAKGT was transferred in the name of one Anurag Potdar but in fact, even after this, RAKGT is under the control of KRBL Ltd through Gupta and part of the proceeds of crime received in RAKGT were transferred to KRBL Limited." — PTI

‘Lawyers’ chambers meant for use of advocates; not to be sold’

New Delhi, Jan. 30: The Delhi high court has held that lawyers' chambers are meant for the use of advocates and those who have been allotted such rooms do not have the rights to sell or alienate them in any manner.

Justice Prathiba M. Singh said that transfer of rights in chambers was contrary to law and cannot be allowed.

The court directed the New Delhi Bar Association (NDBA) to place on record any specific rules or decisions relating to allotment and transfer of chambers between unknown and unrelated persons," the court said and listed the matter for hearing on March 19.

The direction came on an application by lawyer Kuldeep Kumar, seeking interim directions to

davit that it was following the high court rules for chamber allotment and transfer as claimed by it.

"The affidavit to be filed by the NDBA shall specifically state as to whether selling/transferring of rights in chambers is being permitted or not.

"The counsel (for NDBA) shall also file on record the rules which permit transfer of chambers between unknown and unrelated persons," the court said and listed the matter for hearing on March 19.

The direction came on an application by lawyer Kuldeep Kumar, seeking interim directions to

NDBA to produce certain documents which according to him are necessary for adjudication of his petition challenging rejection by the association of his request to transfer to him the chamber which had been allotted to his father.

In his petition, filed through advocate Tarun Chandio, Kumar has contended that after his father's demise when he sought transfer of the chamber to him as per the customary practice being followed by NDBA, his request was rejected in an "arbitrary, discriminatory and whimsical manner". — PTI

IN BRIEF

POCSO ORDERS
COST HC JUDGE
CONFIRMATION

New Delhi, Jan 30: The Supreme Court Collegium is understood to have withdrawn its approval to a proposal for the appointment of an additional judge of the Bombay High Court, Justice P.V. Ganediwala, as a permanent judge of the court following her two controversial verdicts in sexual assault cases.

The decision was taken after the judge faced flak for her interpretation of sexual assault under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, a source said.

Justice Pushpa Ganediwala recently acquitted a man accused of groping a 12-year-old girl's breast because he did not make skin-to-skin contact and days earlier, ruled that holding the hands of a five-year-old girl and unzipping the trousers do not amount to "sexual assault" under the POCSO Act.

On January 27, the Supreme Court stayed the Bombay High Court order acquitting the man after Attorney General K K Venugopal said the order would set a dangerous precedent. The collegium headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde, at a meeting held on January 20, had okayed the proposal for making Justice Ganediwala a permanent judge.

In two other judgments this month, Justice Ganediwala acquitted two men accused of raping minor girls after noting that the testimonies of the victims did not inspire confidence to fix criminal liability on the accused.

"No doubt the testimony of the prosecutrix (victim) is sufficient for conviction of the accused. However, the same ought to inspire confidence of this court. It ought to be of sterling quality," she said in one of the judgments.

Justice Pushpa Virendra Ganediwala was born on March 3, 1969 at Paratwada in Amravati district. She was a panel advocate for various banks and insurance companies and was also an honorary lecturer in various colleges of Amravati and gave lectures to the MBA and LLM students of the Amravati University. She was directly appointed as a district judge in 2007 and was elevated as an additional judge of the Bombay high court on February 13, 2019. — *PTI*

COURT REFUSES
BAIL TO PNB
SCAM ACCUSED

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, JAN. 30

A special court here on Saturday denied bail to retired bank official Gokulnath Shetty, a key conspirator and prime accused in the Punjab National Bank (PNB) scam case.

Special judge for cases under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) V C Barde rejected Shetty's bail plea. Mr Shetty, who is alleged to have played a key role in the ₹13,700-crore loan fraud while working as deputy manager at PNB's Brady House branch in Mumbai, was arrested in March 2018.

The scam came to light when jewellery firms of prime accused Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi approached the Brady Road branch of the PNB in January 2018, seeking Letters of Understanding (LoU) for payment to suppliers.

The bank realised that LoUs were being issued to these firms fraudulently for seven years by bypassing its core banking system, and Mr Shetty was allegedly instrumental in this.

LoU is a guarantee which is given by an issuing bank to Indian banks having branches abroad to grant short-term credit to an applicant. In case of default, the bank issuing the LoU has to pay the liability to the credit-giving bank along with accruing interest.

MP civic body dumps destitute on roadside

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, JAN 30

The Indore Municipal Corporation (IMC) has invited severe flak from all quarters for dumping homeless elderly destitute on the outskirts of the city late on Friday.

The hapless people, who appeared feeble and sick, were bundled out in a truck of the corporation and driven to Kishpra, on the outskirts of Indore city, to drop them on the roadside. Several videos capturing

the inhuman act of the civic body officials went viral forcing chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan to suspend deputy commissioner of the Corporation Pratap Singh Solanki and sack 2 contractual workers, Vishwas Vajpayee and Brajesh Lashkari, late on Friday night.

Videos shot by the locals showed the civic body officials pulling the homeless elderly people including a woman out of the truck and dropping them on a deserted place one after another. The locals had come to the



rescue of the destitute by forcing the municipality officials to put them back in the truck.

The elderly woman who appeared not even in a position to move, was seen being lifted out by 3 municipal workers and bundled out in the truck, in the video.

"We were shocked to see the civic body officials dropping the elderly people on the roadside. We confronted them and forced them to take the hapless people back", Rajesh Joshi, a local grocery shop owner, told this newspaper on Saturday.

He said the municipality workers tried to justify

their action saying that the destitute were making Indore dirty and had to be driven out of the city.

IMC commissioner Pratibha Pal described the incident as insensitive and said the guilty would not be spared.

Former chief minister and senior Congress leader Kamal Nath on Saturday described the incident as "shameful and insensitive".

Actor Sonu Sood, in a video message, offered to help to rehabilitate the homeless elderly destitute.

Tikait's appeal energised,
revived farmers' agitation

BKU leader has emerged as most powerful farm leader of the day



Bharatiya Kisan Union spokesperson Rakesh Tikait addresses farmers at Ghaziपुर border in New Delhi. — *PTI*

More and more Punjab farmers heading towards Delhi

Chandigarh, Jan. 30: After briefly appearing to be fizzling out following the Republic Day violence in Delhi, the farmers' stir against the agri laws on Saturday seemed to be reviving with more and more of farmers groups heading to the national capital from various parts of Punjab.

Various farmer leaders on Saturday claimed that with more and more

farmer groups marching towards Delhi, there would be a record gathering of peasants and farm labourers on the borders of the national capital by February 2.

Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) president Balbir Singh Rajewal said he expects a record gathering by February 2 at the border points of Delhi.

Farmers and farm labourers at some places

including Sangrur and Mohali in Punjab observed hunger strike in support of farmers' agitation on Saturday.

Protesting farmers even burnt effigies of the Centre at 400 places in 14 districts of Punjab against the new farm laws, demanding its repeal.

People from several areas are heading towards Delhi borders to

join the agitation, said Bharti Kisan Union (Ekta Ugrahan) general secretary Sukhdev Singh Kokrikalan on Saturday.

Our "jatha" (group) of at least 700-800 tractors will leave for the Tikri border protest site on Sunday, said Kokrikalan.

He said only those people who went for participating in the January 26 tractor parade came back. — *PTI*

gations of conspiracy and demanded a judicial probe into the violence, blaming infiltrators in the tractors' parade of the unrest.

To be named as an accused by the Delhi Police is perhaps strange for Tikait, who served as a head constable in the force but quit in 1992-93 when he had to deal with a farmers' agitation led by his father, the legendary Mahendra Singh Tikait. — *PTI*

FARM LAWS
WILL AFFECT
MSP: PAWAR

New Delhi, Jan. 30: Raising concerns over the three new farm laws, NCP president Sharad Pawar on Saturday said the legislation will adversely affect the Minimum Support Price (MSP) and weaken the mandi system.

Mr Sharad Pawar said that he virtually participated in the all-party meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in which issues related to the proposed agenda for the Budget session, farmers' agitation, women's bill and other important issues were discussed.

Mr Pawar said the new laws will adversely impact the MSP procurement infrastructure thereby weakening the mandi system. MSP mechanism has to be ensured and strengthened further, he added. — *PTI*

Covid: Over 37L
vaccinated so far

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN 30

With a fortnight over since the central government started the nation-wide immunisation drive against the coronavirus, Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan on Saturday held a review meeting with the state and union territory health secretaries to take stock of the progress.

Mr Bhushan urged States/UTs to increase percentage coverage of beneficiaries, increase and optimise sessions per day and start vaccinating frontline workers from the first week of February.

In the last 15 days, 37 lakh healthcare workers have been vaccinated across the country.

The Union health secretary also highlighted certain issues that need attention of the states/UTs to improve and accelerate the coverage. He pointed out that Covid-19 vaccine is available in sufficient quantity and technical glitches on CoWin have now been resolved.

"States/UTs were advised to ensure that regular review meetings of the state, district and Block Task Force were held to assess the emerging challenges, understand the ground issues and promptly address them at the appropriate levels," union health ministry officials said.

A comprehensive discussion of issues and feedback from the States and UTs was held during the review

meeting. It was pointed that there is a huge scope for improvement in the number of average vaccinations per session. The state Health Secretaries were asked to analyse the daily variation in the number of average vaccination and take the necessary steps to increase them. States/UTs were also asked to organise multiple simultaneous vaccination sessions per day wherever possible as this would substantially boost the number of vaccinations per day.

Drawing attention to the recent letter of the health ministry, the Union health secretary pointed out that a provisional digital vaccination certificate after the first dose and final certificate after completing the second dose is required to be issued. States/UTs were asked to take the necessary steps to ensure that the vaccination certificates are issued to all vaccinated beneficiaries before they exit the session.

He reiterated that validation of eligibility and verification of identity of a beneficiary is of utmost importance to ensure that only genuine and duly authenticated beneficiaries are vaccinated as per the priority group identified. In this regard, he said that since use of Aadhar for verification provides a most reliable authentication of beneficiaries, Aadhar based authentication must be the preferred mode of verification of beneficiaries prior to the vaccination.

Video shows men with
Sena logo waving guns

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, JAN. 30

Maharashtra Police on Saturday registered a case against some unidentified persons for brandishing guns on the Pune-Mumbai Expressway while attempting to clear the way for their vehicle. The case was registered in the Khopoli police station of Raigad and police said that further investigation regarding the case is underway.

The video of the incident has gone viral. AIMIM MP from Aurangabad Intiaz Jaleel also posted the video in his Twitter handle. He said the incident took place on Friday night and claimed that the two men belonged to the Shiv Sena's logo.

In the text posted along with the video, the MP said, "This is on Pune Mumbai expressway in Maharashtra! The logo on the vehicle says it all! Shiv Sainiks brandishing revolvers while trying to make way for their vehicle on Friday night. Can HM/DG take note of this lawless-ness!"

The video shows two men waving one gun each from the car window at a truck driver to clear way for their own vehicle. After a while, their car speeds away from the spot. The rear windshield of their vehicle could be seen carrying a sticker of a snarling tiger face, which is Shiv Sena's logo.

Mr Jaleel also tagged Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray's office, Home Minister Anil Deshmukh and the state director-general of police (DGP) in his tweet.

BJP leader, Ram Kadam also took to his Twitter handle and said, "Shiv Sena people are threatening people with revolvers on Mumbai-Pune Expressway and making a mockery of law and order." "Neither 'sadhus', nor common citizens are safe in the state" he added.

When asked about the incident, Shiv Sena's Lok Sabha MP from Mumbai South and party spokesperson Arvind Sawant said, "All are equal before the law. Police will investigate and take necessary steps."

ARMY PUBLIC SCHOOL
BB CANTT, BATWARA, SRINAGAR, J&K-190004
E-Mail: apssrinagarkmr@gmail.com, Website: www.apssrinagar.co.in

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

1. On behalf of Chairman APS Srinagar, **sealed tenders are hereby invited** from qualified and experienced firms by or before 10 February 2021 for supplying of 50 Red colour cushion chairs of Supreme quality to the school.

