

THE ASIAN AGE

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Shooting of Janhvi Kapoor starrer *Good Luck Jerry* affected by farmer agitation



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Actor and politician Sonali Phogat poses for photographs during a press conference after she got evicted from the *Big Boss* house in Mumbai on Wednesday. — PTI

SC stays Bombay HC's 'groping sans skin contact' order

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Wednesday stayed the Bombay high court order which acquitted a man under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act saying groping a minor's breast without "skin-to-skin contact" cannot be termed as sexual assault. The SC bench stayed the high court order after Attorney General K.K. Venugopal mentioned the matter. ■ **More on Page 3**

IPL 2021 auction to be held on Feb. 18

New Delhi: The player auction for IPL 2021 will be held on 18th February in Chennai, announced the Indian Premier League. Indian players who don't have a contract and wish to be a part of the auction will need to fill the agreement and submit it online on February 4 by 5 pm. ■ **More on Page 8**

Cold wave: Min temp plummets to 5.4°C

New Delhi: Delhi on Wednesday recorded a minimum temperature of 5.4 degrees Celsius, three notches below the normal, even as the weather department said cold wave might make a comeback over the next two days. The maximum temperature settled at 21.5 degrees Celsius.

COUNTERPOINT



It's high time we allocate more funds in the budget for teargas shells, lathis, water cannons...

WEATHER

Max: 18°C
Min: 06°C
RH: 66%
Rain: 10%

Forecast: Sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Pushya Shuddha Purnima till 12.42 am (Friday)
Star: Pushyami till 3.48 am (Friday)
Variyam: 11.47 am to 1.23 pm

Durmuhurtam: 10.36 am to 11.21 am; 3.06 pm to 3.50 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm

SUNSET TODAY 5.57 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 7.10 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 6.33 PM
MOONSET TODAY 5.53 AM

■ Govt says door not shut on dialogue ■ Farmers see 'conspiracy'

2 farm unions quit agitation, but others to continue stir at borders

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, JAN. 27

A day after the national capital saw unprecedented violence during the Republic Day tractor rally, two farmers' unions — the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) and the Bharatiya Kisan Union (Bhanu) — on Wednesday broke away from the ongoing protests against the three contentious agricultural reform laws at Delhi's borders.

AIKSCC leader V.M. Singh said his organisation was withdrawing from the agitation with immediate effect because the format of the protest was "unacceptable" to it. "We are discontinuing our agitation but our fight for farmers' rights will continue," he said at the Ghazipur border.

Speaking about the violence, Mr Singh said he and his organisation had nothing to do with the protest led by Bhartiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait. "I have nothing to do with the protest being led by them and over here being represented by Rakesh Tikait on their



Farmers during their ongoing protest against the Centre's new farm laws at the Ghazipur border in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

■ **A DAY AFTER** farmers went on a rampage in Delhi during the tractor rally, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi quoted Mahatma Gandhi's teachings and also appealed to the Modi government to revoke the three contentious farm laws.

■ **Report on Page 3**

■ **BLAMING THE CONGRESS**, in particular its leader Rahul Gandhi and the communists for instigating farmers for violent protests in Delhi, the BJP said that the Congress used the same tactics to instigate people against the amended Citizenship Act.

■ **Report on Page 3**

behalf."

Mr Tikait, who has been at the forefront of the agitation, has alleged the violence Tuesday was part of a "conspiracy" by certain forces to defame their "gen-

uine" movement to protect the interests of poor farmers. Hitting out at Mr Tikait, the AIKSCC leader said he neither spoke about the issues faced by sugarcane

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19 held, 200 detained, SIT formed; top cop says 37 leaders instigated violence

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JAN. 27

A day after the national capital saw unprecedented violence during the farmers' Republic Day tractor rally, Delhi police commissioner S.N. Shrivastava said on Wednesday some farmers' leaders were also involved in the violence and that all those involved will not be spared. A Special Investigation Team, including officials from Special Cell, Crime Branch and the district police, has been constituted to investigate the incident.

The police has registered 25 First Information Reports (FIRs) for rioting, robbing, attempt to murder and other criminal offences across against several people, including some farmers' leaders, and 19 people have been arrested while around 200 other were detained and 50 were questioned.

The Delhi police has named 37 farmers' leaders, including Medha Patekar and Yogendra Yadav, in an FIR registered at the Samaypur Badli police station in connection with the violence. According to the FIR, the protesters also

robbed an official pistol with 10 rounds of ammunition along with two gas guns.

The farmers' leaders named in FIR include Rakesh Tikait, Medha Patekar, Yogendra Yadav, Darshan Pal, Kulwant Singh Sandhu, Satnam Singh Pannu, Joginder Singh Ugraha, Surjeet Singh Phool, Jagjeet Singh Dalewal, Balbir Singh Rajewal, Harinder Singh Lakhoval, Gurnam Singh Chanduni.

The police chief also said by January 25 evening, it became clear that the farmers' unions were not keep-

ing their word as they brought forward the aggressive and militant elements who occupied the stage at protest sites and delivered provocative speeches.

He said that after five rounds of talks with the farmers' union regarding the tractor parade on Republic Day, there was mutual agreement on the parade routes from the Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur borders.

"The police laid down the conditions, which were agreed by the farmers and the first was a time that

■ **Turn to Page 4**



Senior security personnel inspect the area after a militant attack on road opening party of the Army at Shamsipora in Kulgam district of South Kashmir on Wednesday. — PTI

Jawan killed, 3 hurt in IED blast: 1st J&K attack in 2021

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, JAN. 27

An Army jawan was killed and three others were wounded in an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blast in J&K's southern Kulgam district on Wednesday morning.

The soldiers belonging to the Army's 24 Rashtriya Rifles were part of a road opening and area dominance party targeted by suspected separatist militants in Kulgam's Subhanpora area.

A Srinagar resident, meanwhile, who was shot and injured by suspected militants last month, died in a city hospital early Wednesday.

Police sources said the IED had been planted by militants in the premises of a roadside school at Subhanpora and was detonated when the soldiers reached the place for a routine area dominance and road opening exercise. Srinagar-based defence spokesman Col. Rajesh

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Swimming pools for all, capacity raised in cinemas, theatres

New SOPs will take effect February 1

New Delhi, Jan. 27: The ministry of home affairs (MHA) on Wednesday allowed cinema halls and theatres to operate with more people while swimming pools have been permitted for use by all in fresh Covid-19 reopening guidelines.

According to these new guidelines, to be effective for February 1, there shall be no restriction on inter-state and intra-state movement of people and goods including those for cross land-border trade under treaties with neighbouring countries.

No separate permission/approval/ e-permit will be required for such movements, the MHA said.

All activities have been permitted outside containment zones, except a few which will be subject to strict adherence of SOPs.

Social, religious, sports, entertainment, educational, cultural, religious gatherings have already been permitted up to a maximum of 50 per cent of the hall capacity, with a ceiling of 200 people in closed spaces; and keeping of the size of the ground or space

■ **INDIA'S COUNT** of cases of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) is at over 10.68 million as the country recorded 12,689 new infections in the last 24 hours, the Union health ministry's dashboard showed on Wednesday

in view, in open spaces.

"Now such gatherings will be allowed subject to SOP of the state and UT concerned. Cinema halls and theatres have already been permitted up to 50 per cent of seating capacity. Now they will be permitted to operate at higher seating capacity, for which a revised SOP will be issued by ministry of information and broadcasting in consultation with MHA," the guidelines said.

Swimming pools have already been permitted for use of sports persons. Now these will be permitted for use of all, for which a revised SOP will be issued by ministry of youth affairs and sports in consultation with MHA. — PTI

Sourav back in hospital after chest pain, stable

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, JAN. 27

Cricket board president Sourav Ganguly, who suffered a "mild" cardiac arrest earlier this month and underwent a stent implantation in one of his three arteries with blockages, was admitted to Apollo Gleneagles Hospital on Wednesday afternoon after he reportedly felt a minor chest pain and dizziness again at home in the morning. He is reported to be "stable".

Wearing a blue jacket, the 48-year-old former Indian cricket captain was seen walking into the private hospital off EM Bypass near the Salt Lake Stadium steadily after alighting from his car in a convoy that brought him through a "green corridor" created by the Kolkata police from his Behala home in South Kolkata. His wife Dona accompanied him.

Sourav "has come for a checkup of his cardiac condition. There

■ **Turn to Page 4**



People gather in large numbers during the inauguration of the Jayalalithaa memorial in Chennai on Wednesday. — PTI

Russia House okays extension of arms pact after Biden, Putin talk

Moscow, Jan. 27: Russian legislators on Wednesday quickly approved the extension of the last remaining nuclear Russia-U.S. arms control treaty, a fast-track action that comes just days before it's due to expire.

Both houses of parliament voted unanimously to extend the New START treaty for five years, a day after a phone call between US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin. The Kremlin said they agreed to complete the necessary extension procedures in

the next few days.

Speaking via video link to the World Economic Forum's virtual meeting, Mr Putin hailed the decision to extend the treaty as "a step in the right direction," but warned of rising global rivalries and threats of new conflicts.

The pact's extension doesn't require congressional approval in the US, but Russian lawmakers must ratify the move and Putin has to sign the relevant bill into law.

Deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov told lawmakers that the extension

will be validated by exchanging diplomatic notes once all the procedures are completed.

The Upper House speaker, Valentina Matvienko, said after the vote that the decision to extend the pact shows that Russia and the US can reach agreements on major issues despite the tensions between them.

New START expires on February 5. After taking office last week, Mr Biden proposed extending the treaty for five years, and the Kremlin quickly welcomed the offer. — PTI

■ **More on Page 6**

Jaya's ex-aide Sasikala freed from jail after 4-yr sentence

Bengaluru, Jan. 27:

Expelled AIADMK leader V.K. Sasikala was set free on

Sasikala Wednesday by authorities after she completed four years imprisonment in a jail here in a case of disproportionate assets, setting off celebrations by her supporters in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

Being treated for Covid-19 for a week, the 66-year-old close aide of former Tamil Nadu chief minister late J. Jayalalithaa, would remain in a state-run hospital here for some more days.

Parappana Agrahara Jail Superintendent V. Sheshamurthy told PTI that Sasikala, lodged in the prison on February 15, 2017, was released on Wednesday.

Sasikala's supporters burst into celebrations distributing sweets and offering prayers in places of worship as they expect her to gain control of the AIADMK, from which she was expelled as interim general secretary. Her counsel R. Senthoo Pandian told reporters that she asked him to convey to the Tamil Nadu people that she would meet them soon. — PTI

■ **More on Page 4**

No culprit will be spared: Police chief

New Delhi: The Delhi police on Wednesday alleged that farmer leaders made inflammatory speeches and were involved in the violence during the tractor parade by agitating farmers that left 394 of its personnel injured, as it warned that no culprit will be spared. Addressing a press conference, Delhi police commissioner S.N. Srivastava said farmer unions did not follow conditions set for the rally that was supposed to be held from 12 pm to 5 pm with 5,000 tractors and accused them of betrayal. He stressed that not a single life was lost as the Delhi police showed extreme restraint. — PTI

ED arrests Yes Bank co-founder in PMLA case

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate has arrested Yes Bank co-founder Rana Kapoor in a fresh money laundering case linked to an alleged ₹4,300 crore fraud at the PMC Bank in Maharashtra, official sources said on Wednesday. Kapoor, 63, was already in judicial custody after he was arrested by the central probe agency in March last year in connection with alleged financial irregularities and purported kick backs paid to him and his family members in lieu of certain loans provided by the Yes Bank to a number of high-profile borrowers. In the latest case, sources said, Kapoor was placed under arrest in jail as per provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). He was later produced before a special PMLA court that sent him to ED custody till January 30 in the second money laundering case filed against him, they said. The latest case pertains to the alleged loan fraud in the PMC Bank where the ED raided the premises of the Viva Group promoted by Maharashtra MLA and Bahujan Vikas Agadhi (BVA) party chief Hitendra Thakur in the Vasai-Virar areas of Palghar district and Mumbai last week. — PTI

A day after violence, business as usual for farmers at Singhu

Sense of urgency, alertness visible at protest venue on GT Karnal Road

New Delhi, Jan. 27: It was business as usual for agitating farmers at the Singhu border on Wednesday as some were busy with langars while others listened to speeches of their leaders even as talks of the tractor rally that witnessed vandalism and violence a day before filled the air.

Most of the farmers protesting at the Singhu border for over two months against the Centre's farm laws were part of the tractor rally on Tuesday and claimed that "miscreants" at the behest of the Centre "sabotaged" the "peaceful" march.

"Why would we discredit our movement with something like that happened yesterday in Delhi. The agents of BJP government were behind the violence who defied the directions of our leaders to strictly follow the pre-decided route," said Balwinder Singh from Ludhiana.

Mr Singh said he and his companions returned



A damaged police jeep in the premises of the Red Fort on Wednesday, a day after it was stormed by protesting farmers during their tractor march.

after covering a distance of 10-15 km from the Singhu border after receiving directions from the leaders on Tuesday evening as clashes between farmers and police were reported at many places.

Over 300 policemen and several farmers were injured in the violence as some sections of protesters deviated from desig-

nated route and entered inner parts of Delhi. A protester died after his tractor overturned at ITO.

A sense of urgency and alertness was visible at the farmers' sprawling protest venue on GT Karnal road on Wednesday as identity cards of outsiders including mediapersons were being checked to weed out

any suspicious people.

At the Singhu border too, identity cards were being checked randomly by the protesting farmers.

Some of those who participated in the tractor rally complained that they were "misled" by a section of protesters and there was no way to check the route on Google map as the internet was down.

"When a section of protesters took the detour those behind them followed. We had to follow the pre-decided route but could not sense that it was changed as Google map (mobile app) was not working due to poor (internet) connectivity," said Sahil Bharti, a protester from Ludhiana.

Sewa Singh, a farmer from Jalandhar said the protest against the farm laws was going on "peacefully" for two months without any incident but the developments within hours on Tuesday has hit the movement.

