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Shastri: PM's words will boost team's morale



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Shah takes aim at Didi for 'promoting' nephew

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, JAN. 31

Making dynasty politics and nepotism the prime weapon of the BJP against the Trinamul Congress, Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday tore into Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee allegedly giving priority to *bhatija kalyan* (nephew welfare) over *jan kalyan* (public welfare), in an oblique reference to her nephew: Abhishek Banerjee.

Shah also accused the Trinamul Congress government of trying to make the young Diamond Harbour MP the successor of Mamata Banerjee as Chief Minister.

Shah told a BJP rally at Dumurjola Stadium in Howrah, which he was earlier supposed to attend in person, virtually from New Delhi, "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi wherever the NDA has formed its government across the country, it is undertaking work for



Union Home Minister Amit Shah addresses a public meeting in West Bengal via video conferencing, in New Delhi, on Sunday. — PTI

MODI TO LAUNCH 3 PROJECTS IN WB

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, JAN. 31

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on his second visit to West Bengal, will inaugurate three big ticket central projects

totaling ₹4,552 crores at Haldia next week in what appears to be a curtain raiser of his campaign to brighten the BJP's prospects in the ensuing polls.

■ Full report on Page 4

public welfare and development so that each and every village and household gets all services. But here, no agenda other

than making Bhatija the Chief Minister exists. The Modi government is committed to all types of public welfare."



Expelled AIADMK leader V.K. Sasikala leaves a hospital after she recovered from Covid-19 in Bengaluru on Sunday. — PTI

Sasi uses Jaya's car, ADMK flag

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR | DC CHENNAI, JAN. 31

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

Acknowledging the cheerful welcome by supporters, who showered flower petals on the

vehicle and raised slogans in her praise, Sasikala waved at them and greeted all those who were around even as she was escorted to her temporary residence by a convoy of vehicles.

As an augury to what might happen in Tamil Nadu politics, Sasikala's nephew and the founder of Amma Makkal Munetra Kazhagam, T.T.V. Dhinakaran, explained the use of the AIADMK flag by saying that she was indeed the general secretary of the party.

■ Page 4: Sasikala may upset AIADMK's plans

ETALA PLANS COUNSELLING ON VACCINE FEARS

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, JAN. 31

The Telangana government is planning to set up a counselling mechanism to encourage health workers to receive Covid-19 jab after several of them tried to pull themselves out of the vaccination drive.

"Some people are worried about taking vaccine shots because of fears arising from unreliable and unscientific claims being circulated about the safety of vaccines, and the government will take steps to address this issue," state health minister Etala Rajendar said.

"Today, 25 to 30 per cent of the health workers in the state have not been vaccinated," he said, adding that it was to boost confidence to everyone that he had volunteered to be the first in the state to receive the vaccine.

Though the Covid-19 vaccine is an mRNA based one "and it behaves differently in different countries and environments, like all vaccines, the Covid-19 mRNA vaccines have been rigorously tested for safety before being authorised for use," the minister said.

■ Page 2: TS requested more doses from Centre

GREEN | POWER

PM cites vegetable mart to promote power and gas from waste

Bowenpally mart catches Modi's eye

T.S.S. SIDDHARTH | DC HYDERABAD, JAN. 31

Employees, workers and vegetable vendors of the Bowenpally vegetable market were on cloud nine on Sunday after they heard Prime Minister Narendra Modi speak about them.

In his first broadcast of the year, through *'Mann ki Baat'*, Modi was all praise for the efforts made by officials at the market yard. The innovative practice takes vegetable waste and converts it into biogas through a plant established on the premises.

"We have a waste-to-energy plant, which has a capacity of 10 tonnes. Our market yard generates close to four or five tonnes of vegetable waste a day. So to meet our target of ten tonnes, we get waste from other nearby fruit markets



A woman dumps waste vegetables on a conveyor that takes them to a biogas plant and a power plant at Bowenpally vegetable market in Hyderabad. — DC

and supermarkets," L. Srinivas, selection grade secretary, AMC Bowenpally, said.

The energy generated from waste is close to between 250 to 400 units of electricity. This energy is

used to run offices, cold-room, lighting in the market, among other spaces.

"Vegetable waste generates electricity for us. We supply it to our market yard, among other places. We earlier had a power bill

run-up to ₹3 lakh to ₹3.5 lakh per month. Now, using the new power, we have cut our electricity spend to ₹1 lakh per month," he said.

However, it wasn't just powering the market yard

that was a priority. Over the last fortnight, officials have also begun generating biogas from the waste. "We have generated 600-odd kgs of gas, which is being supplied to a canteen for ham-als, vendors and other staffers of our yard," he said.

While they were unsure of the source of fuel for the canteen, hamalis say they are happy that the gas for the canteen helps cook their food. "We don't know much about electricity. It is good to know that vegetables we consider useless are being put to use," said Karunaker, a hamali of the market.

This project was a joint collaboration between the department of biotechnology and the state government. It was designed by IICT and executed by Ahuja Engineering.