2. **Interested parties** to forward the rates alongwith details like Name of firm, GST/VAT No., permanent postal address, Mobile number and business profile. Firm/persons are requested to visit the school to see the sample of the chair before quoting the final rates. **For any query, please contact** on any working day during office hours on Phone No.: 0194-2468224.

Sd/-
Principal

Government of Jammu & Kashmir
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER MECHANICAL HOSPITAL AND CENTRAL HEATING DIVISION SRINAGAR
-----Telefax:- 0194-2468089, Email ID:- xennhchdd@yahoo.in-----

Gist of e-tender
NIT No: MHCHD/TS /2020-21/261/e-tendering
Dated: 29.01.2021

For and on behalf of the Lt. Governor of Jammu and Kashmir UT, e-tenders, valid for 180 days, are invited from the **Registered, reputed & experienced firms** as detailed in the NIT for below mentioned works:

Name of Work	Est. Cost (Rs. in Lacs)	Cost of T/Doc. (In rupees)	Time of completion (in Days)	AA Accorded Vide No.	TS No.
1	2	3	4	5	6
Dismantling of existing equipments inside old oxygen plant and re-orientation of the plant at SMHS Hospital, Srinagar.	5.40	500	05	MC/Plan/Aug/oxygen plant/1973-82, Dated: 05-09-2020	63 of 01/2021

1. **Downloading of Bids:-** The NIT Consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, specifications, Bill of quantities (B.O.Q), Set of terms and conditions of contract and other details can be seen from the departmental website www.jktenders.gov.in from 29.01.2021(08.00 hrs) and can be downloaded from 29.01.2021(18.00 hrs).

2. **Uploading:** The bidders shall deposit their bids in electronic format on the above web site from 30.01.2021(10.00 hrs) to 05.02.2021(16.00hrs) in two (02) covers.

3. **Opening of Bids:-** The bids received upto due date and time shall be opened on 06.02.2021at 14.00 hrs or any date convenient to the department in the office of Executive Engineer, MHCHD, Srinagar.

No: MHCHD/TS/ 9196-9201 Date :29-01-2021

Sd/-
Executive Engineer,
MHCHD, Srinagar

DIPK-124296 Dated 29-01-2021

SHORT TAKES

10 killed, 12 hurt in bus-truck collision

Moradabad, UP: At least 10 people were killed and around a dozen received injuries when a private bus collided with a truck on the Moradabad-Agra highway on Saturday morning owing to poor visibility due to dense fog, an official said. Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath has announced a financial assistance of ₹2 lakh for the kin of the deceased and ₹50,000 for those injured, district magistrate Rakesh Kumar Singh said. Top police and administration officials, including Mr Singh and senior superintendent of police Prabhakar Chaudhary have reached the spot. The accident took place at around 8 am near Manpur village under Kundarki police station area here, Mr Singh said. Rescue operation is underway and the injured have been admitted to a government hospital. — PTI

Sasikala will walk out of hospital today

Bengaluru: Expelled AIADMK leader V.K. Sasikala, undergoing treatment for Covid-19, would be discharged Sunday. "Sasikala Natarajan completed 10 days of treatment. She has been asymptomatic and maintaining saturation without oxygen for the past three days. As per protocol, she can be discharged from the hospital," Bangalore Medical College & Research Institute said in a bulletin.

BJD seeks passage of women's quota bill in Parl Session

New Delhi: The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) on Saturday demanded for the passage of the contentious Women's Reservation Bill in the ongoing Budget session of Parliament. The issues for the passage of the bill was raised by party representative Pinaki Misra at the all-party meeting convened by the government for the smooth conduct of the budget session that began on Friday. Mr Misra said Odisha Chief Minister and BJD supreme Naveen Patnaik had directed him to raise the issue of the passage of the bill. "BJD gave 7 out of 21 MP tickets to women in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, being the only political party to do so. Five of our women MPs won and so did 2 BJP MPs, so CM (Patnaik) is happy that Odisha is the only state in the country to have one third women MPs in LS," Mr Misra said. The BJD's demand for the passage of the bill was supported by the YSR Congress and Telangana Rashtra Samiti. Mr Misra said the BJD feels that the time has come when the Lok Sabha must pass the bill. The pathbreaking bill was first introduced in the Lok Sabha by the Deve Gowda government on September 12, 1996. Snatching of papers from presiding officers and ministers and scuffles became a familiar scene each time the bill made its way to parliament before it was aborted. — PTI

PM asks allies to respond...

■ **Continued from Page 1** Chirag Paswan-led LJP, which had earned the ire of the JD(U) during the Bihar Assembly polls for criticising its leader and chief minister Nitish Kumar and had contested the polls solo, did not attend the meeting due to Mr Paswan's health. Mr Paswan did not attend the all-party meeting chaired by the PM earlier during the day for the same reason. The JD(U) protested over reports that LJP was invited for the meeting.

On the Covid-19 issue, the Prime Minister, it was learnt, said that there was a perception that being a third world country how will India fight this global pandemic but India changed the perception through its fight against the pandemic and developing vaccine against it. The PM, sources said, told the NDA members that post-pandemic India will play a key role in the emerging new world order. "PM said this decade is a very important one, just like the decade after world war II, unlike earlier, we're not going to be a mute spectator, & we'll rise to the occasion based on our traditions and ideals of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam," Parliamentary Affairs minister, Pralhad Joshi said.

Not surprised, says Israel envoy on embassy blast

New Delhi, Jan. 30: A day after a blast outside its embassy here, Israel's ambassador to India Ron Malka said there are enough reasons to believe it was a terrorist attack but they are not surprised at the event as the alert level had been increased for past few weeks following intelligence inputs.

In an interview with PTI, he also said the investigations will look into all possible angles, including whether there are any links to the 2012 attack on Israeli diplomats here while events around the world are also being examined to find any related operations or activities at any destination.

"These attacks by those seeking destabilisation in the (West Asia) region cannot stop us or scare us. Our peace efforts will continue uninterrupted," he said when asked whether the attack was aimed at derailing Israel's peace efforts with various Arab countries.

He said Israeli authorities and the embassy are providing all assistance and every information Indian authorities probing the attack.

A low-intensity improvised explosive device(IED) went off near the Israeli Embassy in the heart of Delhi on Friday evening but no one was injured.

Some cars were damaged in the blast that occurred about 150 metres away from the Embassy in Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Road in the very high-security Lutyens' bungalow zone.

An envelope addressed to the Israeli Embassy and containing a note, purportedly linking the blast to Iran, was also found at the site of the blast.

Initial investigations



Ron Malka

revealed that the IED was planted in a flower pot on the median near Jindal House on A.P.J. Abdul Kalam road outside the Israeli embassy.

The blast took place when President Ram Nath Kovind, vice-president M. Venkaiah Naidu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi were present a few kilometres away at the Beating Retreat ceremony.

Besides, it coincided with the day when India and Israel marked the completion of the 29th anniversary of the establishment of their diplomatic relations.

Asked whether Israeli agencies will join the probe, Malka said a kind of cooperation and collaboration is taking place, but the probe is mostly being done by Indian authorities as it happened on Indian soil.

"But of course, whatever assistance we can provide, whatever we can share, we will do that," he said.

On the envelope recovered from the site hinting at a possible Iranian link, Malka said, "You need to understand that the investigation is still in early stages, so it is not appropriate to talk about anything that might harm the investigation."

He said it won't be fair for him to talk about any specific detail regarding the investigation or other inputs relating to the probe. — PTI

50 conned with fake job letters in UP govt hospital

Bareilly (UP), Jan. 30: An inquiry has been ordered after 50 youth were duped with fake appointment letters to posts at a government hospital here allegedly by the clerks posted in the chief medical officer's office and a district women's hospital, police said on Saturday.

Acting on a complaint given in this connection by the affected youth, an inquiry has been ordered by the district police chief.

About 50 youths have charged a clerk in the medical official's office here and three other staff in the women's hospital of taking Rs 3 lakh from each of them with the promise of securing jobs in a 300-bed hospital that was opened in 2019 in the district.

SSP Rohit Singh Sajwan said the issue is serious and the Circle Officer (Sadar) Dilip Kumar has been asked to probe it with further action to be initiated on the basis of the inquiry report.

In their written complaint to police, the youths alleged that the clerks told them in 2019 that recruit-

■ **WHEN THEY** reached the hospital for joining duty in September and October, officials told them that they were given fake appointment letters and no recruitment process was initiated

ment was open for the posts of supervisor, computer operator, lab technician, driver, ward boy among others on contract basis in the new hospital and that the appointment will be made by the Bareilly CMO.

They were told that they will get jobs if they give ₹5 lakh each for which they had paid an advance of ₹3 lakh each after which they were made to fill an application form.

Following a 'delay' in getting the appointment letters, the youths approached the clerk posted in the office, who allegedly issued fake appointment letters in March last year with the letterhead of Rashtriya Swasthya Mission (National Health Mission) with a fake signature and

stamp of the chief medical superintendent, they said. Later using the coronavirus pandemic and the lockdown that followed as a ruse, the youths were told that their jobs were shelved as the hospital had been turned into a Covid care centre.

When they raised the issue again in August last year, they were called to the district hospital for a medical test and given forged medical certificates with the stamp and signature of a senior official of the hospital.

When they reached the hospital for joining duty in September and October, officials told them that they were given fake appointment letters and also told that no recruitment process was initiated after the opening of the new hospital.

When the youths cornered the clerks, they allegedly promised to return the amount in two months time but none of the victims have got their money back till now, they further said in the complaint. — PTI

Offer on farm laws still stands, says PM Modi

■ **Continued from Page 1** Modi's remarks. The all-party meeting is convened for the government to put forth its legislative agenda before political parties. Leaders from various parties flag issues they wish to raise during the meeting. The Prime Minister also condemned the vandalism of Mahatma Gandhi's statue in California in the US, the parliamentary affairs minister said.

"The Prime Minister said the Centre's stand is same as it was on January 22, the last meeting between the protesting farmers and the Centre and proposal given by Agriculture Minister on the farm laws still stands. Modiji reiterated what

Tomarji had said - that he (Narendra Singh Tomar) is phone call away for talks," Mr Joshi said, quoting Mr Modi.

The all-party meeting is convened for the government to put forth its legislative agenda before political parties at the commencement of a parliamentary session. Leaders from various parties flag issues they wish to raise during the meeting.

At the meeting, various leaders including Ghulam Nabi Azad of Congress, Sudip Bandyopadhyay of Trinamul Congress, Balwinder Singh Bhunder of Shiromani Akali Dal and Vinayak Raut of Shiv Sena raised the issue of protesting farmers,

Maoists kill 2 villagers in Odisha

Suspected them of being police informers ■ Call local people not to allow children support cops

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, JAN. 30

Suspected Maoists, on Saturday, killed two villagers at Belaghara in Odisha's Kandhamal district on the suspicion of being police informers. The bodies of the deceased were recovered from two separate places—Bhandarangi and Guchagada.

The identities of the victims were not revealed by the police till this report was filed.

According to reports, the ultras abducted the two youths from their respec-

tive villages in the early hours on Saturday and hacked them to death. In posters found near the Bansadhara-Ghumusar-Nagabali division of the banned CPI (Maoist) claimed responsibility for the killings.

The rebels mentioned that the slain men had given inputs to the police about the Maoist hideouts in the district which led to the death of five members of the division in September 2020 in an encounter with the security personnel.

"We have complete

■ **MAOISTS ABDUCTED** two youths from their villages in the early hours of Saturday and hacked them to death. In posters found near the bodies of the deceased, the Bansadhara-Ghumusar-Nagabali division of the banned CPI(Maoist) claimed responsibility for the killings.

knowledge of all those who are providing inputs to the local police. All informers should surrender before the Jan Adalat in 15 days or else they too will suffer the same fate. Those who choose not to

surrender will be awarded the death penalty," the Maoists said.

It added that the Naveen Patnaik government, Odisha police director general (DG) Shri Abhay, and inspector general (IG-Intelligence) R.K. Sharma will be held responsible for the loss of lives.