— PTI

Freedom of speech not absolute: Top court

No SC relief to makers of Tandav, told to move HCs

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, JAN. 27

The Supreme Court on Wednesday declined to interfere with the spate of FIRs filed against the producer director and actors of *Tandav* Web series on Amazon Prime and asked them to approach the high courts of the states where FIRs have been lodged for their quashing.

Observing that the freedom of speech is not absolute but subject to restrictions, the bench comprising Justice Ashok Bhushan, Justice R. Subhash Reddy and Justice M.R. Shah while dismissing the plea for the quashing of the FIRs said, "You want the FIRs to be quashed. But why can't you approach the high courts."

While declining the plea for the quashing of the FIRs, the court however

issued notice "limited to transfer and clubbing of the FIRs with first FIR".

Having issued notice on the transfer and clubbing of the FIRs, the court made it clear that it will not come in the way of actor and makers of the webseries from approaching the concerned courts for anticipatory bail.

"We make it clear that the issue of notice in this petition shall not preclude the petitioners to approach the concerned courts for anticipatory bail/bail as per law," said the order passed on Wednesday.

Senior lawyers Fali S. Nariman, Mukul Rohatgi and Siddharth Luthra cited the top court judgment in Arnab Goswami case to seek relief in the matter.

Mr Luthra argued that the director of the web series is being harassed.

"Is this way liberty should be protected in the country and FIRs are being filed across the country," he asked.

Mr Nariman submitted that apologies have been made, and despite that several FIRs have been filed in six states.

The bench said it need not intervene as even the police can file closure reports if apologies have been made and the controversial scenes have been deleted.

Mr Rohatgi cited Arnab Goswami case to move the top court after a violation of Article 19(1)(a). He added people get offended with anything and everything these days. "Please protect us with no coercive steps."

"We deleted content without any protest. Scenes have been deleted. Its a political satire," argued Mr Rohatgi.

Several roads, entry to few Metro stations shut

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 27

Several roads in Delhi along with entry to a few Metro stations were shut for commuters on Wednesday a day after violent clashes broke out between farmers and the police during the farmers' Republic Day tractor march in the national capital. The key ITO junction near the Delhi police headquarters has been closed with barricades on all sides, according to a Delhi traffic police advisory.

Entry and exit gates of the Lal Quila Metro sta-

tion and entry gates of Jama Masjid Metro station were also closed with only exit being permitted at the station, said the DMRC. The average waiting time at Saket Metro station was 35 minutes.

Ghaziपुर Mandi, NH-9 and NH-24 were also closed for traffic movement. Those commuting from Delhi to Ghaziabad had been advised to take Shahdara, Karkari Mor and DND, said a traffic police statement. The road from Minto Road to Ghaziabad was closed early in the morning, however, it was opened for traffic towards noon.

BJP planted its 'stooge' to create chaos: AAP

New Delhi, Jan. 27: The AA on Wednesday alleged that the BJP planted its "stooge" actor Deep Sidhu to create "chaos" in farmers' tractor parade in Delhi on Republic Day.

The tractor parade on Tuesday that was to highlight the demands of the farmer unions to repeal the three new agriculture laws descended into anarchy as tens of thousands of protesters broke through barriers, fought with the police, overturned vehicles and hoisted a religious flag from the ramparts of the iconic Red Fort.

Clashes broke out in

multiple places, leading to violence in well-known landmarks of Delhi and its suburbs, amid waves of violence that ebbed and flowed through the Republic Day.

Punjabi actor Deep Sidhu has been blamed by the farmer union leaders and politicians for inciting violence during the tractor rally.

At a press conference, AAP spokesperson Raghav Chadha, while questioning the connection between Sidhu and BJP, showed several photos purportedly of the actor with various BJP leaders.

96 new Covid cases, lowest in 9 months

New Delhi, Jan. 27: Delhi recorded 96 fresh Covid-19 cases in a day, the lowest single-day rise in over nine months, pushing the infection tally in the national capital on Wednesday to 6,34,325.

This was first time in January that daily rise in cases stood below 100.

These 96 cases were detected from 29,855 Covid-19 tests, including 22,426 RT-PCR ones and 7,529 rapid antigen tests, conducted the previous day.

The low number of testing may be attributed to January 26 being a national holiday on account of Republic Day.

The case positivity rate stood at 0.32 per cent, slightly higher from the corresponding figures on Tuesday, according to the bulletin issued by the Delhi health department on Wednesday.

Delhi's Covid-19 death toll rose to 10,829 with nine more people succumbing to the disease in a day, it stated.

The tally of active cases in the city stood at 1,501, according to the bulletin.

This was the sixth time that the number of daily coronavirus cases stood below the 200-mark in January.

— PTI

NDMC released ₹516cr for staff salaries: Mayor

New Delhi, Jan. 27: North Delhi Mayor Jai Prakash on Wednesday announced in the meeting of the NDMC House that the civic body has released ₹516.67 crore for paying pending salaries of several employees and pensioners.

The move comes amid an ongoing strike by scores of civic employees of the three corporations demanding their due salaries.

"North Delhi Mayor Jai Prakash today announced in the meeting of the NDMC House that the NDMC has released ₹516.67 crore for paying pending salaries," the mayor's office said.

— PTI

GROOMING FUTURE LEADERS

NATIONAL CADET CORPS

PRIME MINISTER'S RALLY

28th January 2021

CARIAPPA PARADE GROUND, DELHI CANTONMENT

LIVE TELECAST | LIVE BROADCAST

11.50 hrs onwards on DD National

11:55 hrs onwards on
• Rajdhani Channel
MW 450.5 mtrs ie 666khz
• FM Rainbow 102.6 Mhz

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ACHIEVEMENTS: 2020

- NCC Training App: Launch of App to enable cadets' training during Covid-19
- Exercise Yogdan: Over 1,39,961 cadets & 21,380 staff participated in the exercise countrywide during Covid-19
- National Education Policy Awareness: Over 50,411 NCC cadets participated in online campaign and impacted over 1.74 lakh people
- Tree Plantation: NCC planted 3.5 lakh saplings during Tree Plantation Drives
- International Yoga Day: Celebrated online pan India with a participation of over 10.5 lakh NCC cadets
- Constitution Day: Over 9.63 lakh NCC cadets participated in activities, impacting a population of over 35 lakh
- NCC Expansion: One lakh cadets in Border/Coastal Taluks and Taluks Housing Air Force Stations
- Incentives: NCC Certificate Holders in recruitment in CAPFs
- Associate Member: NCC now an associate member of Hockey India

dayp-10110/13/0001/2021

IN BRIEF

More vaccines on their way: Vardhan

New Delhi/Riyadh: Health minister Harsh Vardhan said that more Covid-19 vaccines are on their way to be introduced in India after the country launched the world's biggest vaccination drive with two made-in-India shots earlier this month. Addressing the 4th edition of the Future Investment Initiative Forum being hosted in Riyadh through video conference, Dr Vardhan informed that Serum Institute will supply COVID-19 vaccine Covishield to Saudi Arabia. He said it is evident that the current crisis will reshape the world as one knew. "Mankind will only remember one thing from the year 2020 that is the deadly virus that created devastation across the world. But at the same time, it will also be remembered how science and healthcare sectors came to the rescue in a record time," he said. The health minister said the pandemic has also resulted in heightened nationalism, but it has also shown us how important global cooperation is for everyone. — PTI

'COVAXIN WORKS AGAINST UK VARIANT TOO'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 27

Covaxin, developed by Bharat Biotech, has the ability to neutralise the UK variant of the coronavirus and circulating strains of SARS-CoV-2 in India, ICMR said on Wednesday. It's assurance has come at a time when scepticism is on the rise over the efficacy of both Covaxin as well as Serum Institute of India's Covishield, as they haven't completed their third phase trials. Virology scientist performed the plaque reduction neutralisation test using sera collected from the 26 recipients of Bharat Biotech's coronavirus vaccine (Covaxin) against UK-variant strain. "A comparable neutralisation activity of the vaccinated individuals sera showed against UK-variant and the heterologous strain with similar efficiency dispel the uncertainty of possible neutralisation escape," stated document appeared in bioRxiv in a pre-print version. "We successfully isolated and characterized the SARS-CoV-2 from UK returnees in India with all signature mutations of the UK-variant," noted the NIV-Pune scientist. "We present the neutralising antibodies (Nab) titers to underline the efficacy of Covaxin vaccine candidate against SARS-CoV-2 UK-variant and one of the heterologous strains. Sera collected from 38 vaccine recipients, who received Covaxin vaccine-candidate in phase-II trial had equivalent Nab titers to homologous strain and two heterologous strains with the characteristic substitution of the UK-variant," said the authors. Meanwhile, as India entered the 309th day since a nationwide lockdown to help curb the novel coronavirus pandemic was implemented, there have been 1,06,89,527 confirmed cases, including 1,53,724 deaths. At the same time a total of 1,03,59,305 people have recuperated from Covid-19 so far. As per the data, there are 1,76,498 active cases in the country as of date, which comprises 1.65 percent of the total caseload.

Farmers cancel Budget Day march

BJP blames Rahul Gandhi, Communists for instigating farmer unions for violent protests on R-Day

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, JAN. 27

As cracks began to appear in their ongoing agitation against the agri laws, farmer unions on Wednesday cancelled their planned march to Parliament on February 1 when the Budget would be presented.

The decision by farmer unions came a day after massive violence during their tractor parade in the national capital that left nearly 400 police personnel injured.

The farmer leaders, however, alleged that there was a conspiracy behind Tuesday's incidents and demanded a probe.

They said their agitation against the farm laws will continue and public meetings and hunger strikes will be held across the country on January 30.

"The tractor parade was hit by a government conspiracy. Deep Sidhu is an RSS man. Police let him go after he hoisted a religious flag at Red Fort," farmer leader Darshan Pal, who has been accused by police of making inflammatory speeches, alleged at a press conference.

"We have cancelled our plan for a march to Parliament on budget day on February 1. But our agitation will continue and there will be public meetings and hunger strike across the country on January 30," Pal said.

Another farmer leader Balbir Singh Rajewal claimed that over two lakh tractors and lakhs of people participated in Tuesday's parade and "99.9 percent of the protesters were peaceful".

Meanwhile, blaming the Congress, in particular its leader Rahul Gandhi and the Communists for instigating farmers unions for violent protests witnessed on the Republic Day in the national capital and "defaming the tricolor" at the Red Fort, the BJP on Wednesday said the Congress used the same tactics to instigate people

against the amended Citizenship Act, asked them to come on roads against it and fanned riots and mayhem.

Claiming that the Narendra Modi government made "sincere efforts" by reaching out to farmer unions over the farm laws, held several rounds of meetings, even suggesting clause by clause discussion but farmer unions remained adamant on repealing the laws as "there was politics behind their demand."

Asserting that all those who instigated the violence will be brought to book and the nation will never forgive those who defamed the tricolor, Union minister and senior BJP leader Prakash Javadekar said the Congress and the Congress ruled Punjab had been instigating farmer unions since day one against the laws and when there were statements and videos of some of them claiming "final match on the Republic Day" why did the Punjab government did not act against "habitual criminals" who were leaving the state to reach Delhi borders. He said no other state witnessed such protests by farmers as in Punjab.

Reading some of the tweets of Congress affiliated handles, Mr Javadekar said Congress members were supporting the violence by claiming that it was peaceful protest when police personnel were beaten up, mob was damaging barricades, flouting the agreed routes of their 'tractor parade,' damaging vehicles and defamed the tricolor at the Red Fort.

"Congress has been losing electorally, politically, it is dejected, desperate and so are the Communists, who now only want that somehow they instigate people, create a situation where there is mayhem, there are riots, so that police is forced to act, lives are lost, public property is damaged so that they can do politics," he said.



A policewoman plays cricket with local children in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

Lone INLD MLA Abhay Singh Chautala resigns

Chandigarh, Jan. 27: Indian National Lok Dal leader Abhay Singh Chautala, who was his party's lone representative in the 90-member Haryana Assembly, Wednesday resigned as an MLA over the three new Central farm laws.

"I decided I cannot sit in the Assembly with those who bring resolutions favouring these laws," Chautala said, referring to the BJP-led government's earlier move of bringing in a resolution backing the Centre's three contentious farm laws.

Abhay, who is the younger son of INLD president and former Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala, drove to the state assembly complex with his supporters in his green tractor to submit his resignation.

"Abhay Chautala, who represents the Ellenabad constituency, came to me personally and tendered



Damaged metal detectors at an entry gate in the premises of Red Fort in Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

his resignation and I have accepted it with immediate effect." Speaker Gian Chand Gupta said, adding his resignation letter was correct in all technical aspects.

Abhay has said in his resignation letter that he was resigning as farmers' demands have not been met by the government, the Speaker told reporters here.

In his resignation paper, Abhay has referred to two

letters he had sent to the Speaker earlier this month, telling him that if the Centre failed to accept farmers' demand to repeal the new farm laws then his letters be treated as his resignation from the state assembly, Gupta said.

The Speaker had not accepted Abhay's previous letters as his resignation on the grounds that "conditional letters" cannot be considered as such. — PTI

Skin-to-skin contact: SC stays HC order acquitting accused

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, JAN. 27

The Supreme Court on Wednesday stayed a judgment of the Bombay High Court holding that groping a child's breast without removing her top is no sexual assault under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.

Permitting Attorney General K.K. Venugopal to file an appropriate petition challenging January 19, 2021, High Court judgment, Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde heading a three-judge bench comprising Justice A.S. Bopanna and Justice V. Ramasubramanian stayed the acquittal of accused Satish and issued notice to him and the Maharashtra government.

"In view of what is stat-

ed, we permit the learned Attorney General to file an appropriate petition against the said judgment", the court said ordering that "In the meantime, we stay the acquittal of the accused ... in respect of the offence under section 8 of the POCSO Act."

The notice to accused Satish and state of Maharashtra is returnable in two weeks.