Tikait seeks respectable solution to end farm stir

Refuses to agree under pressure, seeks mid-way resolution

SANJAY KAW | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

With more farmers streaming into the protest sites at Delhi's borders, Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait said on Sunday that the farmers' unions were ready for a "respectable solution", but they would "never agree to anything under pressure".

In Punjab, Chief Minister Amarinder Singh has called an all-party meeting on Tuesday to show unity with the protesters and evolve a consensus on the way forward on the three contentious agricultural laws.

As the stream of farmers heading for Delhi's borders remained incessant on the 67th day of the massive agitation, Mr Tikait said the Republic Day violence was "part of a conspiracy" and that the government should nab all those behind it. "The violence on January 26 was part of a conspiracy. The tricolour is over

MODI SAYS COUNTRY IS SADDENED BY 'INSULT' TO NATIONAL FLAG ON R-DAY

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

Breaking his silence on the shocking events that took place at the Red Fort just after the Republic Day parade on January 26, when unruly elements brandishing swords and sticks had attacked policemen and hoisted a flag other than the national tricolour at the iconic venue, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday that the "country was saddened by the insult to the tricolour on January 26 in Delhi".

This was the only direct, but brief, reference to the



tumultuous events of that day in his speech, that otherwise focused on India's vaccine programme, the Padma honours for "unsung heroes", innovation, self-reliance and development.

■ Full report on Page 7

and above everything. We will never let anyone disrespect it. It will not be tolerated," he said.

Mr Tikait, who is camping at the Ghazipur border

and has now become the face of the agitation, urged the government to release all those farmers who were arrested in connection with the tractor rally.

AP local poll candidates, relatives are kidnapped

DC CORRESPONDENTS SRIKAKULAM, KAKINADA, ANANTAPUR, JAN. 31

Followers of former minister and TD state president K. Atchannaidu have allegedly prevented YSRC supporter Kinjarapu Appanna from filing his nomination from Nimmada in Srikakulam district, home village of Kinjarapu family on Sunday.

Reports said Atchannaidu called Appanna, who also happens to be his nephew, asking him not to file his nomination. Appanna refused stating his wife had lost her government job during TD regime and his family also did not benefit much from Telugu Desam party.

After Appanna expressed his determination to file his nomination, TD workers and close followers of Atchannaidu rushed to YSRC leader's residence and prevented him from coming out of his house to file nomination papers.

This led to commotion with the two groups of people almost coming to blows. Police personnel rushed to the spot and dispersed the crowd. Appanna finally filed his nomination papers

under police escort.

Elsewhere, one Sabbella Srinivasa Reddy of Gollalakunta village in Jagampeta mandal of East Godavari district, who switched over to Telugu Desam from YSR Congress on Saturday, was kidnapped and dropped in a forest between Bhavaram and Govindapuram villages after being tied with ropes.

The incident went viral and created havoc in the district. Telugu Desam leaders alleged that he had opposed marking the village as 'unanimous' for the gram panchayat election. However, the police said that no complaint has been lodged regarding the incident.

According to sources, Srinivasa Reddy wanted to field his wife Pushpa Veni for the sarpanch post. In the wee hours of Sunday, when he came out of his house and was drinking water, some unknown persons came and covered his face with a hood. Later, they tied him with ropes and dropped him near a forest between Bhavaram and Govindapuram. On Sunday morning, a cattle-herd saw Reddy lying on the ground.

He informed the villagers, who came and took him to his house. Later, his wife Pushpaveni filed her nomination papers and Srinivasa Reddy accompanied her.

A tense situation is prevailing at Rayadurgam in Anantapur on Sunday after the husband of a sarpanch candidate of Banepalli gram panchayat belonging to Telugu Desam was abducted. The kidnapping took place near Molakalmur in Karnataka.

According to Eeranna, Telugu Desam leader from Banepalli in Rayadurgam assembly segment, he went to offer pooja and seek blessings from the goddess of a temple in Hulagi of Koppal district before his wife could file nomination papers for the post of sarpanch in the ward reserved for women.

Eeranna was at Molakalmur bus stand in Karnataka, about 30 km from his village, when a group of unidentified persons dragged him into car and took him into deserted fields away from Molakalmur town. Eeranna said he escaped from the abductors at Morampalli.

COAST GUARD TO GET 100 PLANES IN 4 YRS

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 31

The Coast Guard (ICG), with a meagre force and two vessels in 1977, has now grown into a major coastal security force with 156 ships and 62 aircraft. The force also became the fourth largest in the world after the ones in the US, the UK and South Korea. It proposes to have 200 vessels and 100 aircraft by 2025.

Briefing media on the eve of its 45th Raising Day, additional director-general V.S. Pathania, Coast Guard commander of the Eastern Board, said the ICG has played a significant role in securing Indian coasts and enforcing regulations within the maritime zones of India.

The service has so far saved over 10,000 lives and apprehended 13,300 miscreants since its inception in 1977. On an average, Coast Guard saves one life every second day at sea, Pathania underlined.