In another poster, the Maoists requested the local people to "bring their children to the right path."

"The youths are being brainwashed and subsequently they are becoming informers. They should mend their ways instead of launching a revolt

against us," the poster stated.

On September 9, the Special Operation Group (SOG) along with the Kalahandi DVF launched a combing operation based on intelligence inputs regarding the presence of ultras in the Bhandarangi Sirki forest area on the Kalahandi-Kandhamal border.

In the gunfight, five Maoists were killed. Two members of Odisha police's SOG, Sudhir Kumar Tudu (28) of Mayurbhanj district and Debasis Sethi (27) of Angul, also lost their lives in the gunfight.

Maoists kill cop, lynch health worker in C'garh

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPLA, JAN. 30

Maoists shot a policeman in a market in Chhattisgarh's North Bastar district of Kanker on Saturday.

According to the Bastar police, a group of armed Maoists opened fire on police constable Sukluram Duggu when he was visiting the weekly market in Pratappur in the district. He died on the spot.

In another incident, ultras brutally killed an ambulance driver at Teknar in Chhattisgarh's South Bastar district of Narayanpur late on Friday.

The incident came to light, on Saturday, when the slain healthcare worker's brother, who was accompanying him in the ambulance, reached his village in the morning after escaping from the custody of the Maoists.

According to the Bastar police, the deceased, identified as Jairam Usendi, was returning to Teknar from Murga Bazar when

16 Naxals lay their arms in Dantewada

Dantewada: At least 16 Naxals, two of them carrying cash rewards on their heads, surrendered before police and CRPF officials in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district, an official said. The lower-rung cadres, who were active in Bacheli and Kirandul areas of the district, surrendered in Kirandul town, citing that they were impressed by the rehabilitation drive 'Lon Varratu' and disappointed with the "hollow" Maoist ideology. Dantewada superintendent of police Abhishek Pallava said. — PTI

Maoists intercepted his vehicle and dragged him out of it. They then attacked him with sharp weapons and sticks.

The rebels then abducted his brother, who managed to escape from their custody and reached his village. The police recovered the body of the slain healthcare worker.



BJP president J.P. Nadda at Meenakshi Amman Temple in Madurai on Saturday.

well, he said.

Be it projects like the defence corridor or allocation of funds for Tamil Nadu, the situation changed only after the BJP came to power at the Centre, he said.

Mr Nadda recalled that Mr Modi had quoted a couplet from "Tirukkural" to soldiers at Ladakh and also cited the Prime Minister's "Yaadum Oorey" reference of Tamil poet Kaniyan Poongundranar

in his speech at the United Nations General Assembly in 2019.

Dwelling on Tamil, he said the Tamil people had a unique combination of entrepreneurship, economic and cultural ethos.

The BJP top leader's Tamil pitch assumes significance Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had some days back alleged that the saffron party had no respect for Tamil language and culture. — PTI

NSG, NIA probe Israel mission blast

■ **Continued from Page 1** to take help of the locals to execute this plan. The day was well chosen as on that day agencies were busy tackling other events such as beating retreat and the focus of Delhi Police was on state borders.

Another source said that the forensic experts have also collected some samples from the crime scene that will ascertain the chemical composition used in the low-intensity improvised explosive device (IED).

Official sources said that the ball bearings seized from the spot were found scattered on the ground and the impact of the explosion was felt within a radius of 20-25 metres.

A half-burnt cloth and polythene bag recovered from the explosion site is also being examined by the authorised agencies.

Its link to the incident is yet to be ascertained.

Further, the cops are questioning few Iranians living in the national capital. The foreign nationals being questioned include those whose visas have expired.

Meanwhile, probe agencies are investigating the Telegram account from which the viral screenshot was sent that claimed an entity named Jaish-ul-Hind has taken responsibility of the explosion.

The Jaish-ul-Hind, an unknown organisation has claimed responsibility after a screenshot claiming to be from messaging service Telegram has gone viral on social media in which the yet unknown organisation is claiming to be behind the blast.

However, the cops reiterate that until any concrete evidence is found, it is difficult to say anything conclusively.

In its message, the Jaish-ul-Hind claims, "By the grace and help of Almighty Allah, soldiers of Jaish-ul-Hind were able to infiltrate a high security area in Delhi and carry out an IED attack. This Allah willing is beginning of a series of attacks that would target major Indian cities and pay back in kind to the atrocities committed by the Indian state. Wait and we are waiting too."

The minor blast took place on Friday evening in a high-security zone of the national capital. No one was injured. An envelope addressed to the Israeli embassy and containing a note was found at the site of the blast, sources said.

Initial investigations revealed that the IED was planted in a flowerpot on the median near Jindal

House on A.P.J. Abdul Kalam road outside the Israeli embassy, sources said on Friday.

The police has already registered a case while the National Investigation Agency is also likely to register a separate case.

A 10-member team from the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) had on Friday visited the blast site and collected residues that include metallic swab and ball bearings.

Delhi police commissioner S.N. Shrivastava too had visited the site in the evening and took stock of the situation.

The blast took place when President Ram Nath Kovind, vice-president M. Venkaiah Naidu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi were present a couple of kilometres away at the Beating Retreat ceremony.

Protesting farmers refuse to relent

■ **Continued from Page 1** after the immense outrage over violence by protesters during their Republic Day tractor rally. The farmer leaders sat on the dais during the fast, as crowds of supporters swelled, especially in Ghazipur where the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) is leading the protest. "The farmers have fought this battle for over two months now and they won't relent or retreat," said Rakesh Tikait, the BKU spokesperson.

Till now, the agitation was seen as mainly being led by Punjab-based farmer unions. A multitude of green-and-white caps, symbolic of the unions spearheading the battle, union flags and the tricolour, planted on tractors dotted the highway. On various tractors and camps, photos of legendary farmer leaders such as Chaudhary Charan Singh and Mahendra Singh Tikait were put up.

Several Opposition parties, including the Congress, TMC AAP, RLD and the Left, have openly supported the stir. Abhimanyu Kohar, a senior member of Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), said that the ongoing agitation

would gain strength, as farmers in large numbers will join them in the coming days.

Farmer leader Balbir Singh Rajewal, president of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (Rajewal), said in Chandigarh that he expected a record gathering by February 2 at the border points of Delhi.

"People in large numbers from Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand are reaching the protest sites. Possibly by February 2, there will again be a record gathering of people at the protest sites," he said, adding that the agitation would remain peaceful.

Mr Rajewal also criticised the Haryana government for suspending Internet services. He accused the Centre of instilling a sense of fear among people by showing pictures of the "unfortunate incidents", apparently referring to the January 26 violence in the national capital.

Mr Rajewal appealed to those joining the agitation at Delhi's borders to keep the protest peaceful. "It is our responsibility to keep the agitation peaceful," he stressed. To a question on

joining the investigation following notices issued by the Delhi Police to farmer leaders in connection with the Republic Day violence, Mr Rajewal said, "We will send them a reply."

The Delhi Police has issued the notices to around 20 farmer leaders, including Mr Rajewal, over the violence during the farmers' tractor parade, asking why legal action should not be taken against them.

A team of forensic experts on Saturday visited the Red Fort, where the protesters had indulged in vandalism, hoisted a religious flag and attacked the police personnel, to collect evidence. The Delhi police examining dump data of mobile calls, registration numbers of tractors in probe into January 26 violations said that it had received 1,700 video clips, CCTV footage from public related to tractor rally violence.

The police had on Friday used tear gas and baton charge to break up a clash between farmers and a large group of men who claimed to be local residents at the Singhu border. The Delhi Traffic Police said that the movement on the National

Highway 24 (Delhi-Meerut Expressway) has been stopped.

Thousands of farmers have been protesting at Delhi's borders with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, demanding a rollback of the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.

The protesting farmers have expressed apprehension that these laws would pave the way for the dismantling of the minimum support price (MSP) system, leaving them at the "mercy" of big corporations.

Meanwhile, the Delhi Police filed an FIR of criminal conspiracy, under IPC Sections 153, 504, 505 (1)(b) against Shashi Tharoor, journalists-Rajdeep Sardesai, Mrinal Pande, Paresh Nath, Editor in chief of Caravan, Anant Nath, Managing Editor of Caravan & Vinod K. Jose, Executive Editor of Caravan.

THE ASIAN AGE

31 JANUARY 2021



Sharon Lowen

Off the beaten track

A view from the Covid cocoon

Over the past many months, we all have travelled farther inside ourselves than outside, contemplating our inner worlds as we stare with wide-eyed trepidation at the world we see through our screens. For those of us with no need to leave home to care for society or put *dal/roti* on the tables for our families, we can ricochet between the anxiety of personal privations and the guilt of knowing how much worse it is for too many or we can value and explore the new opportunities from home.

Zoom fatigue may have dimmed some enthusiasm for this kind of communication, but I remember when it took hours to get an exorbitantly expensive “Lightning call” through in our pre-fibre optic days (God bless Sam Pitroda!). Today, I can read stories and show the illustrations to my grandson in Singapore and celebrate in real time the joys of daily events with family near and far. When letters took two weeks to arrive, it’s really quite fabulous that we have WhatsApp, Google, Zoom, Instagram, FB, etc., to connect. And you don’t need to let them overwhelm you either. My incoming social media is all muted except for my daughter’s and I check the rest very intermittently. Occasionally, I do miss something time-bound, but not enough to be addicted to checking.

Being at home meant I had to face teaching online. I’ve avoided this for years, despite requests, as it seemed too challenging logistically and of doubtful success. The other day, I asked one of my online classes what they discovered as the best thing about being a homebody. Unanimously, they chimed in: “Being able to take Odissi classes!” These students include teachers, an astro-physicist, European language interpreters, professional Odissi dancers and my teenage GOI scholarship holder, among others. They are spared the expense and hardships of travelling to India from London, San Paolo, Atlanta, San Francisco, Vilnius, Berlin, Pune, Bhubaneswar and even Delhi as they simply flip open their laptops to immerse themselves in a world of metaphysical beauty. Whether my own choreographies or those of my guru, Padmavibhusan Kelucharan Mohapatra, teaching online also means each session is easily recorded and uploaded to an unlisted YouTube playlist for indefinite review, reference; it even allows dancers with scheduling conflicts never to miss a class.

Home time does mean more consuming of news, which can lead to “Doom scrolling”, not to mention being led down rabbit holes by social media. Anything I watch on YouTube leads to their algorithm only showing me more of the same; sometimes, I find myself watching repeats of US Senate hearings! Easy to see how QAnon and other bizarre conspiracy groups hypnotise the unwary. One advantage we have in India is the print media. Newspapers are still holding their own here, and they give us the opportunity to learn something not pre-selected for us by AI. I like to start my daily newspaper reading with the *Asian Age*, since it’s the only paper that has a front page showing news I’m interested in rather than ads I’m definitely not. (Sponsor disclaimer: I’d say this even if *Asian Age* wasn’t the sponsor of this column!)

Perhaps, I’m being a bit churlish about YouTube not helping find diverse content; in the months before I finally turned on the TV and succumbed to Netflix, I watched a super selection of historical documentaries and listened to free audio books. *Sapiens* had been sitting on the shelf for ages unopened, but it was an easy listen. So was the *Trilogy of Immortals of Meluha*, *Dune* and finally winding down to binging on pure brain candy Agatha Christie and Sherlock Holmes. Besides the world-from-home of YouTube, podcasts are great windows into offbeat and amazing subjects, especially for extending the time spent on long walks socially distancing in parks or gardens.