At the outset of the hearing on Wednesday, Attorney General Venugopal in a mentioning described the January 19 judgment as a "disturbing conclusion" and asserted that it "sets a dangerous precedent".

The Attorney General said that the Centre will file a petition challenging the High Court verdict on Thursday.

The High Court ruling came in an incident dat-

ing back to December 2016, the victim girl's mother complained that the accused took her daughter to his house on the pretext of giving her a guava, pressed her breasts and tried to remove her salwar. The mother immediately lodged an FIR against accused Satish, who was held guilty in February 2020 and sentenced to three years of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of ₹500 by a trial court under sections 354 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty), 363 (kidnapping) and 342 (wrongful confinement) of the IPC, and Section 8 (punishment for sexual assault) of the POCSO Act.

On his appeal, the Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court held that "admittedly, it is not the case of the prosecution that the appellant removed her top and pressed her breast. As such, there is no direct physical contact i.e. skin to skin with sexual intent without penetration," it said.

Holding that the crime falls under Section 354 of the Indian Penal Code and convicted him to a year's rigorous imprisonment instead of three years of rigorous imprisonment.

Meanwhile, the Youth Bar Association of India has also filed a petition in the top court challenging the High Court verdict. The petition asserts that the observations and reasoning in the verdict would "lead to a dastardly situation."

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights too has demanded the review of the High Court order.

Power Committee constituted for the border dispute with Karnataka.

For decades, Belgaum has been the subject of a bitter dispute between the two neighbouring states.

Uddhav Thackeray had earlier claimed that the Karnataka government is "committing atrocities" on Marathi-speaking people living in Belgaum, Karwar, Nipani and also accused the central government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi 'siding' with neighbouring Karnataka, which has a BJP government in power.

Meanwhile, Maharashtra deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar said, "This matter is in the Supreme Court and this is our last option. When we have one option left then we have to prepare

for it very well, and we have to win it. If this is not done now, then I don't think it will happen anytime."

Earlier too, Thackeray in his recent tweet had backed incorporating Marathi-speaking areas in Karnataka into Maharashtra. "Bringing Karnataka-occupied Marathi-speaking areas into Maharashtra will be a true tribute to those who accepted martyrdom in the boundary battle. We are united and committed towards it," he had said in his tweet.

Thackeray said a time-bound action plan is needed to win the legal battle and ensure the Marathi-speaking leadership and people in those areas of Karnataka remained united.

RSS ideology poses danger, says Rahul

GILVESTER ASSARY
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
JAN. 27

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi alleging that his 'incompetence' coupled with the RSS ideology of 'hatred', was causing immense damage to the country.

Gandhi was addressing Congress-led UDF's pre-election preparation meeting in Malappuram district of Kerala. "Of course the Prime Minister is incompetent. But the greatest danger is the hatred that RSS is spreading in the country" he said while accusing Modi of ruining the economy through demonetisation and flawed implementation of the GST.


At the two meetings that he addressed in Malappuram, Gandhi did not say anything on the farmers agitation or the violence that was witnessed in Delhi on Tuesday.

India to send 5L vaccine doses to Lanka

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 27

Continuing its neighbourhood diplomacy of gifting Covid-19 vaccines, India will Thursday despatch five lakh doses of the Indian-manufactured Covishield (Oxford-AstraZeneca) vaccine to Sri Lanka. India had

delivered the vaccine recently to neighbours Bhutan, the Maldives, Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar. New Delhi was awaiting regulatory clearances from Colombo which have now come through. The vaccines have been manufactured by the Serum Institute of India (SII).


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NOTICE INVITING QUOTATIONS

1. APS Srinagar invites sealed quotations from experienced vendors/ firms for supplying of following Science Lab apparatus/equipments:-

- Skeleton with Muscles & Ligaments 180 cm tall.
- Manti Lab MT-103 Deluxe pH Meter, pH Range: 0-14.00pH
- Digital Storage Oscilloscopes (DSO) TBS 1000.
- Paper Chromatography Column
- Desiccator
- Distillation Assembly
- Distilled Water Assembly
- Volumetric Flask.

2. The vendor should quote basic cost inclusive of transportation for delivery including installation charges. All valid taxes at the destination should also be included in the price quoted. The school reserves the right to cancel the call for quotation without assigning any reason.

3. Interested parties may submit the quotations in the school by or before 10 Feb 2021 alongwith non refundable bank Demand Draft (DD) for ₹ 5,000/- in favour of APS, BB Cantt, Srinagar. For any query contact during office hours between 10 A.M to 2 P.M. at 0194-2468224, 94191 59461, 99063 47599.

TERRITORY | DISPUTE

Uddhav accuses K'taka of deliberately changing Belgaum's name

Belgaum should be UT, says Uddhav

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC
with agency inputs
MUMBAI, JAN. 27

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has demanded that the Marathi speaking villages at the border region with Karnataka be declared as a Union Territory. He has also threatened to make Belgaum a part of Maharashtra.

Thackeray accused the Karnataka government of deliberately changing the name of Belgaum despite the matter is in court and making the city deputy capital of the state.

"Looking at the atrocities of Marathi-speaking people in disputed border areas, our government will urge the Supreme Court to declare the disputed area



DESPITE THE matter being in court, the Karnataka government deliberately changed the name of Belgaum city. They made Belgaum the second capital where they also held an Assembly session. Maharashtra is following the rule of law but the Karnataka government does not.

— **UDDHAV THACKERAY**
Maharashtra Chief Minister

as a Union Territory as long the case is in court," Thackeray said on Wednesday.

"Despite the matter being in court, the Karnataka government deliberately changed the name of Belgaum city. They made Belgaum the second capital where they also held an

Assembly session. Maharashtra is following the rule of law but the Karnataka government does not. We should all come together to put an end to their arrogance. We will strive hard to bring the border region in Maharashtra for sure," he said after a meeting with the High

Court. Thackeray said the matter is in court, the Karnataka government deliberately changed the name of Belgaum city. They made Belgaum the second capital where they also held an Assembly session. Maharashtra is following the rule of law but the Karnataka government does not. We should all come together to put an end to their arrogance. We will strive hard to bring the border region in Maharashtra for sure," he said after a meeting with the High

SHORT TAKES

MLA's son assaults store owner, booked

Shahjahanpur, UP: An FIR has been registered against the son of a BJP MLA and two others for allegedly beating a liquor shop owner in Puwayan area here, police said. The incident took place on Tuesday following which locals blocked the Puwayan-Pallia highway in protest and demanded that the police book the culprits. According to police, Neeraj Verma, son of BJP legislator from Puwayan Chetram Verma, and his two associates thrashed Shankar Verma, owner of the country liquor shop, following an argument. Additional SP, Praveen Kumar said an FIR was registered against Neeraj and others on the basis of a complaint lodged by Shankar Verma. However, the BJP MLA claimed that some people were having liquor in front of his son's office and when he objected, they clashed with him. — PTI

Students develop satellite for Isro

Coimbatore: Students of Sri Shakti Institute of Engineering and Technology, here, have designed and developed a satellite at a cost of ₹2.5 crore. It would be inaugurated by chairman of Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) Dr R Sivan on January 28. The formation of the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre in June last by Prime Minister Narendra Modi inspired 12 students of the institute to collaborate with Isro and develop "SriShaktiSat", the institute chairman Dr Thangavel told reporters here on Wednesday. After installing Sri Shakti Sat Ground Station in collaboration with Serbia-based Community for Space Programme Development, the institute became a member of the Satellite Networked Open Ground Station project, he said. — PTI

Dalit couple badly burnt in acid attack

Pratapgarh, UP: A dalit couple was grievously injured after a group of unidentified people allegedly threw acid at them in a village of this district. The incident took place in Bhogapur village on Tuesday night when the Dalit couple and their children were sleeping in their hut, additional superintendent of police Dinesh Dwivedi said. The couple has been sent to a hospital in Allahabad for treatment while the children were safe, police said, adding a probe into the matter was underway and no arrest has been made yet. — PTI

30 CBI OFFICIALS GET PRESIDENT'S POLICE MEDALS

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 27

Thirty officers of the CBI have been awarded the President's Police Medal for distinguished service and Police Medal for meritorious service by the President on Republic Day. President's Police Medals for distinguished service have been awarded to six officers and while Police Medals have been given for meritorious service to 24 other officers. CBI officials who have been conferred with the President's Police Medal for distinguished service include Sampat Meena (joint director, CBI, Lucknow), Vineet Vinayak (joint director, Chandigarh), Saraladas Mishra (ASP, EO-III, New Delhi), Vivek Dhir (DSP, ACB, Jammu), Surender Kumar Rohilla (DSP, ACU-V, New Delhi), and Basant Singh Bisht, head constable, HQ, New Delhi).

Among the recipients of the President's Police Medal are Abhay Singh (DIG, New Delhi), Manish Viresh Surti (SP, CBI, Bhopal), Prasanna Kumar Panigrahi (SP, ACB, Dehradun), Prahlad Kishore Jha (ASP, ACB, Dhanbad), Richhpal Singh (ASP, ACB, Jaipur), Letkholam Hangshing (ASP, ACB, Imphal), Ismail Babalal Pendhari (DSP, Mumbai), Rama Raman Tripathi (DSP, AC-II, New Delhi), Devraj Vakkada (DSP, ACB, Cochin), Rajender Singh Gosain (Inspector, ACB, Mumbai), Naresh Kumar (Sub Inspector, AC-V, New Delhi), Srigopal Sharma, ASI, HQ, New Delhi), Samshar Singh Dalal, (ASI, AC-II, New Delhi), K.K. Sasi (head constable, BS & FB, Bangalore), Shiv Dutt Sharma (head constable, academy, Ghaziabad), A. Damodharan (head constable, ACB, Madurai).

■ 1st batch of 5 jets arrived on July 29, 2020

More firepower to IAF, 3 Rafales arrive in India

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, JAN. 27

India on Wednesday received the third batch of three Rafale fighter jets from France, in a further boost to the strike capability of the Indian Air Force. This will take the total strength of Rafale fighters with IAF to 11 to take on threats emerging from China.

"The third batch of three Rafale aircraft landed at an IAF base a short while ago. They flew over 7000 kilometres with in-flight refuelling. The aircraft got airborne earlier in the day from Istres Air Base in France. IAF deeply appreciates the tanker support provided by UAE Air Force," said the Indian Air Force. The jets flew over 7000km with in-flight refuelling.

The Indian Air Force will like to operationalise the third batch of Rafale jets as soon as possible.

In 2016, India had signed a \$59,000 crore deal for 36 Rafales which will be based in Ambala and Hasimara (West Bengal) airbases.

The 4.5 generation fighter aircraft, capable of carrying nuclear weapons provides IAF unmatched air superiority in the region with its advanced avionics and deadly



The third batch of three Rafale aircraft flying from France land at an IAF base in India on Wednesday.

— PTI

weapon package which include Meteor, Scalp and HAMMER missiles. Rafale jets give India an edge over China and Pakistan as it is armed with the most advanced beyond visual range Meteor air-to-air missiles which have a range of up to 150 kilometres.

Meteor has the ability to chase down and destroy agile hostile fighters at even the furthest of ranges and has a no-escape zone many times greater than any other air-to-air missile.

Both Pakistan and China Air Force don't have a missile to counter it. These Meteor air-to-air missiles will prove deadly during a dogfight. Rafale fighters will also be armed with Scalp cruise air to surface missiles, which have a range of

over 300 kilometres.

The first batch of five Rafale jets had reached the Ambala air base on July 29 after which they were formally inducted into the IAF in an event attended by defence minister Rajnath Singh, French defence minister Florence, chief of defence staff General Bipin Rawat and air force chief Marshal R.K.S. Bhadauria.

The second batch of three Rafale jets arrived in India on November 3. The Rafale jets, manufactured by French aerospace major Dassault Aviation, are India's first major acquisition of fighter planes in 23 years after the Sukhoi jets were imported from Russia.

The new fleet of Rafale jets has been carrying out sorties in eastern Ladakh.

■ Discusses regional, global issues, including Indo-Pacific

Rajnath speaks to US DefSecy Austin

New Delhi, Jan. 27: In the first high-level engagement between the Modi government and the Joe Biden administration, US defence secretary Lloyd Austin spoke to defence minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday and exchanged views on pressing regional and global issues, including developments in the Indo-Pacific.

The defence ministry said Singh received an "introductory telephone call" from the newly-appointed US Secretary of Defence Austin and that the two leaders reaffirmed their commitment to work together to strengthen the "multifaceted" defence cooperation and the



Rajnath Singh

strategic partnership between the two countries.

Official sources said China figured in the talks in the larger context of geo-political developments, and in relations to the strategic interests of

India and the US in the Indo-Pacific region.

The essence of the conversation was that both sides wanted to maintain the upward trajectory of the strategic and defence ties to advance their common agenda of peace, prosperity and growth, the sources said.

In a tweet, Mr Singh said the firm commitment to deepen India-US defence cooperation was reiterated during the talks.

"Spoke with my US counterpart, secretary def Austin and conveyed my warm wishes on his appointment," Mr Singh tweeted.

"We reiterated our firm commitment to deepen

PM reviews ₹54675cr 9 projects in 15 states

New Delhi, Jan. 27: Prime Minister Narendra Modi reviewed a number of projects with a total cost of ₹54,675 crore in 15 states as he chaired the 35th "Pragati" meeting on Wednesday.

During the meeting, the Prime Minister directed officials to ensure expeditious resolution of issues hindering infrastructure projects, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said in a statement.

"Pragati" is an ICT-based multi-modal platform for pro-active governance and timely implementation, involving central and state governments.

Ten agenda items — nine projects and one programme — were taken up for review in the meeting, the PMO said.

Among the nine projects, three are of the ministry of railways, three of the ministry of road transport and highways, and one project each of the department for promotion of industry and internal trade (DPIIT), power ministry and the ministry of external affairs, the statement said.