You may not have the “library bug” or the “curse of the collector” but if you are older than a millennial you probably have actual photographs stuffed in drawers or shoeboxes. It took months into being at home to confront this and suddenly the fog cleared and the organisational sun came out! The inspiration came from an idea to scan my daughter’s childhood photos for a digital birthday gift album as I couldn’t easily give a physical present. Unsurprisingly, opening the trunk of filled with long unseen Rama Color small plastic photo albums was a rediscovery and I decided to keep going beyond the albums and sort through loose photos after the this start. Instead of making more albums, which would mean taking up unavailable space and lessen the ability to scan if needed, I streamlined the process with labelling manila folders. Magically, miscellaneous buried sources revealed photos I’d forgotten (and really would have loved to use in my two last books!) Chhau and Manipuri were separated from Odissi; Family and Friends subdivided, Students, Other Odissi dancers, Other dance artists’ lec-dems, Fest of India-USA with Guruji, Contact sheets, Dance related, all these specific-to-me files created. Family photos can sectioned into Birthdays (by name), Diwali (over the years), Vacations (by name) and *voila*, you can easily find and revisit all the memories you valued enough to photograph with a glance at the folder headings.

What about DVDs? Do you have some you love and some you are done with? Do you have DVDs copied from VHS tapes or other formats? I may not be ready to ditch all of them yet, but I know I’m less inclined to put them in a DVD player and soon Windows will join Mac in not bothering to include this hardware. No time like the present home time to confront this. It was liberating to throw out the old *Pilates for You* and *AM PM Yoga* and Jane Fonda DVDs. I periodically give batches of age-appropriate DVDs to the teenage children of staff to enjoy on their laptops and get English practice between online classes. I plan to also give away audio CDs of Indian and Western classical and folk music. If you are an interested NGO, let me know. Calling the Blind School is on my to-do list.

A major long pending home project has been going through stacks of DVDs of archival dance performances and family events copied from VHS and Video-8. I upload, edit and put on my non-monetised YouTube channel to share precious videos of my guru, other dancers, and even rehearsals and lec-dems that might be of interest to *rasikas*. Family and many of my performances I upload as unlisted, so I have free cloud storage and personal histories needn’t disappear in the trash with DVDs in the not-too-distant future.

Staying at home has been easy, considering what a dear friend said years ago “A better class of problems”. We need awareness and commitment to help those in need and make our personal lemons into lemonade.

Sharon Lowen is an eminent exponent of Odissi, Manipuri and Mayurbhanj and Seraikella Chau. She can be contacted at manasa.art.without.frontiers@gmail.com.

Subhani



A ‘new deal’ for India is the call of the hour



Manish Tewari

State of the Union

India is facing its worst economic crisis since 1991. It is in now in the 37th month of relentless regression in GDP growth. The fourth consecutive year of decline so far. The country is officially in a recession with the economy having contracted by 7.5 per cent in the second quarter. It was down by 23.9 per cent in the first quarter of the current fiscal.

Much before Covid-19, a Chinese export, ravaged the world, the Indian economy was already in a downward spiral. The ill-conceived demonetisation on November 8, 2016, rocked the economy off its haunches. It was followed by a shoddily implemented Goods and Service Tax (GST) regime. The four fundamentals, namely, savings, consumption, investment and employment were already under stress. Nothing evidences it more than the fact that, in the first six months of the 2019-20 fiscal (H-1), financial flows to the commercial sector were down by a whopping 88 per cent. According to RBI data flow of funds from banks and non-banks to the commercial sector was ₹90,995 crore between April and September 2019-20 as against ₹7,36,087 for the corresponding period in the preceding year.

Then came the ill-conceived lockdown of March 23, 2020. All that it succeeded in doing was further flattening the economy rather than the disease curve. The total number of Covid-19 infections in India today stands at 10.7 million out of 101 million worldwide. That translates into 10.59 per cent of the total infections globally. While it is correct that the infection rate is on the decline in India so is it in a large number of other Asian geographies that did not subject their populations to the draconian lockdown imposed by the NDA/BJP

government.

However, if the Economic Survey tabled by the finance minister on January 29 in Parliament is anything to go by, the government strategy seems to be “blame all the economic ills on the damn Covid” and then pat yourself on the back claiming that we are the white knights in shining armour who have prevented millions of deaths from taking place. This simply is not true. If India has survived through the horrific once-in-a-century pandemic, it is primarily because the immunity of Indians generally seems to be more robust than their western counterparts. Why so? The jury remains out on that.

The 11 per cent GDP growth prediction for the next fiscal in the Economic Survey is also misleading. From a low base of -7.7 per cent this year it would really translate into a GDP growth rate of only 3.3 per cent next year.

The government’s much touted stimulus package has simply not worked. The monetary part of the 20 lakh-crore package was about 3.5 lakh crores that works out to 1.75 per cent of the GDP only. Going by publicly available figures, revenues of the Union government decreased by about 18 per cent or ₹1,81,372 crore between the April and November of 2020 over the corresponding period the previous year. This was because of the virtual cessation of economic activity on account of the lockdown and its aftermath. What is, however, bewildering is that the total spend of the Union government went up by a paltry ₹86,301 crore. A marginal 4.6 per cent increase barely keeping up with inflation. What this translates into is that the NDA/BJP dispensation reduced its expenditure in real terms during the most

critical phase of the health and economic pandemic.

With the government abstaining from delivering significant income support to business establishments, livelihoods were hit with MSME earnings taking the hardest knock. The third quarter of fiscal 2020-21 is anticipated to finish with job numbers at 385 million a 2.5 per cent drop from the 405 million employed in the corresponding quarter of the previous year as per CMIE data. MSME units account for 45 per cent of the total manufacturing in the country.

There is widespread rural distress in the country as revealed by the 38.79 per cent jump in demand for employment figures under MNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act between April and September 2020 over the corresponding figure last year. The employment demand by persons between April 1 to September 12, 2020, was 22,49,07,004 as compared to 16,20,38,372 for the same period in 2019. These figures were given in a written response to the Lok Sabha by the Union agriculture minister on September 15 last year. Close to 12 crore people have sought work under MNREGA in 2020-21 till now, the optimum level since the Act was promulgated. In the preceding two months alone 3.5 crore people have sought work under this programme. What V shaped recovery is the government talking about?

Where does India go from here. It needs a “New Deal” just like the one President Roosevelt crafted to get the United States out of the great depression in 1929-1939. The American New Deal was a series of massive federally-funded infrastructure and upgradation

Where does India go from here. It needs a ‘New Deal’ just like the one President Roosevelt crafted to get the United States out of the great depression in 1929-1939.

projects across the US targeted at creating fresh employment avenues for people and earnings for small and large business establishments.

Our new deal must push demand by both putting money both into the economy and directly into the hands of the people.

However, there are certain essential pre-requisites for any new initiative to succeed. There can be no substantive economic recovery without restoring social cohesion. For money is a coward and goes to the safest harbour and not where there is planned and orchestrated social strife with the anti-conversion laws being its latest manifestation. This is a non-sequitor if India needs to attract any degree of foreign investment, especially in long-term infrastructure projects. The government must repeal the farm laws to restore tranquility in the countryside for it is bad optics to have lakhs of farmers camping out in the cold braving Covid-19 and protesting for months to an end against the government. Incidentally, agriculture was the only sector that held up in the past year. A tribute to the resilience of our farmers.

Resuscitating the economy sustainably in the short term would require enhanced government outlays especially for developing additional public goods coupled with a sustainable plan for robust employment generation. For India can ill afford a nine per cent plus unemployment rate that it is currently experiencing. For that the FRBM limits must be stretched. This not the time for fiscal conservatism. Finally, the government must transfer cash directly to the deprived and vulnerable at the base of the economic pyramid. This would not only help in keeping their body and soul together but also boost demand. If there was ever a time to think out of the box, it is now.

The author is a lawyer, Member of Parliament and former Union information and broadcasting minister. The views expressed are personal.
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LETTERS RED HERRING

A low-intensity blast took place near the Israeli embassy in New Delhi around 5 pm on Friday, coinciding with the anniversary of India and Israel establishing full diplomatic relations on January 29, 1992. No one was injured, but windows of three cars were damaged. The Delhi Police handed over the probe to its anti-terror unit. An FIR was registered. The bomb was a crude Improvised Explosive Device. Observers, however, believe that it is a tactic by “locals” egged on by Sangh Parivar to divert attention from the BJP’s virtual defeat at the hands of the farmers and spread canards about a Khalistan angle to the stir.

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

HIKE DEPOSIT RATES

PETROL AND diesel prices are going to touch Rs 100 a litre. The automobile industry is increasing prices of cars and two-wheelers. The prices of almost all commodities have gone up post lockdown. Only one thing is going down constantly, and that is the interest on fixed deposits and that on savings bank accounts. After a lockdown, the rate of interest on deposits has come down by 30 per cent and settled at around six per cent per annum. The worst sufferers are senior citizens retired from private jobs, who depend upon only the interest on their bank fixed deposits. The finance ministry must look into this and raise the bank interest rates on deposits.

J. Vijay Kumar
Secunderabad

SECOND CHANCE

KUDOS TO the Tamil Nadu cricket team, led by Dinesh Karthik, for entering the finals of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy for the second consecutive time. No doubt, most of our players are on a roll, winning all the seven games. But they should not be complacent against Baroda, who stormed to the finals. We sincerely hope that Karthik and his boys would not repeat their mistakes of the 2019-20 season, when they lost the finals to Karnataka by just one run. We wish TN the best during their finals on Sunday.

N. Mahadevan
Chennai

GO FOR SHROUDING

MANY FAMILIES have now discovered new, and yet old, ways to honour their loved ones in how the body is buried. One option becoming more widespread in recent years is shrouding. Shrouding is simple, eco-friendly and relatively affordable. Some faiths require it, while others simply prefer the aesthetics of it. Some families are looking for a budget-friendly option, and of course, many people have concerns about the environment. Depending on the cemetery and your personal preferences, a shrouded body can be placed directly into the ground or perhaps buried in a simple pine coffin or a biodegradable willow basket. Shrouds also forgo the use of metal, chemical finishes, or other non-biodegradable products. For these reasons and many more, the idea of a natural burial with a body wrapped in a simple shroud is appealing to many families.

Jubel D’Cruz
Mumbai

Aakar Patel



Modi’s eighth Budget looms, there’s still no ‘grand vision’

This will be the Narendra Modi government’s eighth Budget. We are told that the gross domestic product of goods and services in the coming financial year, meaning from April 2021 to March 2022, will be 11 per cent more than it was in the period between April 2020 and March 2021.

The Economic Survey last year had said that growth would be six per cent in the current year. It turned out to be minus 7.7 per cent instead.

In the coming year the government will again get the chance to claim that India is the “fastest growing economy” because from the minus numbers we will have modest growth of about 2.2 per cent over two years, between 2019 and 2022. This shift from negative to positive will come with the illusion that there is record shattering growth, which is simply bogus. The government also said this week that in 2019-20 growth, which it had earlier said was 4.2 per cent, was actually four per cent. This is the actual trajectory on which we are today. Indeed, it is lower than that, but let us leave that for now.

The point is that this is Prime Minister Modi’s eighth Budget. Can we discern, whether we are Modi haters or Modi *bhaktis*, any idea of a grand narrative or a master plan? The fact is that we cannot. We have, in the words of a friend who was responding to Mr Modi’s national security policy, “some catchphrases, acronyms and advertise-able phrases strung together”. Who remembers Make in India? This came with a superb logo of a lion striding boldly forward and a series of events. The logic of Make in India was that India was overly reliant on services, which while it contributed well over half of GDP only contributed 25 per cent to employment. By increasing the share of manufacturing, we would have more employment in the formal sector.

Well, manufacturing’s share of GDP since the launch of Make in India has actually gone down from 15 per cent to 14 per cent, and possibly now 13 per cent after the Covid-19 pandemic. Unemployment has naturally followed the opposite trajectory, going from about four per cent before Mr Modi

became PM to six per cent, and then nine per cent. And this figure is not really accurate because we are at the lowest historical labour force participation rate. This means that the number of people who have no job and are not looking for work, having given up hope, is at the historical highest.

This is the despondency that is resulting in mass movements all over the country, as we are seeing in the current time. To return to the original point, eight Budgets is a lot. It is more than P.V. Narasimha Rao, the great reformer, got. It is as many, more or less, as Atal Behari Vajpayee, who was seen as the great liberaliser, got. People may not remember that the Jan Sangh, under Vajpayee, once promised to cap the salaries of all Indians at ₹2,000 and said the government would take all income that came over that (the details of this are in my last book *Our Hindu Rashtra*). Vajpayee had also said his party would force Indians to build homes only on 1,000 square yards of land or less.