These nine projects have a cumulative cost of ₹54,675 crore concerning 15 states. — PTI

Sasikala walks out of jail after 4 years

Will stay in hospital for some more days for Covid care

Bengaluru, Jan. 27: Expelled AIADMK leader V.K. Sasikala was set free on Wednesday by authorities after she completed four years imprisonment in a jail here in a case of disproportionate assets, setting off celebrations by her supporters in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

Being treated for Covid-19 for a week, the 66-year-old close aide of former Tamil Nadu chief minister late J. Jayalalithaa, would remain in a state-run hospital here for some more days.

Parappana Agrahara jail superintendent V. Sheshamurthy told PTI that Sasikala, lodged in the prison on February 15, 2017, was released on Wednesday.

Sasikala's supporters burst into celebrations distributing sweets and offering prayers in places of worship as they expect her to gain control of the AIADMK, from which she was expelled as interim general secretary.

Her counsel Raja Senoor Pandian told reporters that she asked



Sasikala

▶ **SASIKALA'S SUPPORTERS** burst into celebrations distributing sweets and offering prayers in places of worship as they expect her to gain control of the AIADMK, from which she was expelled as interim general secretary

him to convey to the Tamil Nadu people that she would meet them soon.

He said the security put in place for her at the Victoria Hospital was withdrawn after authorities set her free.

Expressing joy over his aunt's release, Amma Makkal Munnetra

Kazhagam general secretary T.T.V. Dhinakaran said Sasikala was being given good treatment at the hospital and depending on the doctors' advice she may remain there for some time. "Tamil Nadu people and our functionaries are expecting her and a grand reception is on the cards for her," he said.

To a question, he said the purpose of floating the AMMK years ago was to retrieve the AIADMK and usher in 'true' Amma's

government in Tamil Nadu and efforts aimed at it continued to be on.

"Chinnamma (as Sasikala is called by her supporters), is coming back. We will form Amma's (Jayalalithaa's) government in Tamil Nadu," he said.

The ruling AIADMK, led by deputy chief minister O. Panneerselvam and chief minister K. Palaniswami had time and again asserted that there was no scope for Sasikala being inducted again in the party.

The formalities for Sasikala's release were done at the Victoria Hospital, where she is undergoing treatment for Covid-19 along with her sister-in-law J Ilavarasi, also a convict in the case. — PTI

BJP leader in Bihar shot at, 1 arrested

Munger (Bihar), Jan. 27: A BJP leader in Bihar was on Wednesday shot at by unidentified assailants here, triggering a spat between the ruling party and the opposition over alleged deterioration in the law and order situation.

Azfar Shamsi, a spokesman of the state BJP who also taught at the Jamalpur College in the district, was shot at by motorcycle-borne attackers while his car was entering the premises of the institute, Superintendent of Police, Munger, Manavjeet Singh Dhillon, said.

The assailants sped away after firing several rounds and Shamsi was left profusely bleeding, with bullet injuries in a leg and close to one of his ears, the SP said.

In his statement, Shamsi alleged that he

suspected the involvement of one of his colleagues at the college, who has been arrested, the SP said, adding that the academician-cum-politician was later referred to a Patna hospital for further treatment.

Meanwhile, RJD spokesman Mrityunjay Tiwari reacted with alarm and remarked "we wonder who is safe in Bihar under the Nitish Kumar regime when even a leader of the BJP, the senior partner in the ruling alliance, is attacked in broad daylight".

BJP national spokesman Shahnawaz Hussain, however, dismissed the Opposition charge and asserted that "the police has acted swiftly. I have spoken to the SP concerned and the man whom Shamsi had suspected has been arrested". — PTI

Man attempts self-immolation at MP CM's meet

Dewas (MP), Jan. 27: (PTI) A 48-year-old man claiming to be a farmer attempted self-immolation at a meeting addressed by Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivrath Singh Chouhan here on Wednesday, police said.

The incident triggered panic at the meeting, but police personnel immediately took the man into custody, before he could light a match after pouring kerosene on himself. The man was rushed to a hospital, where he is currently undergoing treatment.

"The man is identified as Anoop Singh Hada and he belongs to the Kanjad community. There are a number of cases registered against him and his children at the different police stations," additional superintendent of police Jagdish Dawar said. — PTI

BJP, JD-S may join hands for top Legislative Council posts

Bengaluru, Jan. 27: With leaders of both parties holding talks, there are all indications that the ruling BJP and JD(S) are likely to join hands for the post of Karnataka Legislative Council chairman and deputy chairman.

On Wednesday, JD(S) candidate for the chairman post, Basavaraj Horatti, MLC, met chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa in this regard and sought the BJP's support.

Horatti said JD(S) patriarch H.D. Deve Gowda has already spoken to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president J.P. Nadda seeking the ruling party's support.

"I met the chief minister. Yesterday our (JD(S) 13 MLCs, H.D. Deve Gowda and H.D. Kumaraswamy (party leader and former CM) had held discussions, and we have decided to ask for Council chairman post and to support them (BJP) for the deputy chairman post," Mr Horatti said.

Speaking to reporters

▶ **ON WEDNESDAY,** JD(S) candidate for the chairman post, Basavaraj Horatti, MLC, met chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa in this regard and sought the BJP's support

here after meeting Mr Yediyurappa, he said the chief minister has told him that BJP's decision will be communicated to the JD(S) leadership after discussion with the party MLCs.

"I'm the senior member in the House (council) and there is general opinion among everyone that I should be made (the Chairman), so we are asking for the chairman post and will support them (BJP) for deputy chairman," he added.

The election for the post of chairman and deputy chairman are likely to take place during the joint session of the state legislature beginning from Thursday.

There are all indications that the incumbent chair-

man K. Pratapachandra Shetty, who is from the Congress, may resign soon, as the ruling BJP has moved a no-confidence motion against him which is likely to be supported by the JD (S).

The post of the Deputy Chairman has fell vacant following JD(S)' S.L. Dharme Gowda's alleged death by suicide last month.

Noting that discussions have taken place with the Prime Minister and Nadda, Horatti said "Deve Gowda has told them that I (Horatti) should be given a chance, considering my seniority."

"Nadda had asked for my bio-data which has been sent. He has told Gowda that their decision will be communicated to the party (BJP) state president," Mr Horatti said, adding that he has experience, seniority and trust of MLCs of various parties to conduct the proceedings of the legislative council as its chairman. — PTI

Jawan killed, 3 hurt in blast

■ **Continued from Page 1** Kalia earlier said the casualties occurred in a possible grenade attack by militants.

This is the first militant strike against the security forces in Kashmir this year. However, in the beginning of this month, three suspected militants and an Indian soldier were killed and three others injured in a clash at the Line of Control. The Indian Army claimed the clash took place after its men challenged a group of infiltrators attempting to

sneak into J&K's Rajouri district from Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir.

Giving details of the incident at Subhanpora, a police release said the militants set off the deadly device at around 10.15 am.

"Preliminary investigations revealed that a rudimentary IED with a low powered explosive and ball bearings was planted in an abandoned building inside the Government Middle School premises at Subhanpora, where the Army jawans used to visit on a routine basis," it

said. It added: "The IED was planted by terrorists probably during the night hours."

Army sources said the injured soldiers were provided first aid locally and then shifted to Srinagar's 92 Army Base Hospital where one succumbed to his injuries.

The police said Nadif Hanief Khan, a resident of Srinagar's Soura area, who was shot and injured by gunmen at his residence on December 1, died in the hospital early Wednesday.

19 held, 200 detained, SIT formed

■ **Continued from Page 1** was fixed for the tractor rally at all borders from 12 noon to 5 pm. The second condition was that the tractor march will be led by farmers' union leaders, and with every jatha their leader should lead the rally and tractors should not exceed more than 5,000 in the rally. The police also put a condition to not bring any kind of weapon.

The farmers gave an undertaking and agreed on the route," the police chief added.

"The farmer protesters from the Singhu border started their rally around

6.30 in the morning, hours before the time allotted, and despite requests from police officials they did not stop and broke the barricades," the CP added.

"Farmer leader Satnam Singh Pannu, who was with the farmers from the Singhu border, was stopped by the police at Mukarba Chowk after they deviated from the route. Pannu sat on dharna and gave inflammatory speeches, following which the protesters got agitated and broke past the police-installed barricades towards ITO," the police chief said, adding that Darshan Pal Singh, the

Samyukt Kisan Morcha leader, also sat on a dharna with others when Mr Pannu delivered the speech.

"The farmers march from Tikri and Ghazipur also started at around 8.30 am. The farmers from the Tikri border also broke barricades at Nangloi to move ahead towards the Red Fort. They overturned trailers and also vandalised vehicles," said the CP.

He said that 394 police personnel were injured while 30 police vehicles were damaged in the violence on Wednesday.

Six Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) buses were also damaged in the violence that broke out at ITO during the farmers' tractor parade.

The tractor march turned violent as the protesters broke barricades and violated the agreed routes of the rally. The rioters entered Central Delhi and clashed with the police and laid siege to the Red Fort, where they hoisted flags. The capital's ITO area became the main clashing point, where several police personnel and protesters sustained injuries.

2 farmers' unions quit agitation

■ **Continued from Page 1** farmers, nor did he discuss their pain in any meeting with the government. "We didn't come to defame January 26. We supported their agitation but not what happened yesterday," Bharatiya Kisan Union (Bhanu) chief Thakur Bhanu Pratap Singh said he too was withdrawing from the protest as he was pained to see the violence in Delhi. "I am deeply pained by whatever happened in Delhi yesterday and am ending our protest."

But even as the two farmers' unions withdrew

from the two-month-long protests, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha, an umbrella organisation of the agitating groups, made it clear they will not call off the agitation until the three farm laws are withdrawn and a legal guarantee is offered on the Minimum Support Price. The morcha appealed to the protesting farmers to maintain peace and said their agitation against the agricultural laws would be a prolonged one. A section of farmers have made it clear they have no plans of delaying or abandoning their march to Parliament

on Budget day on February 1.

The government has so far held 11 rounds of talks with the farmers who have been protesting since November 26 last year.

A petition has also been moved in the Supreme Court seeking an inquiry by a retired apex court judge into the violence. The plea has also sought a direction to the concerned authority to lodge an FIR under the relevant penal provisions against the individuals or organisations responsible for the violence and causing dishonour to the national

flag.

A section of the protesters had stormed the forecourt of the iconic Red Fort where they hoisted a Sikh "Nishan Sahib" flag. The national flag, a permanent fixture on the 17th century landmark, was not touched.

A video of a youth from Tarn Taran district in Punjab, who is believed to have hoisted the "Nishan Sahib" flag at the historic site, has gone viral on the social media. In the video, the youth's father and grandfather are heard showering praise on him for "showing bravery".

Sourav back in hospital after chest pain

■ **Continued from Page 1** is no charge in his parameters since his last hospitalisation and his vital parameters are stable," the hospital stated in a statement after he underwent medical tests, including ECG. Saurav Ganguly is likely to undergo an angiogram on Thursday, sources said.

The BCCI chief has been kept under observation in a cabin under his cardiologists, Dr Aftab Khan and Dr Saroj Mondal, and a family friend, Dr Saptarshi Basu. This is the second time that Sourav, who has a family history of ischemic heart disease, fell ill in less than a month.

On January 2 he was admitted to Woodlands Hospital after a mild heart attack, that led to a black-out during a fitness session on a treadmill at his home gym.

On January 7, Sourav was discharged from Woodlands after he underwent angiography. Like last time, Union

home minister Amit Shah inquired about Sourav's health from BJP leader Kailash Vijayvargiya. Later, Cricket Association of Bengal chief Avishek Dalmiya and his elder sister, Bally MLA Baishali, visited Sourav. Baishali said: "Sourav is keeping well. His medical reports are good."

THE ASIAN AGE

28 JANUARY 2021

China playing long game, be vigilant and prepared

The skirmish involving Indian soldiers on the Sikkim-China border last week is just another event in a decades-long chain featuring Chinese expansionism. It may seem incongruous that while Commander level talks have been going on that an incursion should take place. Place the event against a historical perspective and the reality hits home that more things change the more China remains the same. The skirmish may indeed be a minor face-off as the Indian Army described it but if it true that the casualties in terms of injuries was on a scale of five to one on the Chinese side, it might just have served the purpose in sending the message across to the territorially ambitious northern neighbour. India is prepared to hold its positions, at least wherever it is placed advantageously in terms of terrain and is capable of giving it back.

The gap between perceptions and reality is huge when it comes to India-China relations. While the political class might want 1.35 billion Indians to believe that not a square mile of territory has been surrendered to the

The way forward for India would be to keep building and buttressing border infrastructure, particularly for the IAF, safeguarding areas around roads India has built and moving armour and men into strategic areas

Chinese since the 1962 war, the truth is huge swathes of disputed land, which in India's eyes is its, has been progressively taken over. It would not be far from the truth to suggest that the Chinese have come in as much as 25 to 30 km in places along the LAC and at least 5 to 8 km in the Finger area north of Pangong Lake in Ladakh. Historically speaking, this can be blamed on the unbridgeable gap in perceptions of LAC rather than weaknesses in the regimes in New Delhi, which, since the times of Vajpayee's prime ministership, have taken a harder stance on India-China border issues.

The reality of China's expansionism is being reflected too often for comfort in most recent times, whether in Doklam in 2017, Galwan Valley in 2020 or in Naku La in Sikkim a week ago. The complaints of our people in Arunachal Pradesh or Ladakh about Chinese soldiers and civilians using Indian roads to expand their presence across the LAC and taking over land they would normally use for grazing their yaks are real, so too whispers of villages coming up on what we perceive to be our side. There is no denying China's propensity to keep up the pressure on the 4,000 km border, ranging from Ladakh in the west to Arunachal Pradesh in the east and including on land bordering Bhutan and Sikkim.

Nothing could be more ideal than seeking peace through diplomacy and pursuing disengagement and de-escalation even if it means having to deal with a truculent neighbour whose deeds betray their words. Since recurring bouts of skirmishes cannot be ruled out, the way forward for India would be to keep continuously building and buttressing border infrastructure, particularly for the IAF whose capabilities are formidable, safeguarding areas around roads India has built and moving armour and men into strategic areas. All of this must serve eternal vigil about China while being prepared to shove if it comes to a push. Let us not for even a moment believe that China has changed.

Kerala must step up Covid fight

Kerala, which once led other Indian states in containing the pandemic, Covid-19, appears to have lost its way and is now lagging behind them in most parameters, excepting the mortality rate. At present, the state has about 71,000 active cases, which make about 41 per cent of the total active cases in the country. Its test positivity rate of 12.48 is the highest in the country.

There have been a lot of factors contributing to the steady spike in the number but experts are in unison pointing to the complacency people exhibit in following the Covid-appropriate protocol. It has been well-established that crowding, close contacts and closed spaces facilitate easy spread of the virus. With the restrictions on most events gone, the state has witnessed a spurt in events with people paying little or no attention to the rules of the "break-the chain" campaign. Elections to the local bodies held in November and the festival season that followed did not help the situation either.

A key point is the low mortality rate that has taken the fear factor off the people's minds. The state has seen only 3,643 deaths due to Covid-19 as on January 26, thanks to the healthcare infrastructure it has created over the decades and the efficient mechanism it has put in place to treat the patients. The state has not yet reached a point where its facilities are overwhelmed though healthcare experts fear that outcome, should the trend continue unchecked.

The state government should act swiftly to contain the Covid spread, and even consider reintroducing some of the controls it has lifted. The state health minister is on record stating that the grassroots work undertaken by the local self governments helped contain the pandemic in the initial phases. The government should try and revive that spirit. With the elections to the state Assembly round the corner, it does not have much time to spare either.

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Subhani



As farmers lose ground, govt will take tough line



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

The Republic Day "tractor parade" mayhem at two points in Delhi

on Tuesday is an episode in the two-month-long standoff between the Narendra Modi government and the Punjab farmers that is neither too big nor too serious. There are always moments in long-drawn agitations when unruly elements indulge in unseemly acts. An agitator placing some flags of a Sikh gurdwara and of the farmers' union was indulging in a mindless prank, or the man driving the tractor into a police cordon was a man who had no sense. But this foolish episode has been blown out proportion by young television news channel reporters and anchors. Their innocence and ignorance were both amusing and touching to watch.

The significance of the fracas on Tuesday has more to do with the position of the farmers, who could proudly claim till then that theirs was a peaceful protest and they could sit on a high moral perch. Their inflexible stance carried a quixotic nobility about it. All that vanished by the afternoon of Republic Day as some of the agitation's senior leaders even apologised as they blamed the people who had turned into hooligans and they tried to say that the trouble-makers were not from their fold. Of course, that defence is weak and unconvincing. And it will be hard for them to live down the avoidable clash with the police. But the farmers and their leaders have lost strategic ground as well. They cannot any longer speak with the courage and confidence they had before Tuesday. They may not be to blame for

the trouble and violence that erupted on the streets, but they cannot escape the moral responsibility.

The more curious part in this showdown is that of the Delhi police and that of the Union home ministry, with home minister Amit Shah at the helm. The unintended consequences of Tuesday's clash with the agitators allows the government to corner the farmers and their leaders, and it also gives them the room to prosecute the suspected "Maoists" and "Khalistanis" who ran amok on the streets. There is an uncanny resemblance to what the police did in February 2020 during the communal riots in northeast Delhi. The Delhi police literally adopted the guerrilla tactic of allowing the protesters to unleash violence, and they used the violence to turn the tables on the agitators. In last year's riots, the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act stir was used to shut down the months-long peaceful protest at Shaheen Bagh. It remains to be seen whether Mr Shah will try to use Tuesday's violence to push the farmers back now that they are on the backfoot. But that is unlikely to happen as the principal leaders of Punjab's farmers aren't going to allow themselves to be distracted by Tuesday's developments; their eyes are focused on the repeal of the farm laws. Mr Shah may not have an easy time though he has ordered the deployment of paramilitary forces in Delhi, Haryana and Punjab. It is, however, clear that Mr Shah will have more of a say in dealing with the agitation now.

Behind this political grandstanding by the government following

Tuesday's events, there is the troubling fact that the Delhi police has lost the ability to tackle agitations and protests. It has been argued by well-meaning neutral observers, including those who have a sneaking sympathy for the Narendra Modi government and a corresponding antipathy for Punjab's "pampered farmers", that the Delhi police could not have deployed sufficient forces at all points of the tractor parade's route due to the constraints of numbers. That the police officers could not but trust the farmer unions leaders, and the police was caught off-guard by the overwhelming numbers of angry protesters with their speeding tractors, swords, rods, etc. This lament of betrayal by police officials is as naive as that of the farm leaders' blaming so-called saboteurs.

It is quite evident that the Delhi police has not been exposed to agitations like before, and that its personnel haven't been trained sufficiently to tackle such situations. The police officers as well as Union home ministry officials should have realised that there was a need for a larger force to monitor the movement of tractors and the protesting farmers. The decision to deploy paramilitary units on Tuesday should have been taken on Monday the moment it was decided to allow the tractor parade. These miscalculations are indeed part of the fallibility of those in command. It is however to be seen whether they will learn any lessons for the future.

The confrontation

The Delhi police is to be blamed for its inept handling and lack of preparedness. The farmers too have lost the moral high ground as rogue elements ran amok on the capital's streets.

between the agitating farmers and the government will turn more hostile than before, and this may not help to find a face-saving exit for either of the two sides. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has kept himself aloof from the issue apart from giving general, vague rhetorical responses. The people on the ground are agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar, railway and commerce minister Piyush Goyal and of course home minister Amit Shah. Mr Shah was earlier active in dealing with the agitation but then moved back and let Mr Tomar hold the fort. It was clear Mr Shah was not the man to take conciliatory positions of any kind, while Mr Tomar played the role of conciliator quite deftly.

After Tuesday's minor explosion, it is likely that Mr Shah will again be in the forefront and will show the mailed fist of the government. This may not help to end the agitation and the deadlock. The force deployment becomes inevitable all around. The government might relish the moment as it would create the momentary satisfaction that is in control of the situation. The Prime Minister, with his unsailable parliamentary majority in the last seven years, has not shown any signs of flexibility on any issue. The deployment of forces will maintain "law and order", but the decisions that gave rise to the agitation still need to be reviewed. Somewhere down the line, the Modi government is losing its political capital. But ruling parties, cocooned behind the turrets and moats of power, do not care much for the changes in the sentiments of the people. There is clear trouble ahead of the political kind, even as the Prime Minister and his colleagues exhibit self-righteousness.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

LETTERS

DEEP'S DUBIOUS ROLE

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), a joint front of the protesting farmer unions, has condemned the violence that erupted in the national capital on Tuesday and blamed antisocial elements for infiltrating the peaceful Republic Day tractor agitation. It is rumoured that actor Deep Sidhu led the planting of the Nishansahib at Red Fort. There have been photographs of Sidhu posing with the Prime Minister and BJP MP Sunny Deol. His role has cast a shadow on the true intent of the hardline faction from amongst the agitators.

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

FARMERS ANSWERABLE

WHAT HAPPENED on the Republic Day in New Delhi was unprecedented and utterly shameful. Protesting farmers stormed the national capital and historic rampart of Red Fort. Those spearheading the farmer agitation cannot absolve them from their responsibility for what happened simply by dissociating themselves and saying that it was the act of miscreants. It is their job to identify the so-called miscreants and present them to police. The agitation leaders have declared a march to the Parliament on February 1. These leaders must ensure that the march remains peaceful.

M.C. Joshi
Lucknow

CARE FOR SENIORS

THOSE AGED OVER 70 years are vulnerable to health issues. Now members of this age group have been advised to confine their movements to home in order to be safe from Covid. The RBI had earlier instructed all banks to extend doorstep banking to the 70-plus age group with nominal charges. But none of the banks took this instruction seriously and no such facility was extended. I appreciate this move by the RBI beseech the central bank to instruct all banks to make suitable arrangements to comply with its guidelines especially in view of the fact that 70-year-olds are not recovering at all from Covid these days.

K.L. Rao
Visakhapatnam

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

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Foreign assets on IRS radar as CBDT lobbies for more funds

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) is strengthening its drive against unaccounted foreign assets and benami properties with a slew of steps. It has launched a new online facility to encourage informants to tip off tax sleuths on black assets abroad. Further, it has started creating special Foreign Asset Investigation Units (FAIUs) in its 14 directorates across the country. Already, sources say, some 70 investigators have been transferred to these units to kickstart their operations. Sources say that CBDT has also put in a request for more Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officers. Since this requires additional resources, the CBDT has sought more allocation in the Union Budget to fund the drive.

The FAIUs will function under director-general ranked income tax officers, and depending on how these units are grouped, they will also have directors, additional directors and sufficient support

staff to perform their mandated job. All these units will be directly monitored by the CBDT, though it is unclear at this stage how this will be achieved.

Sources also reveal that the CBDT is not averse to hiring the services of experts like data analysts and chartered accountants from outside the government if required. The FAIUs will also probe cases of Indian entities named in global tax document leaks, such as the infamous Panama Papers. It does appear that the IRS cadre, often eclipsed by the other more high-profile civil services, may get their moment in the sun.

DON'T KEEP VIGILANCE CASES PENDING, SAYS CVC

In a significant move, the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) has urged cadre controlling authorities, including the Union home ministry and the department of personnel and training (DoPT), to facilitate and approve vigilance

Speculation is rife that Mr Arvind Sharma could be named the home minister or even deputy chief minister of UP. But many see a larger plan for Mr Sharma in UP politics.

clearance of IAS, IPS and IFS officers if the state government or relevant department fails to respond within three months on vigilance queries.

The communication from chief vigilance commissioner Sanjay Kothari also states that in all instances where the authorities fail to provide details of vigilance cases against babus within three months, the officers will be considered as clean and fit for promotion.

Sources say that this order is consequent to the commission discovering that often cadre-controlling authorities do not adhere to the

rule, leading to long-pending and unresolved complaints shown against the officers' names. Apparently, in some instances, even the concerned officers were unaware of a complaint pending against them!

If the CVC has its way, this could put an end to the many frivolous vigilance cases that are kept pending for months (and years in some cases) and give deserving officers their career dues.

SHARMA TO SPEARHEAD MODI'S UP PLAN

The advent of Arvind Sharma, a former Gujarat cadre IAS officer and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's trusted lieutenant, in the hurly-burly of Uttar Pradesh politics is being watched keenly. Mr Sharma recently joined the BJP after having retired as MSME (micro, small and medium enterprises) secretary at the Centre. He is to join the state legislative council.

Speculation is rife that Mr

Sharma could be named the home minister or even deputy chief minister of UP. But many see a larger plan for Mr Sharma in UP politics. They feel that Mr Modi wouldn't depute his trusted ex-babu to simply become an MLC or minister. It is believed that Mr Modi will start the party's campaign for the 2022 Assembly elections through Mr Sharma. So, it is quite likely that Mr Sharma's role will be to help chief minister Yogi Adityanath's government implement government schemes in the state before the polls.

The move also reiterates Mr Modi's oft-seen penchant for introducing his trusted bureaucrats in politics. Retired bureaucrats and technocrat professionals are his first choice—bringing R.K. Singh, Hardeep Puri and S.K. Jaishankar into politics is an example.

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@Twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect.

SHORT TAKES

RIVER OF LAVA FROM VOLCANO IN INDONESIA

Yogyakarta (Indonesia), Jan. 27: Indonesia's most active volcano erupted Wednesday with a river of lava and searing gas clouds flowing 1,500 metres (4,900 feet) down its slopes. It was the Mount Merapi's longest lava flow since authorities raised the volatile volcano's danger level in November, said Hanik Humaida, the head of Yogyakarta's Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation Centre.

The alert level was being maintained for now at the second-highest level, she said, and people should stay out of the existing 5-kilometre (3-mile) danger zone around the crater as the local administrations in Central Java and Yogyakarta provinces closely monitor the situation. The 2,968-metre (9,737-foot) volcano is on the densely populated island of Java and near the ancient city of Yogyakarta.

TREAT SAILORS FAIRLY, CHINA TELLS INDONESIA

Beijing, Jan. 27: China's government called on Indonesia on Wednesday to treat a group of detained Chinese sailors fairly but gave no indication what their oil tanker was doing when it was found at sea transferring fuel from an Iranian ship.

The Iranian-flagged MT Horse and Panamanian-flagged MT Freya were seized Sunday and are suspected of illegally transferring fuel at sea, shutting off their identification systems and other offences, Indonesian authorities said. 36 Iranian and 25 Chinese crew members were detained. Iran has sold oil on the black market since then-President Donald Trump imposed sanctions in 2018 and threatened to penalise countries that bought Iranian crude.

Indonesian authorities confirmed to the Chinese Embassy crew members are "in good condition," said foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian.

IRAN PREZ FLAYS PROSECUTION OF TELECOM MIN

Tehran, Jan. 27: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on Wednesday criticised Iran's hard-liner dominated judiciary over last week's prosecution of the country's telecommunications minister.

Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi was released on bail after he was summoned for prosecution. Judiciary officials cited his refusal to block Instagram and impose limitations on the bandwidth of other foreign social media and messaging systems.

Speaking in a Cabinet meeting Wednesday, Rouhani said improving the bandwidth of the Internet was done on his orders. "If you want to try someone, try me. It was my order," he said.

Under pressure from hard-liners, the Iranian government has long blocked access to many websites and social media platforms, from YouTube and Facebook to Twitter and Telegram. The relatively moderate Rouhani said increasing bandwidth would help improve business and an anti-corruption campaign.