From such a socialist position, the same Vajpayee headed a government

that was the most privatisation-oriented of any that came before it. His 2004 campaign was headlined “India Shining” because he believed his economic policies were strong enough and distinct enough for him to run on them. He lost the election, but it was not because he was wrong about his policies. They were of course quite remarkable. Can we say the same about what has happened to India since 2014?

Mr Modi’s first Niti Aayog head was a man who has spent his entire life saying open and unrestricted free trade was the only way for a nation to quickly grow its economy. That man, Arvind Panagariya, was left to lament over today’s policy, which is the opposite of free trade. Atmanirbharta means import substitution, which in turn means cheaper foreign imports are taxed at high rates so that Indian companies can sell to Indians at higher prices. Is this good economics? Mr Panagariya says no, but this is what we are now doing, a 180 degree turn from where Mr Modi had started.

Eight Budgets is sufficient time, more than sufficient, to at least be able to

establish a grand narrative. This is where India was, and this is where we are headed, and this is how we will do it. Nobody today, including those inside the government, can fill in the blanks of this sentence. This is not because the policy and narrative are too complicated to describe. It is because there is no grand policy. It is being made up and shifted and changed and even reversed as we go along.

There is the conviction that THIS particular Budget will be the “game changer” that India has always waited for. That is what you will hear again after Nirmala Sitharaman presents a speech that will prove to be meaningless and numbers that will show themselves to be wildly off the mark.

But we will continue bumbling in this fashion, not mindful of what has happened over the last eight Budgets. We will allow this nation’s economy to be governed not by competence and demonstrable numbers but by charisma and charlatanny.

The writer is a senior journalist and columnist

SHORT TAKES

CHINA'S 1st NUKE REACTOR BEGINS OPERATIONS

Beijing, Jan. 30: China National Nuclear Corp. said its first nuclear power unit that uses Hualong One, a third-generation nuclear reactor, started commercial operations on Saturday.

The reactor, located in the city of Fuqing city in China's southeastern Fujian province, was designed to have a 60-year lifespan, with its core equipment domestically produced. Each unit of the Hualong No. 1 has a capacity of 1.161 million kilowatts and can meet the annual domestic electricity demand of 1 million people in moderately developed countries, according to China National Nuclear Corp, or CNNC.

"With Hualong One online, China is now at the forefront of third-generation nuclear technology in the world, alongside countries like the United States, France and Russia," said CNNC President Yu Jianfeng.

MYANMAR ARMY EASES COUP FEARS

Yangon, Jan. 30: Myanmar's military on Saturday vowed to abide by the country's constitution, in an apparent backtracking after its commander-in-chief spurred fears of a coup when he suggested the charter could be repealed.

The army has for weeks alleged widespread irregularities in November's election, won in a landslide by Aung San Suu Kyi's ruling National League for Democracy (NLD). Tensions were ramped up Tuesday when a military spokesman refused to rule out the possibility of a coup.

A day later, army chief General Min Aung Hlaing — arguably the most powerful person in Myanmar — said revoking the 2008 junta-scripted constitution could be "necessary" under certain circumstances. His comments — translated into English and published in the army-run Myawady newspaper — sent shockwaves through the nascent democracy, which is only a decade out of the grips of a 49-year military dictatorship.

WOMAN HIDES CORPSE FOR 10 YEARS IN JAPAN

Tokyo, Jan. 30: A Japanese woman who said she hid her mother's corpse in a freezer in her apartment for a decade told police she feared eviction if the death was discovered, media reported Saturday.

Police said that Yumi Yoshino, 48, was held "on suspicion of abandoning and hiding a female body" found Wednesday in a freezer in a Tokyo apartment. Yoshino said after finding her mother dead 10 years ago, she hid the body because she "didn't want to move out" of the home they shared, local media reported, citing unnamed police sources.

The mother, thought to have been aged around 60 at the time of her death, was named on the lease of the apartment in a municipal housing complex, Kyoto News said. Yoshino had been forced to leave the apartment in mid-January after missing rent payments, according to the reports, and a cleaner then discovered the body in a freezer hidden in a closet.

'ROYAL PURPLE' DYE FOUND FROM KING DAVID'S ERA

Jerusalem, Jan. 30: Israeli researchers said they had found scraps of fabric coloured with a purple dye dating from the eras of King David and King Solomon in the south of the country.

"The researchers were surprised to find remnants of woven fabric, a tassel and fibres of wool dyed with royal purple," the Israel Antiquities Authority, Tel Aviv University and Bar Ilan University said.

The discovery happened while they were examining coloured textiles from Timna Valley, an ancient copper production district, they said in a joint statement this week.

"Direct radiocarbon dating confirms that the finds date from approximately 1000 BCE, corresponding to the biblical monarchies of David and Solomon in Jerusalem," they said. It was the first time purple-dyed Iron Age textiles had been found in Israel or the Levant, they added. The colour was associated with royalty, nobility and priests and the dye "often cost more than gold", said Naama Sukenik.

EU squeezes vaccine exports

UK slams bloc for invoking emergency clause in its Brexit deal

Biden warns inaction over \$1.9 tn aid will cost dearly

Washington, Jan. 30: President Joe Biden is warning of a steep and growing "cost of inaction" on his \$1.9 trillion Covid relief plan as the White House searched for "creative" ways to win public support for a package that is getting a cold shoulder from Senate Republicans.

In the age of Covid, it's not as simple as jumping on a plane to travel the country and try to gin up a groundswell.

And at a time of deep polarisation, Biden may struggle to convince Republican voters of the urgency when Congress already has approved \$4 trillion in aid, including \$900 billion last month.

Biden signaled on Friday for the first time that he's willing to move ahead without Republicans. "I support passing Covid relief" with support from Republicans if we can get it," he told reporters. "But the Covid relief has to

pass. No ifs, ands or buts."

His message so far has been that a fresh \$1.9 trillion in aid would be a bargain compared to the potential damage to the world's largest economy if it doesn't pass.

An aggressive push for vaccinations and gener-

exporting company based in the EU will first have to submit their plans to national authorities.

The UK and Northern Ireland governments immediately lashed out at the move, saying the bloc invoked an emergency clause in its divorce deal with Britain to introducing controls on exports to Northern Ireland.

Goods are supposed to flow freely between the EU and Northern Ireland under special arrangements for the UK region designed to protect the peace process on the island of Ireland. — AP



President Joe Biden speaks with the Director of Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Col. Andrew Barr, and Command Master Chief Randy Swanson as he arrives at the medical center in Bethesda, Maryland. — AFP

ous aid to individuals would help put parents back to work and let children return to school and improve their lifetime earnings, Biden said at a Friday meeting with Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen in the Oval Office. — AP

The leader of the loyalist Democratic Unionist Party has long been critical of the protocol which allows Northern Ireland to follow EU customs rules and avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland. — AFP

Macron says AZ vaccine 'ineffective' for over-65s

Paris, Jan. 30: French President Emmanuel Macron said on Friday that AstraZeneca's Coronavirus vaccine appeared not to be effective for people over 65 years of age.

Speaking to reporters only hours before the European Medicines Agency (EMA) recommended the vaccine for

adults of all ages, Macron said there was "very little information" available for the vaccine developed by the British-Swedish company and Oxford University. "Today we think that it is quasi-ineffective for people over 65," he told the reporters, his office confirmed.

"What I can tell you offi-

cially today is that the early results we have are not encouraging for 60 to 65-year-old people concerning AstraZeneca," he said. Macron said he was awaiting the EMA's verdict — which came later Friday — and also that of France's own health authority "because they have the numbers". — AFP

WHO experts get Wuhan propaganda tour

Wuhan, Jan. 30: A team of WHO experts investigating the origins of the Coronavirus toured a propaganda exhibition celebrating China's recovery from the pandemic in Wuhan on Saturday, after a meeting at the hospital that treated the first confirmed Covid-19 cases over a year ago.

Details of the trip have been scant so far, with the media kept at arm's length and information on the itinerary dribbling out via tweets from the World Health Organisation experts instead of China's tight-lipped Communist authorities.

The group was driven to the Jinyintan Hospital, the first to receive officially diagnosed Covid-19 patients in late 2019, as the horrors of the virus emerged in the central Chinese city.

In a tweet, team member Peter Daszak welcomed the hospital visit as an "Important opportunity to talk directly w/ medics who were on the ground at that critical time fighting Covid!". On Saturday afternoon, the team visited a cavernous exhibition that applauds the emergency response of Wuhan health authorities in the chaotic, terrifying early stages of the outbreak — as well as the agility of the Communist leadership in controlling a crisis without precedent.

The WHO mission comes with heavy political baggage — China refused the team access until mid-



Members of the World Health Organisation (WHO) team investigating the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic arrive to visit a museum exhibition about China's fight against Covid-19 in Wuhan, China's central Hubei province on Saturday. — AFP

January and there are question marks over what the experts can hope to find a year after the virus first emerged.

On Friday, the WHO's emergencies director Michael Ryan sought to manage expectations.

Success "is not measured necessarily in absolutely finding a source on the first mission", he told a press conference in Geneva.

"This is a complicated

business, but what we need to do is gather all of the data... and come to an assessment as to how much more we know about the origins of the disease and what further studies may be needed to elucidate that." Last week, China warned the United States against "political interference" during the trip, after the White House demanded a "robust and clear" investigation.

The WHO insists the probe will stick tightly to the science behind how the virus jumped from animals — believed to be bats — to humans.

The team is also expected to visit the market believed to have seen the first major cluster of infections, as well as the Wuhan Institute of Virology and other labs, in what the WHO's Ryan described as a "very busy, busy schedule".

Beijing is desperate to

defang criticism of its handling of the chaotic early stages of the outbreak.

It has refocused attention at home — and abroad — on its handling of and recovery from the outbreak.

Since seeping beyond China's borders, the pandemic has ripped across the world, killing more than two million people and wrecking economies.

— AFP

Biden admin sees Quad as base for Indo-Pacific plan

Washington, Jan. 30: The new Biden administration sees the Quad grouping, comprising the US, India, Japan and Australia as a fundamental foundation upon which to build a substantial American policy in the strategically-vital Indo-Pacific region, a top US official has said.

National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said at an event organised by the US Institute of Peace, a Congress-funded think-tank, on Friday that the US will build on and carry forward the four-nation Quad grouping.

"One very positive thing we will be building on, (former NSA) Robert (O'Brien) mentioned the Quad, which for those watching who don't know is the United States, Japan, Australia, and India," Sullivan said.

"There too I think we really want to carry forward and build on that format, that mechanism which we see as fundamental a foundation upon which to build substantial American policy in the Indo-Pacific region," he said.

Quad and the Indo-Pacific policy of the previous Trump administration are one of the few policies that the Biden administration has said it will continue to build on, besides the Abraham Accords, Sullivan said.

"Those are in two different theaters in the world and two initiatives that you will see continuity and an effort to reinforce and carry forward steps that have been taken by the previous administration," he said.

"When the first Accords with the UAE, Bahrain were announced, it was in the heat of a political campaign, a presidential campaign, and then candidate Biden made no bones about coming out saying: 'I think this is a good thing. I think this is a positive thing'," he said. Biden said consistently over the course of the last several months that he would like to carry forward this initiative, deepen the cooperation between the countries that have signed the accords, make

INDIA SLAMS VANDALISATION OF GANDHI STATUE IN U.S.

Washington/New Delhi, Jan. 30: Unknown miscreants have vandalised, broken and ripped from the base a statue of Mahatma Gandhi in a park in the US state of California, evoking a strong response from India which sought a thorough investigation and appropriate action against those responsible for the "despicable act."

The 6-ft tall, 650-pound (294 kg) bronze statue of Gandhi, in the Central Park of the City of Davis in Northern California, appeared to have been sawed off at the ankles and half its face was severed and missing, local Davis Enterprise daily reported.

The vandalised statue of Mahatma Gandhi was found by a park employee in the early hours of morning of January 27, the police said. The statue is being removed and will be stored in a safe place until it can be evaluated, said Davis City councilman Lucas Frerichs. — PTI

real normalisation that has taken root and add more countries, he said.

"He (Biden) sees that as being positive for security in the region, positive for economic development, in the region, and positive for America's national interest for many of the reasons that Robert laid out,"

Sullivan said. "So, one of the things that we will be doing in the coming weeks and months is thinking about how we make sure that the seeds that have now been planted actually grow into the full kind of cooperation across multiple dimensions and these relationships can move forward and how that can really help the United States advance our interests," he said. — PTI

Navalny's brother under home arrest

Moscow, Jan. 30: The brother and aides of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny were placed under house arrest on Friday ahead of new rallies, as Russian authorities warned that protesters could face charges of taking part in "mass unrest".

Moscow police also announced that on Sunday, when the fresh protests are planned, movement in the centre of the Russian capital would be limited and seven central metro stations closed.

Kremlin critics say authorities are dramatically ramping up pressure on the opposition in an effort to intimidate protesters and smother dissent.

Navalny's plight and the increasing crackdown on dissent in Russia has sparked an outcry in the West, and the UN Security Council is set to meet informally on Wednesday to discuss

Navalny, diplomats said. Navalny's team has urged new protests, suggesting residents of Moscow gather on Sunday in Lubyanka Square outside the headquarters of the FSB security agency and Staraya Square, where the presidential administration has its offices.

On Friday, Navalny's brother Oleg, prominent aide Lyubov Sobol and Pussy Riot activist Maria Alyokhina were placed under house arrest until March 23 for allegedly violating restrictions related to the Coronavirus pandemic by calling for people to join protests.

The coordinator of Navalny's Moscow office, Oleg Stepanov, and Anastasia Vasilyeva, head of the medical workers' union critical of the government, were also placed under house arrest for two months. — AFP

BOTTOM LINE

China will provide 500,000 doses of coronavirus vaccines to Pakistan by January 31

Pak to send special plane to China to get Covid jab

Dubai blamed for virus spread

Islamabad, Jan. 30: Pakistan will send a special plane to China on Sunday to bring back the first batch of the 500,000 doses of Covid-19 vaccine that Beijing has promised to provide to its close ally.

The National Command and Operation Center (NCOC), during a meeting here on the strategy of vaccine administration, said on Saturday that the country is geared up for the vaccination programme.

The forum was apprised

that a special plane will fly to China tomorrow (Sunday) for transportation of the first tranche of vaccine, according to a statement from the NCOC.

The move comes after Pakistan foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi on January 21, following a call with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, had announced that China will provide 500,000 doses of Covid-19 vaccines to Pakistan by January 31.

He said that Beijing had asked Islamabad to send

an airplane to get the vaccines.

Pakistan has approved two foreign anti-Covid vaccines as of now, including the Chinese Sinopharm Covid-19 vaccine, for emergency use in the country.

All necessary measures have been put in place for vaccine storage at Islamabad and distribute the vaccine to various federating units particularly to Sindh and Balochistan provinces, the statement said.

The vaccine nerve centre

has been established at the NCOC with provincial and district level vaccine administration across the country for vaccination in a systematic manner, it said.

Pakistan plans to provide vaccines to frontline health workers and elderly people in the first phase.

Meanwhile, a senior Pakistan minister said that the country would get up to 17 million doses of anti-coronavirus vaccine in the first half of this year. — PTI

Dubai, Jan. 30: After opening itself to New Year's revelers, Dubai is now being blamed by several countries for spreading the Coronavirus abroad, even as questions swirl about the city-state's ability to handle reported record spikes in virus cases.

The government's Dubai Media Office says the sheikhdom is doing all it can to handle the pandem-

ic, though it has repeatedly declined to answer questions from The Associated Press about its hospital capacity.

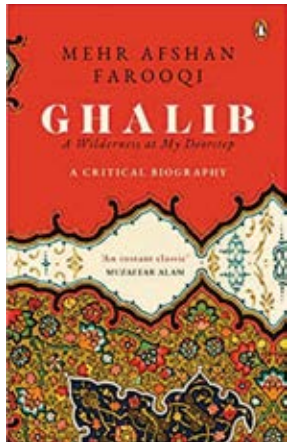
"After a year of managing the pandemic, we can confidently say the current situation is under control and we have our plans to surge any capacity in the health care system should a need arise," it said. However, Nasser al-

Shaikh, Dubai's former finance chief, offered a different assessment on Thursday on Twitter and asked authorities to take control of a spiraling caseload.

"The leadership bases its decisions on recommendations from the team, the wrong recommendations which put human souls in danger and negatively affect our society," he wrote. — AP

INDIAN TOP 10
BESTSELLERS

NON-FICTION

1 **GHALIB: A WILDERNESS AT MY DOORSTEP: A CRITICAL BIOGRAPHY**
Mehr Afshan Farooqi
Allen Lane, ₹7992 **THE BATTLE OF BELONGING**
Shashi Tharoor
Aleph, ₹7993 **THE PRESIDENTIAL YEARS 2012-2017**
Pranab Mukherjee
Rupa, ₹6954 **A PROMISED LAND**
Barack Obama
Penguin Viking, ₹1,9995 **INDIAN ECONOMY'S GREATEST CRISIS**
Arun Kumar,
Penguin Portfolio, ₹4996 **VAJPAYEE: THE YEARS THAT CHANGED INDIA**
Shakti Sinha
Penguin Vintage
₹5997 **REMNANTS OF A SEPARATION**
Aanchal Malhotra
HarperCollins
₹5998 **JUGALBANDI: THE BJP BEFORE MODI**
Vinay Sitapati
Penguin Viking, ₹7999 **THE TALE OF THE HORSE: A HISTORY OF INDIA ON HORSEBACK**
Yashaswini Chandra
Pan Macmillan, ₹69910 **THE KHALISTAN CONSPIRACY**
G.B.S. Sidhu,
HarperCollins
₹599

FICTION

1 **SHUGGIE BAIN**
Douglas Stuart
Picador, ₹4992 **THE DISCOMFORT OF EVENING**
Marieke Lucas Rijneveld
Faber & Faber, ₹4993 **THE LAST QUEEN**
Chitra Banerjee
Divakaruni
HarperCollins, ₹5994 **A TIME FOR MERCY**
John Grisham
Hodder & Stoughton
₹6995 **WRITERS & LOVERS**
Lily King
Picador, ₹6996 **HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT**
Jeffrey Archer,
Pan Macmillan, ₹4507 **HAMNET**
Maggie O' Farrell
Tinder Press, ₹6998 **THE ARCHER**
Paulo Coelho
Penguin Viking
₹2509 **WHAT THE BODY REMEMBERS**
Shauna Singh Baldwin
Tara- India Research
Press, ₹59910 **DAYLIGHT**
David Baldacci
Pan Macmillan
₹650

Bahrison, New Delhi

Mukherjee: A status quoist in the culminating analysis



Anand K. Sahay

review

One may quarrel with the ideas of prominent political figures even when these are published only after their death in keeping with the embargo they placed on their writing being made public. But this does not seem necessary in the case of the late Pranab Mukherjee, whose long career in politics — during much of which he held high executive positions — was capped by his elevation to the office of President (2012-17). The reason is that he takes few unexpected turns. The Constitution is his rulebook and guide, and on the whole he shows himself to be a fairly traditional interpreter of that basic document of the republic he served in so many capacities. At any rate, he shows himself in this book as one who shies away from causing a flutter.

In this volume, the last of five he wrote while being in Rashtrapati Bhavan, criticisms are made in elliptical fashion, and in the end no offence is really meant to be caused. The name of the game is stability at all costs, and this is where the former President may be thought of as being at his most fragile.

Mukherjee's presidential years saw India being convulsed by actions of violent civilian gangs in all parts of the country. These non-state actors

appeared to have the blessing of state actors. In his capacity as Rashtrapati, Mukherjee did indeed express sorrow at these grotesque happenings that mauled the spirit of the Constitution. Yet, in *The Presidential Years* there is no reference to this disturbing phenomenon which, in the reading of careful observers in India and around the world, has placed this country on a slippery path.

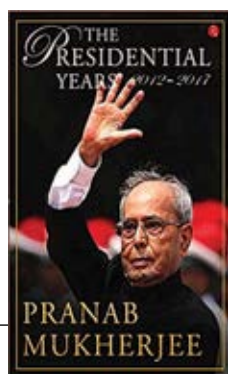
There is "an attempt on my part to place before the readers the functions and duties, and the challenges that I encountered, during my tenure as President," says the protagonist. But in the writing he has gone well beyond his presidency. There are references, for instance, to Balakot, the so-called surgical strike against Pakistan, and to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's return to power in 2019 with a bigger majority than in 2014. And yet, there is no mention of the author's visit to the RSS headquarters in Nagpur in June 2018, eleven months after he demitted office as President, although that event caused agonised debate in the country and his own daughter, who is with the Congress Party, was left criticising her father. This would seem a calculated omission.

Nor is there a reference to the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution in August 2019, which has shaken not just

Kashmir but India, and is inarguably a hard-to-ford watershed in the life of the making of India as a republic with the consent of all her people. Did the publishers impose a cut-off date on the author? We shall never know. The introduction, which is in the nature of a preface, is left undated.

The last part of the book, in patches, may elicit the interest even of the discerning reader, as when the author speaks of the India-US-Japan "axis". Since there is no elaboration, it is hard to say if this was unintended or is an example of a Freudian slip. There are also some interesting tidbits here, as when President Barack Obama, in New Delhi as the chief guest for Republic Day in 2015, confounded President Mukherjee with his extempore rendering of the latter's career which was so inaccurate that it made Mukherjee gasp.

The former Indian president also recalls his visit to China



By **PRANAB MUKHERJEE**
Rupa
₹695

when, at the banquet, President Xi Jinping made the Indian head of state lecture him for one whole hour on India's constitution and its functioning and the Chinese interpreter was kept away, except when the visiting dignitary spoke of the boundary question!

The affair made then foreign secretary (now external affairs minister) S. Jaishankar sweat. If the story speaks of Mr Xi's shrewdness, Mukherjee is silent on whether he probed the Chinese boss-man in turn. At any rate, in the book the former president's rendering of our foreign policy approach seems anodyne. There is an absence of both nuance and gravitas considering that the author was once external affairs minister and played a long hand as cabinet minister with four Prime Ministers.

The early chapters make for dour reading, although there are some interesting reflections. At the start one may even detect some wistfulness that Congress chief Sonia Gandhi did not name Mukherjee Prime Minister, though this is not made quite explicit.

Says the author, "Some members of the Congress have theorised that, had I become the PM in 2004, the party might have averted the 2014 Lok Sabha drubbing. Though I don't subscribe to this view, I do believe that the party's leadership lost political focus after my elevation as president." In the same short section, he contradictorily notes, "I firmly believe that my presence in active politics would have ensured that the Congress wouldn't have faced the drubbing it received in the 2014 general elections."

There is perhaps just one major bold assertion in the

book, and it's at the beginning. If the Lok Sabha election in 2014 had thrown up a hung Parliament, and even if the Congress had emerged "with fewer seats (than the first party) but promised a stable government, I would have invited the leader of the party to form the government, keeping in mind their previous track record in managing coalition governments successfully."

And Mukherjee goes on to say with frankness, "This would have been in contravention of the convention established by the former president, Shankar Dayal Sharma, of inviting the single-largest party to form the government. He had invited Vajpayee to form the government after a hung House in 1996, despite lack of clarity on Vajpayee's numbers. I was convinced even before the 2014 elections that I would not be neutral between stability and instability."

The level of the book would have been lifted if there were more glimpses of candour and clearly enunciated assessments in place of routine descriptions of institutional plodding. Forays into colonial history with references to the early 19th century Subsidiary Alliance and mid-19th century Doctrine of Lapse in the context of the conceptual emergence of the idea of federalism in India are clearly out of place. The editors have been less than alert in overlooking slips such as the year of Afghanistan joining SAARC. All said and done, though, the book will hold a place, being the reflection of one of modern India's most experienced politicians who held nearly every top job in the country except that of Prime Minister.