U.S.: ERITREA SOLDIERS MUST LEAVE TIGRAY

Nairobi, Jan. 27: The United States said all soldiers from Eritrea should leave Ethiopia's embattled Tigray region "immediately." A State Department spokesperson cited "credible reports of looting, sexual violence, assaults in refugee camps and other human rights abuses." "There is also evidence of Eritrean soldiers forcibly returning Eritrean refugees from Tigray to Eritrea," the spokesperson said.

The statement reflects new pressure by the Biden administration on the government of Ethiopia, Africa's second most populous country and the anchor of the Horn of Africa, and other combatants as the deadly fighting in Tigray nears the three-month mark.

The AP this week cited witnesses who fled the Tigray region as saying Eritrean soldiers were looting, going house-to-house killing young men and even acting as local authorities. The Eritreans have been fighting on the side of Ethiopian forces as they pursue the fugitive leaders of the Tigray region, though Ethiopia's government has denied their presence.

Fog engulfs Eiffel Tower



A pedestrian crosses a bridge in front of the Eiffel tower in Paris on Wednesday. The top of Eiffel Tower is engulfed in fog. — AFP

Impeachment trial: Don likely to be acquitted

Democrats fail to get enough support from Republicans

Washington, Jan. 27: Former US President Donald Trump is likely to be acquitted in his impeachment trial as the Democrats failed to garner enough support required from Republican Senators. The Democrats who have impeached Trump in the House charging him with "incitement of insurrection," needs two-thirds of the vote for the Senate impeachment.

Currently both the Democrats and the Republicans have 50 members each in the 100-seat Senate. The Democrats need the support of at least 17 Republican Senators to reach the two-thirds majority mark. Trump is the first US president who facing an impeachment trial after he left the presidency. This is for the second time in about a year that Trump is likely to be acquitted by the Senate. "I can't see how you get 17. I think that was a test vote," Republican Senator John Boozman said after 45 of the 50 Republican Senators voted for the motion that the impeachment trial of Trump after he left the presidency is unconstitutional.

The article of impeachment was delivered by the House to the Senate Monday night. "The next step, as you all have reported and people watching at home know, is for the Senate to proceed with their trial. He's going to allow them to move forward at the pace and manner that the leaders in the Senate determine. And I can promise you that we will leave the vote counting to leaders in the Senate from now on," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters at her daily news conference.

Biden inks orders for racial equity

Washington, Jan. 27: US President Joe Biden has signed a series of executive orders to ensure racial equity across the country, acting on one of his core campaign promises to dismantle "systemic racism" that has plagued America far too long.

While announcing the four presidential actions on Tuesday at the White House, a week after being sworn in as the 46th US President, Biden cited the killing of George Floyd, a PoC man, by a Minneapolis police officer last May,

which touched off demonstrations across the country. Biden called the killing "the knee on the neck of justice," and said that because of it, "the ground has shifted."

It changed minds and mindsets. "In my campaign for President, I made it very clear that the moment had arrived as a nation where we face deep racial inequities in America and systemic racism that has plagued our nation for far, far too long," Biden said.

— PTI

YouTube suspends Trump indefinitely

San Francisco, Jan. 27: YouTube has suspended Donald Trump indefinitely from the platform and said it will also prevent the former president's lawyer Rudy Giuliani from being able to monetize his clips, US media reported.

It comes a week after the social media giant confirmed it would extend a ban on Trump's channel - which has just under

three million subscribers - joining other social media platforms in banning his accounts following the deadly January 6 Capitol riot.

The Google-owned firm has faced some criticism over its slow response following the violence in Washington, as well as the proliferation of conspiracy theories on the platform. — AFP

Republican Senator Kevin Cramer said the Senate should not be wasting its time holding another impeachment trial. "We do not have solid constitutional standing to impeach a former president, and even if we did, this is not the time

to use it. As I have said repeatedly, President Trump's comments on January 6 were rash and ill-advised but I do not believe they meet the constitutional standard for impeachment," he said.

— PTI

PIO LAWMAKERS IN CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES

Washington, Jan. 27: Indian-origin US lawmakers Pramila Jayapal and Raja Krishnamoorthi have been named to key congressional committees on budget and the Covid-19 pandemic by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

While Congresswoman Jayapal, 55, was named to the powerful budget committee, Congressman Krishnamoorthi, 47, was appointed to a key congressional committee on the Coronavirus crisis on Tuesday. The Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis was established to provide oversight of the federal Covid-19 pandemic response.

"I am honoured to join Chairman Clyburn and our colleagues on this panel to provide vital oversight of the federal Coronavirus response to protect the health and safety of the American people as we defeat the pandemic and rebuild our economy," said Krishnamoorthi, serving as the US Representative for Illinois's 8th congressional district since 2017.

"I look forward to working with members of both parties as we ensure that the trillions of dollars in taxpayer funds dedicated to our country's response to this pandemic and its economic impacts are used as efficiently, transparently and effectively as possible," he said.

Jayapal, the US Representative for Washington's 7th congressional district since 2017, was named as a member of the House Budget Committee. — PTI

Maduro 'miracle' cure for Covid draws skeptics ire

Supply chains vulnerable: UN

Caracas, Jan. 27: Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro appears to be counting on yet another "miracle" to save his citizens from Covid-19, promoting a secretive solution with no published scientific evidence he claims will conquer the new Coronavirus.

"Ten drops under the tongue every four hours and the miracle is done," Maduro said in a televised appearance on Sunday. "It's a powerful antiviral, very powerful, that neutralises the Coronavirus."

But his government has released no evidence. He even kept secret the name of the "brilliant Venezuelan mind" behind it, saying he needed to protect them. Scientists at home and abroad remained sceptical. The local National Academy of Medicine said it appeared to be derived from the common herb thyme. It's not the first time the Venezuelan leader has promoted a cure.

In October, he notified the Pan American Health Organisation that Venezuelan scientists discovered a molecule that nullifies the replication capacity of the new Coronavirus. He hasn't spoken of that development since. He's also promoted a special herbal tea he claims can fend off the virus and other ailments.

Other leaders too have embraced solutions dismissed by scientific studies.

The Hague, Jan. 27: The head of the World Food Programme said Wednesday that the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the need to strengthen vulnerable supply chains to impoverished nations struggling to feed their populations. David Beasley, executive director of the United Nations' Nobel Peace Prize-winning food programme, said that the pandemic put further stress on supply chains getting food to the hungry. "We've got to continue to work the system, we've got to make certain that we are ... less

vulnerable to Covid type impacts," Beasley told a World Economic Forum virtual panel.

"If you think you've had trouble getting toilet paper in New York, because of supply chain disruption, what do you think's happening in Chad and Niger and Mali and places like that?" Beasley stressed that the food supply system is "not broken" but that 10 per cent of the global population is in extreme poverty and need to be reached by suppliers and that the global pandemic exacerbated existing problems. — AP

ies. Former US President Donald Trump and Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro both stubbornly touted an antimalarial drug despite repeated studies finding it ineffective and possibly dangerous.

The new Coronavirus hasn't hit Venezuela as hard as other South American countries such as Brazil, Ecuador and Peru, though many experts say that's likely because sanctions against Maduro's government have sharply limited travel there.

Maduro said the treatment, which he called carvativir, has been under testing for nine months among Venezuelans ill with the Coronavirus. He said he plans to distribute it nationwide and to other nations as well. Dr David Boulware, professor of medicine and an infectious diseases physician at the University of Minnesota Medical School, noted the lack of scientific evidence. — AP

JETS TO TAIWAN WARNING TO ALL POWERS: CHINA

Beijing, Jan. 27: The Chinese government said Wednesday that actions like its warplanes flying near Taiwan last weekend are a warning against both foreign interference in Taiwan and any independence moves by the island.

Asked about the flights, Zhu Fenglian, a spokesperson for China's Taiwan Affairs Office, said China's military drills are to show the nation's resolution to protect its national sovereignty and territorial integrity. "They are a stern warning against external interference and provocation from separatist forces advocating for Taiwan independence," she said at a regular briefing, giving the Chinese government's first official comment on the recent flights. China sent eight bombers and four fighter jets into Taiwan's air defence identification zone on Saturday, according to Taiwan's Defence Ministry. — AP

N-treaty extension gets Russian nod

Moscow, Jan. 27: The lower house of Russian parliament on Wednesday approved the extension of the last remaining nuclear arms control pact days before it's due to expire.

The State Duma voted unanimously to extend the New START treaty for five years.

The vote came a day after a phone call between US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin, in which they voiced satisfaction with the exchange of diplomatic notes about extending the New START treaty.

They agreed to complete the necessary procedures in the next few days, according to the Kremlin. The pact's extension doesn't require congressional approval in the US, but Russian lawmakers must ratify the move.

Top members of the Kremlin-controlled parliament said they would fast-track the issue and complete the necessary steps to extend the treaty this week. — AP

EURO COURT SLAMS RUSSIA'S '08 WAR WITH GEORGIA

Tbilisi, Jan. 27: Europe's top human rights court on Wednesday found Russia responsible for a swath of violations in Georgia's breakaway regions after the 2008 Russia-Georgia war.

Georgia hailed the verdict by the European Court of Human Rights as a major victory.

President Salome Zurbishvili described the ruling as "historic," noting that Georgia was "recognised as a victim of this war and it is a great achievement for our country, our society, our history and our future."

Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia also described the verdict as a landmark move, saying that "the case against Russia at the European Court of Human Rights has ended with Georgia's victory." — AP

Raj Kapoor Pak home owner opposes sale at govt's rate

Peshawar, Jan. 27: The owner of Indian film legend Raj Kapoor's ancestral home in Peshawar has refused to sell the building at the rate fixed by the provincial Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, saying the prime-location property has been severely undervalued.

Earlier in the month, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government had approved the release of Rs 1.5 crore for Kapoor's ancestral home, with the aim to

turn it into a museum in honour of the movie star. Haji Ali Sabir, the present owner of the haveli, in a chat with a private news channel on Wednesday, flatly refused to sell the property at Rs 1.5 crore. "Even half a Marla land in the area is not available for Rs 1.5 crore. How can I sell the six-marla property for Rs 1.5 crore?" he said.

Marla, a traditional unit of area used in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, is considered as equal to

272.25 square feet or 25.2929 square metres. Sabir said the right valuation of the property is Rs 200 crore. Raj Kapoor's ancestral home, known as Kapoor Haveli, is situated in the famed Qissa Khwani Bazar.

It was built between 1918 and 1922 by the legendary actor's grandfather Dewan Basheswarnath Kapoor. Raj Kapoor and his uncle Trilok Kapoor were born here. — PTI

EXTERMINATION | CAMP

Prez of Israel, Germany, Poland to deliver remarks on global Holocaust Remembrance Day

Auschwitz survivors mark anniversary online due to Covid

Warsaw, Jan. 27: Tova Friedman hid among corpses at Auschwitz amid the chaos of the extermination camp's final days. Just 6 years old at the time, the Poland-born Friedman was instructed by her mother to lie absolutely still in a bed at a camp hospital, next to the body of a young woman who had just died. As German forces preparing to flee the scene of their genocide went from bed to bed shooting anyone still alive, Friedman barely breathed under a blanket and went unnoticed.

Days later, on January 27, 1945, she was among the thousands of prisoners who survived to greet the Soviet troops who liberated the camp in Nazi-occupied Poland.

Now 82, Friedman had hoped to mark Wednesday's anniversary by taking her eight grandchildren to the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial site, which is under the custodianship of the Polish state. The Coronavirus pandemic prevented the trip. So instead, Friedman will be alone at home in Highland Park,

New Jersey, on International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Yet a message of warning from her about the rise of hatred will be part of a virtual observance organised by the World Jewish Congress.

Other institutions around the world, including the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial museum in Poland, Yad Vashem in Israel and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC also have online events planned. The presidents of Israel, Germany and Poland

will be among those delivering remarks of remembrance and warning.

The online nature of this year's commemorations is a sharp contrast to how Friedman spent the 75th anniversary of Auschwitz's liberation last year, when she gathered under a huge tent with other survivors and dozens of European leaders at the site of the former camp.

It was one of the last large international gatherings before the pandemic forced the cancellation of most large gatherings.

Many Holocaust survivors in the United States, Israel and elsewhere find themselves in a state of previously unimaginable isolation due to the pandemic. Friedman lost her husband last March and said she feels acutely alone now. But survivors like her also have found new connections over Zoom: World Jewish Congress leader Ronald Lauder has organized video meetings for survivors and their children and grandchildren during the pandemic. — AP



File photo of the railway tracks where thousands of people arrived to be directed to the gas chambers inside the former Nazi death camp of Auschwitz Birkenau in Oswiecim, Poland. — AP

quick
BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	47,409.93	-1.94
Nifty 50	13,967.50	-1.91
S&P 500*	3,775.91	-1.91
Dollar (₹)	72.91	0.05
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.07	-0.43
Euro (₹)	88.60	0.02
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,421*231	0.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	56.30	0.70
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.954	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.003	-0.037

* As of 8:30 PM IST

ByteDance cuts
India workforce,
unsure of future

China's ByteDance is cutting the size of its 2,000-plus India team and is unsure when it will make a comeback, the firm told employees in an internal memo, months after its popular TikTok video app was banned. The move came after India this month decided to retain its ban on TikTok and 58 other Chinese apps. "We initially hoped that this situation would be short-lived...we find that has not been the case," ByteDance said.

JLR appoints
creative chief
to board



Jaguar Land Rover appointed its chief creative officer Gerry McGovern to the board of management to help redefine the Jaguar brand as Britain's biggest carmaker reviews its strategy under new CEO Thierry Bollere. McGovern would be "developing the character, distinction and personality of each" brand and the role includes leading the design function at the marques, the firm said.

Reliance, Israeli
firm in deal to sell
breath test kit

Reliance Group has signed a \$15 million deal with Israeli company Breath of Health (BOH) to distribute the latter's swift Covid-19 breath testing system throughout India, a media report in Jerusalem said. Reliance will purchase hundreds of systems from the Israeli company in a deal valued at \$15 million and will use them to conduct millions of tests a month at a cost of \$10 million per month.

Ethanol-blending
target brought
forward by 5 yrs

India has preponed the target of achieving 20 per cent ethanol-blending with petrol by five years to 2024-25 as it looks to cut dependence on costly oil imports, oil minister Dharmendra Pradhan said. "In 2014, less than 1 per cent ethanol was being blended with petrol against the target of 5 per cent. In the last sugar year, this ratio has reached 8.5 per cent and next year it is 10 per cent," he said at an event.

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■ Double-digit growth in HUL rural sales
FMCG firms sight
consumption rise

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JAN. 27

Revival of consumer sentiments, combined with festive season consumption, helped FMCG companies post impressive growth in revenues, volumes as well as profits in the third quarter. Health and hygiene products, food and refreshments and rural consumption supported the performance of fast moving consumer goods firms.

Hindustan Unilever's total sales grew by 20 per cent in the December quarter, while its domestic consumer business grew by 7 per cent. Sales volumes, excluding acquisition of GSK, grew 4 per cent. Health, hygiene and nutrition, which form 80 per cent of HUL's portfolio, grew in double digits. Foods and refreshments were up by 19 per cent. Rural market, which grew in double digits, also supported sales.

HUL's profit after tax for the quarter went up 19 per cent to Rs 1,921 crore against Rs 1,616 crore in the year-ago quarter. As the commodity prices had gone up, HUL made double-digit price hike in tea and a 2.5 per cent increase in skin cleansing products during the quarter.

"With Covid cases coming down sharply and increasing mobility, economic activity in the country continues to improve. The rapid rollout of vaccines will give further impetus to economic growth," said Sanjiv Mehta, chairman and MD of HUL.



"Good recovery in lag-gard parts, 80 per cent of portfolio grew in double digits, Minimal margin compression, strong brand investments continue, which is the right strategy in our view," finds Edelweiss. Securities.

Emami reported 36.6 per cent jump in its standalone net profit at Rs 202.17 crore for the third quarter as revenue from operations surged by 13 per cent to Rs 845.37 crore. The company posted a strong growth of 16 per cent in its domestic business led by 13 per cent growth in volumes.

"We are witnessing a consistent and all-round growth coming from all channels over the last two quarters and expect to continue with this growth trajectory. Most of our brands, including power brands and digital-first brands in the healthcare segment are on their growth path," said Harsha V. Agarwal, director, Emami.

While rural markets continued to perform better, growth in urban markets also picked up. E-commerce grew by 3.5x and

modern trade registered growth of 51 per cent during the quarter for Emami.

Marico reported a 13.04 per cent rise in consolidated net profit for the third quarter while revenue from operations went up by 16.33 per cent. Revenue from operations grew on the back of a strong domestic volume growth of 15 per cent. Marico saw robust demand for more than 95 per cent of its portfolio amidst steadily improving consumer confidence.

Jyothy Labs reported an 18.23 per cent rise in consolidated net profit. Revenue from operations of the company was up 13.26 per cent. According to Jyothy Labs, revival of the consumer sentiment reflected in the company's performance across its brand portfolio.

"The performance of FMCG companies have improved sequentially along with volume growth. Discretionary spends are also recovering. We should expect better performance in the coming quarters," said Kaustubh Pawaskar, AVP, fundamental research at Sharekhan.

Market gains
of this month
wiped out

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JAN 27

Profit taking ahead of the Union Budget, the outcome of US Fed meeting and monthly futures & options contracts expiry led to Nifty and Sensex falling for the fourth consecutive session and wiping out of all the gains made this month.

The Nifty-50 closed below the 14000 level at 13967.50, down by 271.40 points or 1.91 per cent while the Sensex closed at 47409.93, down by 937.66 points, or 1.94 per cent. The Sensex lost 2382.19 points, or 4.78 per cent, in the last four sessions.

The sharp fall led to a notional loss of Rs 2.62 lakh crore of investors wealth on Wednesday and over Rs 8.07 lakh crore in the last four days.

Investors are apprehensive of US Federal Reserve's next monetary policy move which will be known only on Thursday morning.

"Global cues were weak as investors got cautious about possible roadblocks to US stimulus plan and ahead of Fed policy announcement.

Absence of FII buying over last two days too added to the nervousness. The foreign portfolio investors were net sellers of equities worth Rs 1688.22 crore on Wednesday, much higher than the previous session.

This is the first instance of the benchmark indices falling for four days in a row since September 2020...markets have erased all gains for CY21 year to date and turned negative," said Siddhartha Khemka of Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

Govt plans ₹3 L cr spend
to revive power utilities

SIDDHARTHA SINGH &
DEBJIT CHAKRABORTY
JAN. 27

The government plans to spend Rs 3 lakh crore (\$41 billion) on a new plan to revive regional electricity retailers, people with knowledge of the matter said, after a previous attempt failed to stem losses at the utilities.

The spending would be spread over a few years and is likely to be unveiled on February 1 as part of the government's budget for the year starting April 1, the people said, asking not to be identified as the proposal isn't public. The plan for carrying out reforms for reducing losses of state distribution utilities was sought by the power ministry and is under discussion.

The government is focusing on turning around electricity distributors to ensure reliable power supplies, improving the financial health of generators and making the sector more attractive to foreign investors. The combined loss at the power distribution companies, mostly controlled by state administrations, jumped 69 per cent to Rs 49,620 crore in the year ended March 2019, the latest available data.

The spending would focus on upgrading infrastructure and technology of the ailing utilities to make them more efficient and reduce financial losses, according to the people. Under the plan, the central government would provide annual grants to states that meet targets set by



BUDGET MAY ADDRESS INVERTED
DUTY STRUCTURE FOR STEEL GOODS

New Delhi, Jan. 27: The government is likely to address the issue of inverted duty structure for certain steel products in the Budget to boost domestic manufacturing, sources said.

Inverted duty structure refers to taxation of inputs at higher rates than finished products that results in build-up of credits and cascading costs. Sources said the

Centre may consider removing customs duties on raw materials used for manufacturing certain flat-rolled products of stainless steel.

The import duty on key inputs for stainless steel flat products—ferro nickel and SS scrap—is now higher than the import duty on final goods coming in from Free Trade Agreement partners. —PTI

the Centre.

The plan could include some specific measures such as separating power feeder grids for farmers and residential users, and installation of prepaid smart meters to stop pilferage and encourage timely payment, they said. It also plans to replace overhead cables with special insulated wires to prevent theft.

Electricity retailers are the weakest link in the country's power supply chain, losing on an average about a fifth of their

revenue because of technical and commercial reasons, including loss of power supplies through theft, poor transmission infrastructure and inefficient billing and collection.

The plan will be a modified version of an earlier programme unveiled in 2015 to revive power distributors through restructuring of their debt. That attempt remained unsuccessful in making retailers profitable by March 2019.

—Bloomberg

Economy to get shot in
arm from budget: Poll

TUSHAR GOENKA &
SHALOO SHRIVASTAVA
BENGALURU, JAN. 27

India's path to economic recovery will be stronger than previously thought as fiscal expansion and vaccine hopes help the country heal from Covid-19, a Reuters poll of economists showed.

The vaccination drive and a steep fall in new coronavirus cases is supporting a recovery in the economy.

Alongside that, nearly 60 per cent of respondents, 18 of 31, who responded to an additional question in the January 13-25 poll said the Union budget would help a significant economic recovery in financial year 2021-22.

"We expect global economic activity to return to normality in fiscal Q2 and India to grow in fiscal 2021-22, with government stimulus packages expected to contribute," said Hugo Erken, head of international economics at Rabobank.

"There is a strong sentiment the budget will aim to continue expenditure as growth is the only way India can come out of recent setbacks."

The poll of over 50 econ-

omists showed the economy would grow 9.5 per cent next fiscal year—the highest since polling began for the year in March 2020—after contracting 8 per cent in the current fiscal year.

It was expected to grow 6 per cent in fiscal year 2022-23. The poll predicted the economy would grow 21.1, 9.1, 5.9 and 5.5 per cent in each quarter of the 2021-22 fiscal year, largely upgraded from a poll taken two months ago.

But when asked how long it would take for the economy to recover to its pre-Covid-19 level, 26 of 32 respondents said it would take up to two years, including six analysts said longer than that. Twelve analysts said within a year.

"There is a lack of fiscal space to boost growth sufficiently and India is unlikely to reach its pre-Covid-19 levels any time soon despite policy support," said Sher Mehta, director at Virtuoso Economics.

"Economic momentum will struggle to gain traction as there are fears of stagflation and the possible end of monetary policy easing."

— Reuters

Banks turn cautious on retail loans

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, JAN. 27

Banks are seeing new bad loan formation in consumer and MSME (micro small and medium enterprises) loans this quarter, something also warned by the apex bank last month in its Financial Stability Report.

On Wednesday, public sector lender Bank of Baroda that announced its third quarter results warned of rising stress in the coming months from retail and MSME loans resulting from the Covid stress.

Similarly, private lender Axis Bank said 83 per cent of its loan slippages during the quarter came from the retail segment, particularly from self-employed

customers and mortgage customers.

"The kind of stress we are seeing now is something which is unprecedented and therefore it is likely that there may be some slippages in MSME and retail," said Sanjiv Chadha, MD & CEO of Bank of Baroda at the earnings call, adding, "I am holding out caution. But we are well-positioned, as we have tightened underwriting. Around one per cent of our loan book is unsecured and more than 70 per cent of the retail loan book comprises home loans."

BoB's credit cost, including the impact of provisioning on proforma non-performing assets, was at 2.10 per cent. The bank

restructured Rs 9,600 crore of loans in the December 2020 quarter, 80 per cent of which was corporate loans.

"We do recognise the fact that going ahead some stress will play out in the MSME and retail loan book," Chadha added.

The bank on Wednesday reported a standalone net profit of Rs 1,061 crore for the December quarter on the back of lower provisions. It had posted a loss of Rs 1,407 crore in the same period last year. It reported provisions of Rs 3,957 crore in Q3 of FY21, down 45 per cent year-on-year. With proforma slippages (adjusted for the Supreme Court's interim order), gross and net NPA ratios would have been

9.63 per cent and 3.36 per cent, respectively.

On the same lines, Axis Bank's rise in slippages from the retail portfolio led to tightening of credit norms by the bank for retail loans. "We have been adding rigour to our credit underwriting process. Our focus is to grow in the secured lending space in the retail portfolio," said Sumit Bali, president-retail lending and payments at Axis Bank.

About retail loans turning bad, Puneet Sharma, CFO said, "These are accounts which were under moratorium between March and August."

Axis Bank's net profit stood at Rs 1,116.6 crore compared with Rs 1,757 crore a year ago.

Airlines could reduce CO2 emissions with better use of wind

LAYAN ODEH
JAN. 27

Airlines could "substantially" reduce their fuel consumption if planes become more efficient at riding the wind, according to new research.

Commercial flights between New York and London during the 2019-2020 winter could have

used as much as 16 per cent less fuel if pilots had taken full advantage of the jet stream, scientists at the University of Reading said in a paper published this week.

"By adopting a more flexible routing system, carbon-dioxide emissions from transatlantic flights could actually be reduced by millions of kilograms

every year," wrote lead author Cathie Wells, a PhD researcher in mathematics at the university.

Waiting for more efficient aircraft could take decades, said co-author Professor Paul Williams. Therefore, "choosing flight routes that make better use of the jet stream could deliver emissions cuts that are

significant, cheap and immediate."

The aviation industry added more than 1 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere in 2019, according to BloombergNEF. While emissions have plummeted since because of Covid-19, that drop is likely to be temporary.

—Bloomberg

AT | SEA Hundreds of containers are being held up in Dalian for virus checks

Frozen fish pile-up in China threatens supply chains

ANN KOH
JAN. 27

A huge pile up of fish cargoes at a Chinese port risks impacting shipments of frozen food across the country and beyond.

Hundreds of containers are being held up in Dalian, a major port for seafood imports, as local authorities test the fish for the coronavirus before allowing them to clear customs, according to several freight forwarders, consultants and shipping companies. That's leading to scant availability of electric outlets to keep refrigerated containers, known as reefers, cold.

The shortage of plug points and dwindling space at the port have prompted shipping liners to cancel new reefer bookings into Dalian, and the congestion is now spreading to other refrigerated items like fruit and dumplings. It also means frozen containers are being diverted to other ports in China, leading to bottlenecks in Shanghai and Qingdao too.

"Much of the recent concern for rollover cargo has focused on reefer containers," said Josh Brazil, chief operations officer of freight-data provider Ocean Insights. "If there are no power outlets at the port for reefers to be



plugged in, cargoes of perishable food could be damaged or entirely lost if they cannot be re-routed to another port."

The scenes playing out in Dalian echo the start of the disruptions the world saw when Covid-19 snared global trade flows early last year. Back then, lockdowns in countries including

China meant ports were closed and ships couldn't unload cargoes, causing a dearth of vessels across the world with the ripple effect lasting for months.

It also highlights the impact China's controversial testing of foreign food for the virus is having on supply chains. The country has been testing imported meat and seafood for traces of the virus on concern Covid-19 can spread to humans, despite the WHO saying there's no evidence of people catching the virus from food and food packaging.

"China is probably the only country in the world which claims that the coro-

navirus can be spread through frozen food," said Ralph Leszczynski, head of research at shipbroker Banchemo Costa & Co. "It might well impact container waiting times at ports."

At least four cold-storage vessels have been waiting near Dalian port for as long as two months, nine container ships are docked at the port, and at least six more are waiting in the Yellow Sea to unload, according to Bloomberg data. Reefer containers typically travel together with thousands of normal containers on ships, as long as they have a power source to keep the cargo cold.

—Bloomberg

Life insurers
want GST
cut to 12%

MADHUSUDAN
SAHOO
NEW DELHI, JAN.27

Life insurance companies have called for a significant reduction in the goods and services tax (GST) to 12 per cent from the existing mark-up of 18 per cent. They argue that a financial product as critical as life insurance should have a low rate of GST to increase the penetration of life cover across the country.