‘Chick lit’ that loses plot after promising start



Aditi Sriram

review

Richa S. Mukherjee's third novel, *Excess Baggage*, opens with suspense, sarcasm, and a mother-daughter squabble. The book's cover and opening pages hint at a light read: two opinionated women who can't stop arguing, who vacation in London where they... can't stop arguing. If the book's underlying message is that mothers and daughters are inseparable while irreconcilable, many readers will surely relate.

The mother and daughter here are Smitta, an enterprising clothes designer, and Anviksha, a trained anthropologist. Smitta has raised Anviksha as a single mother and Anviksha has just divorced her second husband. At first glance, these two protagonists have potential.

Anviksha decides that she needs a change of scene after divorce number two, and books a trip to London. Her mother insists on accompanying her. They argue about this, and finally, Anviksha gives in. *Excess Baggage* is the story of Anviksha's no-longer-solo trip, now laden with her mother's personality and demands, not to mention her own emotional baggage. Mukherjee has set up an exciting opportunity for these two characters. Her readers are primed for a comedy of errors and surprises in London.

But this is where the book stops delivering. In



By **RICHA S. MUKHERJEE**
HarperCollins India
₹299

spite of a promising set up, and some genuinely funny lines throughout the book, *Excess Baggage* deflates after the characters begin their one-month vacation. Anviksha insists that her trip, although inspired by the 2011 Bollywood movie *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara*, will not mimic it. But many scenes seem straight out of a movie. Smitta's food-stuffed suitcase is stopped at customs in airport; the crisis ends with her distributing homemade laxatives to stern British officials. A few days later, Anviksha finds that her mother has gathered several Indian men at their lodgings, for a swayamwar. In another scene, Smitta ends up in the middle of a flashmob, leading the group in bhanga moves. The duo even spends a weekend in Amsterdam, where they bump into Anviksha's estranged father at a strip club. Each of these scenes is short and often humorous, but they either begin or end with an argument. And while mother-daughter clashes are inevitable, Mukherjee denies either character any space on the page to reflect, reconcile, or properly recover. Their disagreements become boring and repetitive, rather than advance the plot.

Mukherjee's choice of London is also overwhelming. While *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* actually utilises its different settings to evoke exciting new cultures, Smitta and Anviksha are mentally trapped in India. Smitta prefers her own snacks to eating out; Anviksha spends more time chatting with her friends back in Mumbai, than interacting with the city. In fact, their exposure to British life is surprisingly limited. Even though they are staying with Anviksha's cousin Preeti, Anviksha does not explore the city with her, or meet any of her friends. Instead, they attend Preeti's British boyfriend's teenage brother's birthday party, wasting pages on stereotypical dialogues between garrulous Indian aunts and buttoned up Britishers.

Anviksha is supposedly an anthropologist, but doesn't ever act on those instincts. She visits tourist sites in London, scoffs at her mother's memories of Partition, and writes off her two brief marriages without any introspection. If readers hope to experience a foreign city, or family tensions, through an expert on human behaviour, they will be disappointed.

"Chick Lit" in India, written in English, is at least 20 years old. But Mukherjee's latest work seems neither experimental nor substantial. *Excess Baggage* is trying to be many things at once, which ends up sounding more confused than comical. If you want to vicariously enjoy a trip abroad, follow Anviksha's idea and watch *ZNMD* instead.

Aditi Sriram teaches writing at Ashoka University and has authored *Beyond the Boulevards: A Short Biography of Pondicherry* (2019)

‘Aladdin’s Cave’: Of mysterious booksellers and unfamiliar riches



Sridhar Balan

review

There are some books that you get so caught up with reading, even lose a bit of your self, that you are reluctant for it to come to an end. So you savour it slowly, relishing every page and occasionally reminiscing, as book lovers are prone to do. *The Bookseller's Tale* is one such book and the only reason its reading was completed, was because the deadline for its review was approaching.

Generally, when we write about some aspect of publishing, we tend to look at publishers, editors, authors, even printers, but rarely booksellers. Booksellers, so inte-

gral to the trade, are the more commercial or 'business' part of publishing. While many of them may have interesting anecdotes to relate, they are so much caught up in the day-to-day business that they have no time to spare.

One exception was Ram Advani (1920-2016) the legendary *nawabi* bookseller of Hazratganj, Lucknow. Ram, along with Shanbagh of the famous Strand Book Stall in Mumbai, constitutes two very pre-eminent bookmen in India and we deserve a fuller account of their lives. It has always been my great pity that in all the years I knew Ram (he

would have turned a hundred years last year), I never got him to reflect a little more full on his life and put down his reminiscences. I did broach the topic to him on more than one occasion but he always waved it away with a deprecatory wave — "who would be interested in my life?" I had to content myself with a chapter on him in my book.

Ram would have loved *The Bookseller's Tale*. He would have seen a bit of himself, too, in some of the pages. More importantly, he would have stocked some copies in his bookshop and with his usual skills, sold a few in spite of its price.

Martin Latham is not the typical bookseller. Currently the manager of the Waterstones bookshop in Canterbury, he has a PhD in Indian History from the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. His supervisor was Peter

Marshall whose works on India Ram used to stock. Everywhere in the book we see evidence of Latham's academic training. The book is a virtual "tour de force" of book history, of legendary booksellers and peddlars, of margin-



By **MARTIN LATHAM**
Penguin Random House, ₹699

alia and scribbles which have a history of their own, of comfort books, of book collectors and libraries, of book-selling histories even amidst adversity in Paris, Venice and England and, above all, of reading. The book is a testament to the power and to the joy of reading. The book was 10 years in the making and in his introduction Latham begins with an account of a book that has not moved a centimetre in 800 years! It is on the tomb of Eleanor of Aquitaine in Fontevraud Abbey, near Poitiers. "Her turbulent life is all behind her; as she lies in deep repose, holding up an open Bible. She rests as we all do in bed when, finished with talking or tea, we become one with a book, lost in a private world. Curled up with a book, we continue to find new selves. The story of humanity's love affair with books is, one of our strangest tales."

Self-effacing as he is, Latham's own career and his involvement with books only comes at the end of book. His career, too, as with most people in publishing begins more as a chance rather than by design.

Stuck in a part-time History lecturer's job (paid only for contact hours), Latham spots a sign in Slaney and McKay, a new bookshop in Chelsea advertising for staff. Interviewed by Sally Slaney, Latham gets the job and realises he has stumbled on a vocation.

What follows is a fantastic career in bookselling meeting personalities like Dirk Bogarde, Francis Bacon, Spike Mulligan, Umberto Eco and Antonia Fraser, Seamus Heaney, and Ted Hughes, all of whom gave talks at the various bookshops in which he worked. Finally, Latham joins the Waterstones group, a chain store started by Tim

Waterstone, and after a spell at Waterstones' Kensington and Cheltenham branches, sets up the Waterstones Canterbury branch in 1990.

Years later, the shop expands to four floors with a stock of 35,000 books and Latham asks Tim to inaugurate it. Tim goes around the refurbished shop but says that it does not quite have "that old Aladdin's Cave feeling". Determined to find a fabled treasure in the bookshop, Latham discovers an old Roman bath under the floor, just behind the History section. He uses the "petty-cash" from the till to dig up the floor and excavate the bath, a significant archaeological find. He is now one with history.

The writer is a senior publishing industry professional who has worked with OUP and has been a senior consultant with Ratna Sagar Books

SHORT TAKES

Marin eyes World Tour Finals title

Bangkok: Reigning Olympic champion Carolina Marin was unstoppable on Saturday, clinching a spot in badminton's World Tour Finals after quickly dispatching Thai player Pornpawee Chochuwong in a 21-13, 21-13 game.

The delayed 2020 season finale, which began Wednesday, is the third tournament behind closed doors in three weeks in Bangkok, as badminton resumes after months of coronavirus cancellations. The Spaniard — winner of back-to-back titles for the past fortnight — is gunning for a hat-trick of victories in Sunday's finals.

Her opponent, 13th-ranked Pornpawee, has performed better than expected in the World Tour. She beat her personal idol, Thai star Ratchanok Intanon, and top-ranked Tai Tzu-ying during the round-robin stage earlier this week. But the 23-year-old was no match against the more experienced Marin, who praised Pornpawee's play but admitted that three straight weeks of badminton was wearing on her. — *AFP*

Bops ties up with Ben for Oz Open

Melbourne: Indian tennis star Rohan Bopanna's search to look for a partner for the men's doubles competition at the Australian Open ended on Saturday as he tied up with Japan's Ben McLachlan for the season's first Grand Slam. Bopanna had originally paired with Joao Sousa but the Portuguese contracted coronavirus, forcing them to pull out. Bopanna, who served a 14-day hard quarantine after arriving in Melbourne on January 16, informed that Ben and he were in the same boat. "I got lucky there. Unfortunately Ben's partner Raven Klassen had to pull out and Ben was looking for a partner, so we finally decided to commit and sign up together. I am looking forward to see how it goes. Definitely was not easy to find partners, happy to have found one," Bopanna said. — *PTI*

Gill rules Day 1 of Coimbatore Rally

Coimbatore: Indian rally driver Gaurav Gill stole the show on opening day of the Rally of Coimbatore, Round 3 of the FMSCI Indian National Rally Championship, here on Saturday. Gill along with his JK Tyre co-driver Musa Sherif, who is on the hunt for a record seventh national title, started from where he left in Arunachal and opened up a comfortable lead in the first two stages of the day itself. Gill drove cautiously henceforth and made sure to bring his car home in the remaining stages to go atop the chart after four stages with a total time of 58.41.8 minutes. "It was a good day to rally. My strategy worked out perfectly and after pushing it to the limit initially, I dropped down pace to avoid any mishaps," Gill said. MRF Tyre driver Bikku Babu and his co-driver Bonny Thomas was equally impressive on a day that was filled with DNF's and drove his Volkswagen Polo with precision to clock a total time of 01:00:19.5 hours to take the second position on the overall standing.

Live on TV

BADMINTON

BWF World Tour Finals: Tournament Final from 11.30 am on Star Sports 2 HD, Star Sports 3

CRICKET

Big Bash League: Knockout from 1.45 pm on Sony Six, HD

Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20: Final — Tamil Nadu vs Baroda from 6.55 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Hyderabad vs Chennaiyin from 4.50 pm; Mohun Bagan vs Kerala Blasters from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

English Premier League: Chelsea vs Burnley from 5.30 pm; Leicester vs Leeds United from 7.30 pm; West Ham vs Liverpool from 10 pm; Brighton vs Tottenham Hotspur from 12.45 am (Monday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

Italian League: Spezia vs Udinese from 5 pm; Atalanta vs Lazio from 7.30 pm; Napoli vs Parma from 10.30 pm; Roma vs Verona from 1.15 am (Monday) on Sony Ten 2

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FULL OF JOSH

Buttler says Stokes, Archer are X-factor players against India

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR
CHENNAI, JAN. 30

England must still be wondering how they lost the last Test they played here in December 2016. The visitors had a head start and made 477 in the first innings but still ended up losing by an innings! India's massive first essay of 759/7d — their highest in Test history — outwitted England on a batting paradise.

Four years on, Jos Buttler remembers the record-breaking Test for the invaluable lessons it taught them. "It was a great education of what is a big total in India and having the right mindset and application to build such innings," said Buttler who is on the cusp of playing his 50th Test.

Buttler who is set to take over wicket-keeping duty in the absence of Jonny Bairstow said having the hunger to score a big total is important in subcontinental conditions.

"In England, when the ball swings around and seams, a 300-run first innings total can be quite handy. But in India, a good first innings score would be 600-650. The realisation of that as a batting side is important. Joe Root was a great example of that in Sri Lanka. With a double hundred and a superb knock of 180, he showed us the way recently," said the 30-year-old.

The trio of Ben Stokes, Jofra Archer and Rory Burns, who had missed the Lanka tour and reached Chennai earlier than the rest of the squad, had a two-hour training session at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium on Saturday.

Buttler said tearaway



England batting coach Graham Thorpe (from left), players Ben Stokes and Jofra Archer at a training session in Chennai on Saturday.

— *ECB*

pacer Archer is definitely an X-factor player in the big series against India. "It's fantastic to have him back into the side. I am sure he would be excited to play his part in the big series. We have a few others who can do quite amazing things with the ball. James Anderson and Stuart Broad are two of the best to play this game. Stokes is another X-factor player for us," said Buttler.

The swashbuckling wicket-keeper batsman believes their IPL experience will hold them in a good stead. "If you haven't faced someone like Jasprit Bumrah, who has a bit of unique action, it can be a bit of a problem. It takes some time getting used to his angles. So, certainly, those who have played in the IPL, know what to expect. Also, the IPL gives you familiarity with the wickets."

ENGLAND CLEAR SECOND COVID TEST

Chennai, Jan. 30: Premier all-rounder Ben Stokes, pacer Jofra Archer and reserve opener Rory Burns on Saturday had their first training session at the Chepauk after successfully completing six days of hard quarantine, while other members of the squad cleared their second Covid-19 test.

The trio had reached India earlier than their colleagues and having already cleared their three RT-PCR tests could hit the nets on Saturday.

"The first group of players — Archer, Burns and Stokes — will practice each morning for the next three days. They are limited to a two-hour session," England's media manager Danny Reuben informed.

"The entire England touring party received their second PCR Covid-19 test yesterday. All results returned negative results," he added.

The full England squad is scheduled to start their training from February 2.

— *PTI*

BCCI SECRETARY SHAH ELECTED AS ACC PRESIDENT

New Delhi, Jan. 30: BCCI secretary Jay Shah was unanimously elected as the president of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) at its Annual General Meeting (AGM) on Saturday, a development hailed by his colleagues in India.

The 32-year-old replaces Bangladesh Cricket Board chief Najmul Hasan Papon.

While addressing the AGM, Shah said: "Formed with a view to organise, develop and promote the sport in the region, the ACC has steadily grown in stature."

"The ACC continues to foster healthy rivalry among some of the biggest cricket playing nations while it also takes the sport deeper into the smaller pockets. We must remain committed to this cause and ensure there is an all-round development in the region," he added. Shah said the challenge facing the cricket boards at the moment is resumption of women's and age-group cricket.

The AGM was held virtually due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

— *PTI*

DOMESTIC | CRICKET

No Ranji for first time in 87 years

New Delhi, Jan. 30: The BCCI will not be conducting its premier first-class domestic tournament Ranji Trophy for the first time in 87 years as the parent body opted for the Vijay Hazare Trophy as per the wishes of majority of the state units.

The BCCI will also host the U-19 National One Day tournament for the Vinoo Mankad Trophy and the Women's national 50-over tournament as per a letter sent by BCCI secretary Jay Shah to the state units.

While BCCI president Sourav Ganguly and secretary Shah were keen to have the blue riband tournament that pays the maximum match fee (₹1.5 lakh per game approx) for the players, it is understood that a two-month long bio-bubble even for a truncated two-phased Ranji Trophy in times of the Covid-19 pandemic wasn't feasible.

"I am extremely happy to inform you that we are going to conduct the Senior Women's One Day tournament simultaneously with the Vijay Hazare Trophy and follow it up with Vinoo Mankad Trophy Under-19. This has been decided after having received your feedback on the domestic season 2020-21," Shah wrote a letter to state units.

It is understood that BCCI will probably follow the same groupings and bio-bubble for the Hazare Trophy that will start next

month. **● The BCCI during its AGM had decided that players will be compensated in case there is a truncated season and with players missing out on Ranji Trophy match fees.**

The BCCI during its AGM had decided that players will be compensated in case there is a truncated season and with players missing out on Ranji Trophy match fees, treasurer Arun Dhimal clarified that the premier domestic cricketers of the country will be taken care of financially.

Agreeing with his secretary's view, Dhimal said that the decision to cancel Ranji Trophy this season was taken after taking every stakeholder into confidence.

"We took feedback from the players, selection committee, state associations. It was felt that 2020 is already gone and rather than having two Ranji events in the same calendar year, it is better to go for white-ball cricket," Dhimal said.

"That way we could have something for junior cricket and women considering the importance of Women's World Cup and U-19 World Cup next year."

— *PTI*

FORMIDABLE TN FAVOURITE AGAINST BUOYANT BARODA

Ahmedabad, Jan. 30: A formidable Tamil Nadu team with oodles of experience in its rank and file will have a head-start over an unheralded Baroda which shrugged off the off-field controversies to set up a promising grand finale of the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 tournament on Sunday.

The Tamil Nadu side with right blend of youth and experience under Dinesh Karthik, has hardly looked in any sort of trouble since their group stage encounters with dominating victories while chasing.

Baroda, under their battle-hardened stand-in captain Kedar Devdhar, had won some one-sided matches but also a cliff-hanger against Haryana in the quarter-final where Vishnu Solanki hit a last-ball helicopter shot to win the match.

Baroda's performance is more praiseworthy after their premier batsman Deepak Hooda stormed out after his differences with skipper Krunal Pandya, who also had to leave after his father's death.

— *PTI*

Mir hat-trick gifts Huesca second win

Barcelona, Jan. 30: Forward Rafa Mir scored a hat-trick to lead last-placed Huesca to a much-needed 3-1 victory at Valladolid in the Spanish league.

Mir, who is at Huesca on loan from Wolverhampton, ended a four-game scoreless slump for the modest team from northeast Spain when he headed in a cross from Pablo Maffeo in the 37th minute on Friday.

Mir doubled his tally in the 50th when he used nice control to pull in a lobbed ball from Maffeo. He held off two defenders before poking the ball past goalkeeper Jordi Masip.

Mir helped to create his third goal in the 57th when he headed on a long ball to Dani Escriche, charged forward, and fired the return pass from Escriche just inside the post.

Mir leads his team with six goals in the league. Huesca remained bottom of the table after just their second win in 21 rounds.

Toni Villa scored Valladolid's consolation goal in stoppage time.

Valladolid were left in 16th place, two points above the relegation zone.

TORINO DRAW WITH 9-MAN FIORENTINA

In Turin, relegation-threatened Torino conjured a last-gasp goal from Andrea Belotti to draw with nine-man Fiorentina 1-1 at home in Serie A.

Belotti slid in at the far post to redirect a cross from Simone Verdi in the 88th minute, after Franck Ribery (68 minute) scored from a tight angle for Fiorentina on Friday.

— *AP*

KOHLI STEADY AT 4TH, PUJARA RISES TO SIXTH

Dubai, Jan. 30: Virat Kohli remained the highest-placed Indian batsman at fourth position even as Cheteshwar Pujara rose a rung to sixth in the latest ICC Test rankings issued on Saturday.

Apart from Kohli (862) and Pujara (760), Test vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane (748) is the other Indian batsman in the top-10, hanging on to the eighth spot. Pujara moved up one place to sixth, while Rishabh Pant and star opener Rohit Sharma remained static on the 13th and 18th spots respectively.

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson (919) continued to lead the batting charts, with the Australian duo of Steve Smith (891) and Marnus Labuschagne (878) rounding up the top three while England skipper Joe Root (823) retained the fifth spot.

Among the bowlers, veteran spinner R. Ashwin (760) and pace ace Jasprit Bumrah (757) retained their eighth and ninth spots respectively. — *PTI*

Oz players critical about Langer's coaching style

Melbourne, Jan. 30: Australia head coach Justin Langer's intense "micro-management" coaching style has apparently not gone down well with a lot of players even as the former opener termed the insinuations as something that "couldn't be further from truth".

The fissures in the Australian camp have come out in the open after an under-strength India came back from behind to beat Australia 2-1 in their own den.

According to a report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* quoting multiple sources close to the Australian set-up, some players are apparently not happy with Langer's management style because of his intensity and mood swings.

The report suggested that Langer is no longer able to cope up with demands of being a three-format coach.

"Dressing room sources say that over a gruelling summer, Langer's management



Justin Langer

style wore thin with some players, who on top of having to live in a bubble for months on end say they have become drained by his intensity and mood swings.

"...Some senior players are frustrated at the atmosphere in the team being brought down by the coach's shifting emotions and what they see as too much micro-management. They say that has extended to bowlers being bombarded with statistics and instruc-

tions about where to bowl at lunch breaks including during the final Test against India at the Gabba," the report further read.

Langer, however, refuted the claims that his relationship with players had soured.

"It's actually the opposite of what happens. I never talk about statistics to the bowlers, ever. I don't go to any of the bowlers' meetings. That's what the bowlers' coach is meant to be doing," he said. — *PTI*

India should not be overconfident facing England



Ayaz Memon
Over The Top

After the splendid successes of both teams in recent weeks, the Test series between India and England promises to be a blockbuster. In these hard times for sport — life in fact — cricket couldn't have had it better.

India's memorable triumph in the riveting contest against Australia has inspired a revisionist perspective about the five-day format. If players live up to reputation in the forthcoming series, Test cricket

— under so much pressure in the past few decades — would get a mighty boost.

How do the two teams square up?

Playing home at home should ordinarily give India a distinct advantage. The last time England came here, they were licked 0-4 by Virat Kohli's team. But it would be folly to believe that such performance can be easily replicated. In fact, on recent form, England could be a very difficult side to beat.

What's different now, and where's the threat coming from?

While India's extraordinary performance against Australia has been widely and justifiably extolled, England's 2-0 sweep against Sri Lanka, while lacking similar melodramatic impact, should not be obscured.

Sri Lanka are not the force they were 8-10 years back, but even so remain a difficult side to beat on home pitches. England managed this with aplomb, and in a fantastic show of all-round strength.

Pace and spin bowlers alike picked up wickets aplenty. The batting was not a whit behind, with Joe Root in outstanding form, and getting good support from Bairstow, Butler, Lawrence on spiteful

tracks.

Beating Sri Lanka was the primary objective, of course, but from England's point of view, these two Tests were also preparation in getting used to pitches and climate in the sub-continent for the stiffer challenge against India. In this, Root's team ticked all boxes.

I've mentioned about India beating England 4-0 in 2016 but go back four years further and history offers another perspective when the shoe was on the other boot when M.S. Dhoni's strong team lost the Test series 1-2 in spite of winning the first match of the series.

England then had come well prepared, getting the right mix of talent and experience to excel in

Indian conditions. Cook and Pietersen batted brilliantly, Panesar, Swann and Anderson showed scintillating bowling form. Not anticipating overseas spinners or batsmen to do better than their own on the slow turners, India were left bewildered and beaten.

Kohli and Shastri need to ensure that their players are not lulled into believing that the upcoming series is already in their pocket. Overconfidence is always accompanied with peril.

How the series unravels remains to be seen, but some contests within the mother contest are crucial and could have a large bearing on the outcome. Anderson, Broad, Archer, Stokes versus Rohit, Kohli, Pujara and Rahane for

instance, and R. Ashwin versus Root and Stokes.

Of the two, the latter seems the more mouthwatering, and could also be the more significant. In Australia, Ashwin had Smith tied in knots in the first two Tests, bowling with great guile and control, outguessing the batsmen most times, keeping him and by extension the rest of the batting on tenterhooks.

Root is England's best batsman. A veteran of 99 Tests, he is widely rated as among the best batsmen of his generation. More pertinently, he comes into this series having scored a whopping 426 runs in two Tests against Sri Lanka.

For the record, Ashwin dismissed Root only twice in 2016, though he claimed

28 wickets in the series. This is one battle he will surely have planned for in detail, as he did against Smith, Labuschagne and other Aussies batsmen.

Against Stokes, the off-spinner's stats are better. In two series (2016 and 2018), Ashwin has dismissed the England all-rounder 7 times, conceding 150 runs. In India, this gets more impressive: 5 dismissals and 101 runs conceded. Since his return in 2018, however, Stokes has scored 1999 runs in 53 innings at an average of 40.79 with four centuries. He's the world's best all-rounder, and the X factor in any match he plays.

How Ashwin fares against Root and Stokes could well be decisive in the series.