"A financial product as critical as life insurance should have a reduced GST, and get exemption on stamp duty for mandated products, so that the costs are not increased for the end customer," said Tarun Chugh, MD & CEO, Bajaj Allianz Life.

"As per the GST norms, life insurance now falls under the slab of 18 per cent tax rate. Since insurance is an essential requirement of every individual for proper financial planning and protection, we believe that a reduction in GST to 12 per cent from 18 per cent or even lower is required," says Vighnesh Shahane, MD & CEO, IDBI Federal Life.

Besides, life insurers also want receipt of life insurance premia via the NRE account as an export service for GST reduction purpose.

"The government can clarify that the receipt of life insurance premium through the NRE account of an NRI, in Indian rupees, is permitted and qualifies as export of services for GST purposes. This will help save costs for NRIs, and in turn, boost the life insurance business," Deloitte said.

The industry has also asked for greater tax exemption for premium payers. "It would be an ideal time for the government to consider increasing the tax exemption limit for life insurance," Chugh said.

SHORT TAKES

Paine remains Oz captain, Wade out

Sydney: Matthew Wade was axed Wednesday for Australia's Test series in South Africa after failing to fire against India, while under-pressure Tim Paine retained the captaincy. Wade played all four games in the tense 2-1 home summer series loss to India, including two as makeshift opener in place of the injured David Warner. But he managed just 173 from his eight innings, with some rash shots ultimately costing him his place in the side and seeing him replaced by Alex Carey as back-up wicket-keeper. Instead, Wade will join Australia's Twenty20 squad on their tour of New Zealand as vice-captain to the out-of-form Aaron Finch. Australia are due to play three Tests in South Africa. The tour was originally scheduled for February and March, but the dates have yet to be locked in due to concerns over Coronavirus. — *AFP*

Stranded Bopanna waits for freedom

New Delhi: The hotel room wall is helping him get some practice and an online course keeping boredom at bay. Rohan Bopanna's build-up to the season-opening Australian Open has been far from ideal so far as he waits for his day of freedom — January 30. The 40-year-old was on one of the three flights out of a total of 17 Tennis Australia-arranged chartered planes, that landed in Melbourne with positive cases on board. He is in his 10th straight day of hard 'quarantine' ever since — confined to his room. "If you test positive, you would be in hard quarantine but what we did not know that if someone on your flight tests positive then everyone also had to be in hard quarantine. That's what happened," Bopanna said from Melbourne. — *PTI*

Gill sets sights on FMSCI Rally lead

Coimbatore: After tasting victories in the first two rounds of the 4 round FMSCI Indian National Rally Championship, the boys in yellow of JK Tyre, are all set to take over in the Rally of Coimbatore scheduled from Jan 30-31. Gaurav Gill reigned in the first two rounds of Rally of Arunachal, is now all geared up in hope to seal his championship title in the third round in Coimbatore itself. Driving the powerful Mahindra XUV 300, he along with his teammate Amitrajit Ghosh make the strongest team in the fray as both of them clinched podiums in their last outing. In order to further enhance the entire team's driving skills and train them for the Rally of Coimbatore, Team leader Gill conducted a two-day workshop in Kethanur, on the outskirts of Coimbatore. "For me, rallying is a science. There is a lot to be learnt and my attempt was to educate the boys on what to do, what were the corrections to be carried out and many more technicalities," said Gill.

Young scores in Atlanta victory

Los Angeles: The short-handed Los Angeles Clippers couldn't overcome the loss of stars Kawhi Leonard and Paul George on Tuesday as they surrendered a first half lead and were beaten by Atlanta, snapping their seven-game NBA win streak. Atlanta all-star Trae Young scored 38 points in his return as the Hawks rallied to defeat the Clippers 108-99 at the State Farm Arena. Hawks top scorer Young, who sat out one game with a back problem, shot 12-of-23 from the field and scored 26 points of his 38 in the first half. He finished a perfect 11 of 11 from the free-throw line. — *AFP*

Live on TV

BADMINTON

BWF World Tour Finals: Group matches from 9.30 am on Star Sports 2 HD, Star Sports 3

CRICKET

Pakistan vs South Africa: First Test, Day 3 from 10.30 am on Sony Ten 2

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Hyderabad FC vs Bengaluru from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

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English test on card

Root & Co. arrive in Chennai to challenge India

Chennai, Jan. 27: Members of the England cricket team including captain Joe Root arrived in the city on Wednesday for the four-match series against India with the first two Tests to be played here.

Some of the Indian players and members of the support staff also landed in this southern city, airport sources said.

Root and Co flew in from Sri Lanka at around 10.30 am and headed to the hotel where members of the two teams will be put up as part of the bio-bubble, a Tamil Nadu Cricket Association official said.

The England team had on Monday completed a 2-0 series sweep of the Tests against Sri Lanka with Root slamming two big centuries.

Star all-rounder Ben Stokes and Jofra Archer had arrived in the city on Sunday and are in quarantine.

While a few Indian players including star batsman Rohit Sharma and Test vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane arrived on Tuesday night, some others like Cheteshwar Pujara, Jasprit Bumrah and Rishabh Pant, star of the series clinching victory in the Brisbane Test, reached on Wednesday morning.

Team coach Ravi Shastri flew in from Mumbai as did several other players from destinations across the country.

Skipper Virat Kohli is scheduled to arrive later on Wednesday.

The players of the two teams will be staying at Hotel Leela Palace in a bio-bubble as part of quarantine protocols and will undergo testing for Covid-19, the TNCA official said. "They will be in quarantine for six days and are set to start practising from February 2," the TNCA official further added.

The first Test will be played at the M A Chidambaram stadium from February 5 and the second from February 13. Chennai had last hosted a Test match in December 2016 against England. — *PTI*

HC NOTICE FOR VIRAT IN PLEA TO BAN GAMBLING

Kochi, Jan. 27: The Kerala High Court on Wednesday issued notice to Virat Kohli and the state government in a plea seeking ban on online gambling in the state.

Besides Kohli, a division bench, headed by Chief Justice S. Manikumar, also issued notices to Malayalam actor Aju Varghese and South Indian actress Tamanna Bhatia. The celebrities are the brand ambassadors of online rummy games.

Petitioner Paully Vadakkan alleged online gambling is now a growing menace in the state and the primary targets will be middle to low income group people who will be enticed to make easy money.

"People who fall to the fraud platforms often use what is left in their life savings. There have been many reported cases across the state in which people have got scammed," he said. — *PTI*

ALAM'S TON LEADS PAK AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA

Karachi, Jan. 27: Fawad Alam's third test century put Pakistan in charge on the second day of the first test against South Africa on Wednesday.

The 35-year-old Alam hit nine fours and two sixes in a patient 109 off 245 balls, compiled in just under six hours, to help his team reach 308-8 at stumps.

Faheem Ashraf also scored a fluent 64 off 84 balls as Pakistan opened up a first-innings lead of 88 runs on a slow wicket. He and Alam shared a stand of 102 for the seventh wicket. Alam was out in the last session when he flicked a ball from Lungi Ngidi (2-55) straight to mid-wicket. Pakistan was in trouble overnight on 33-4 after South Africa had been skittled out for 220 on an eventful first day. — *AFP*

Brief scores: South Africa 220 in 69.2 overs vs Pakistan 308/8 in 107 overs (F. Alam 109, F. Ashraf 64; Archer 2/33, Rabada 2/45).



England cricket team and staff at the Colombo airport on Wednesday.

— *TWITTER*

Virat, Rohit top ODI rankings

Dubai, Jan. 27: India captain Virat Kohli and senior batsman Rohit Sharma retained their number one and two position respectively in the ICC rankings for ODI batsmen, while pacer Jasprit Bumrah remained at the third spot in the bowler's list.

Kohli, who had scored 89 and 63 against Australia in his last two ODI appearance, has 870 points to his kitty.

Rohit, who missed the tour of Australia due to an injury and has not featured in any one-day game since the Covid-19 pandemic began, remained at the second spot, five points ahead of Pakistan skipper Babar Azam (837).

New Zealand's Ross Taylor (818) and Australia



Virat Kohli (right) and Rohit Sharma in this file photo.

skipper Aaron Finch (791) round up the top five in the batsmen's list.

Ireland's Paul Stirling gained eight slots to reach 20th place after scoring 285 runs against Afghanistan which included centuries in the sec-

ond and third matches.

Afghanistan's Hashmatullah Shahidi (70th to 66th), Rashid Khan (96th to 89th) and Javed Ahmadi (103rd to 99th) have also gained in the rankings for batsmen. Among the bowlers, Bumrah

remained the best placed Indian, occupying the third spot with 700 points. New Zealand pacer Trent Boult (722) and Afghan spinner Mujeeb Ur Rahman (701) occupy the top two spots.

Bangladesh spinner Mehidy Hasan Miraz, who was the most successful bowler in the recently concluded series against the West Indies, has progressed nine spots to take fourth position after grabbing seven wickets, including a haul of four for 25 in the second ODI that won him the player of the match award.

Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman's six wickets in the series has lifted him from 19th to eighth position. — *PTI*

IPL AUCTION ON FEBRUARY 18 IN CHENNAI

New Delhi, Jan. 27: The IPL players' auction ahead of the 2021 edition will be held in Chennai on February 18, the league organisers announced on Wednesday.

The announcement was made via IPL's Twitter handle.

"IPL 2021 Player Auction on 18th February," read part of the post.

The "mini auction" will take place following the first two Tests between India and England in Chennai. The series begins on February 5 while the second Test will be played from February 13 to 17. The BCCI is also yet to decide whether the IPL will happen in India even though Sourav Ganguly has repeatedly asserted that everything possible would be done to keep the glitzy event at its home. The player retention deadline ended on January 20 and the trading window closes on February 4. — *PTI*

Sindhu, Srikanth lose in openers

Bangkok, Jan. 27: Star Indian shuttlers P. V. Sindhu and Kidambi Srikanth fought their hearts out before suffering close defeats in their respective group 'B' openers at the \$1.5 million HSBC BWF World Tour Finals here on Wednesday.

A week after a demoralising defeat at the Toyota Thailand Open quarterfinals, World champion Sindhu produced a much-improved performance but still lost to world number one Tai Tzu Ying of Taiwan 21-19, 12-21, 17-21.

"It was a good match, there were no easy points. In the third game I came back and it was just one point difference at one stage. I broke my racket strings twice (during rallies) and that made a difference," Sindhu said.

"It's a tough group. I have to give 100 per cent," she added.

It was Sindhu's 16th defeat to Tzu Ying in 21 meetings.

Former world number one Srikanth too squandered an opening game advantage, losing 21-15, 16-21, 18-21 to world number three Anders Antonsen of Denmark in a gruelling 77-minute contest.

Olympic silver medallist Sindhu, who had won the prestigious title in 2018, will next play home favourites Ratchanok Intanon, who had handed her a humiliating defeat last week, while Srikanth, ranked 14th, will face

fourth seed Wang Tzu Wei of Chinese Taipei on Thursday.

In the women's singles, the opening game was a close fight as Sindhu and Tzu Ying engaged in an enticing battle.

Tzu Ying led 5-3 early on before grabbing a 11-8 advantage at the interval as Sindhu lost a few points on the net.

In the decider, Tzu Ying again led 6-3 but she stumbled to defensive errors as Sindhu levelled the score with a smash.

However, the second seed Taiwanese held a 11-9 lead at the break after Sindhu made another error at the backline.

After the change of sides, Sindhu managed to keep the two-point difference till 13-15 before a lucky net cord and a weak return at the net by Sindhu gave Tzu Ying a 17-13 lead.

Sindhu narrowed it to 16-18 and then 17-19 before Tzu Ying sealed the contest with the Indian going to the net twice. — *PTI*



P. V. Sindhu hits a shot against Taiwan's Tai Tzu-ying during their women's singles first round match at the World Tour Finals badminton tournament in Bangkok on Wednesday. Tai won 19-21, 21-12, 21-17.

— *AFP*

Gundogan brace boosts Man City

London, Jan. 27: Manchester City thrashed West Brom 5-0 to move back top of the Premier League on Tuesday as Arsenal aided their push towards the European places with a 3-1 win at Southampton.

City have now won 11 consecutive games since West Brom earned a shock 1-1 draw at the Etihad last month.

City have hit top form since and did not miss the presence of the injured Kevin De Bruyne in blowing away the Baggies by scoring four goals before half-time.

Ilkay Gundogan opened the floodgates by curling home from the edge of the box before Joao Cancelo's controversial strike doubled City's lead.

The West Brom defence was distracted by a wrongly raised offside flag before the Portuguese full-back found the net, but the goal stood after a VAR review.

Gundogan then took his tally to seven goals in his last eight league games before Riyad Mahrez and Raheem Sterling rounded off the scoring.

THE RESULTS

Manchester City (<i>Gundogan 6, 30, Cancelo 20, Mahrez 45, Raheem Sterling 57</i>)	5
West Bromwich	0
Arsenal (<i>Pepe 8, Saka 39, Lacazette 73</i>)	3
Southampton (<i>Armstrong 3</i>)	1

West Brom have now conceded 17 goals in Sam Allardyce's four home games in charge as they remain second bottom of the table, six points off safety.

Mikel Arteta is also enjoying a fine run of form as Arsenal have taken 16 from the last possible 18 points. Arsenal avenged their FA Cup to Southampton at the weekend despite falling behind after three minutes to Stuart Armstrong's strike.

Nicolas Pepe quickly levelled before Saka rounded McCarthy and slotted home to give the visitors at half-time lead. Lacazette sealed a vital three points 18 minutes. — *AFP*



Ilkay Gundogan (left) of Manchester City celebrates with teammate Phil Foden after scoring his side's third goal against West Bromwich during their English Premier League match at the Hawthorns stadium in West Bromwich, England, on Tuesday. City won 5-0.

— *AP*