The Coast Guard, despite restrictions imposed by Covid-19 pandemic, maintained strict vigil in Indian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

Tejas Mk 2 trial from 2023: HAL

New Delhi, Jan. 31: A more potent version of the indigenous Tejas multi-role combat jet featuring a much powerful engine, greater load carrying capability, next-generation electronic warfare system and an array of superior avionics is expected to be rolled out next year and its first high-speed trials will start in 2023, chairman and managing director of Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd R. Madhavan has said.

He said the structural package and other work on the Tejas Mark II is progressing well and its production is likely to start somewhere around 2025. He said the upgraded version will have a bigger fuselage, longer range, better maintainability,

greater load carrying capability, much stronger engine power and superior net-centric warfare systems.

With increase in range and payload capability, Madhavan said the new variant will be much superior than Tejas Mark-IA, 73 of which are being procured by the Indian Air Force from the HAL under a ₹48,000 crore deal that was approved by the government on January 13. "Tejas Mark II is likely to roll out by August-September of 2022 after that the first flight will take some time. The first high-speed trial of the jet will start in 2023 and we expect the production to start somewhere around 2025," Madhavan said.

■ Full report on Page 4

WEATHER

Max: 29.5°C
Min: 20.2°C
RH: 51%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Partly cloudy.
Misty morning. Max/Min temp. 31/19 °C

COVID-19 COUNT

CASES (+8,662)
DEATHS (+135)

1,07,52,872 1,54,397

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+163) (+1)
TS: 2,94,469 1,599

(+116) (+0)
AP: 8,87,836 7,153

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

10,33,06,428

DEATHS 22,33,104

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES 219

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Pushya Bahula Chavithi till 6.23 pm

Star: Uttara till 11.56 pm
Varjyam: 8.04 am to 9.34 am

Durmuhurtam: 12.52 pm to 1.37pm to 3.07 pm to 3.52 pm
Rahukalam: 7.30 pm to 9 pm

HUIRI CALENDAR
Jamadi- ul- Akhri 18,1442 AH

PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.46 am
Zohar: 12.40 pm

Asar: 4.35 pm
Maghrib: 6.17 pm
Isha: 7.26 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.11 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.47 AM

MOONRISE TODAY 9.29 AM
MOONSET TODAY 9.42 PM

COUNTER POINT



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

SHORT TAKES

Sitharaman to present Budget

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

RAMANNA PLANS INSURANCE FOR LANDLESS POOR

DC CORRESPONDENT ADILABAD, JAN. 31

TRS Adilabad legislator Jogu Ramanna is likely to launch a 'health insurance scheme' with ₹5 lakh cover on behalf of Jogu Ramanna Charitable Trust for the landless poor in his Assembly constituency.

He will pay an annual premium of up to ₹1,000 per policy to one landless member from each family. Death due to ill-health or accidents will be covered under this scheme.

Farmers who own land get ₹5 lakh insurance in case of death under the Rythu Bheema scheme.

■ Full report on P2

SHORT TAKES

IRON AGE
DOLMENS IN TS
UNDER THREATDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 31

Structures of archaeological importance belonging to the Iron Age at Padurivariapalem near Chandupatla village in Narekral mandal in Nalgonda district in Telangana state are under serious threat. Archaeologists worry that the destruction of many burials built by huge boulders arranged in circular fashion near the local tank called Chinnacheruvu are being bulldozed out for want of land for agricultural operations. Dr E. Sivanagi Reddy, archaeologist and CEO, Cultural Centre of Vijayawada and Amaravati, came to the spot in Chandupatla village along with Tanguturi Saidulu, amateur archaeologist, with a view to sensitising villagers on the significance of preserving these Iron Age monuments. After conducting a survey of these proto-historic structures, Dr Reddy said that out of 100 burials, only 10 are left here and there is no guarantee for their safety unless steps are taken to protect it.

Dr Reddy inspected a huge granite stone, known as a menhir, erected in the memory of a dead chieftain of the megalithic tribe near Netturu Shambham Chelka area of Padurivariapalem.

He said the menhir, the only extant monument of its kind in Narekral, measures 11 feet above ground level, six feet in width and is half a foot in thickness and is buried at least six feet deep underground. Such an invaluable monument cries for protection, he bemoaned.

AP SEC's VOTER
FORM REJECTED
IN HOMETOWN

From Page 1

It was a clear warning to all those leaders holding the reins of the AIADMK as many of them had openly said that Sasikala would have no place in the party anymore by reminding everyone that she had already been expelled following her going to jail.

But going by the hype and hoopla over her first whiff of freedom after four years of incarceration, Sasikala's next long drive to Chennai in a motorcade, probably by February 7, could attract more supporters and her entry into Chennai, too, could be marked by more dramatic scenes.

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

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

If the AIADMK leaders resist her taking charge, there is every possibility of many functionaries within the party gravitating towards Sasikala, creating differences and rifts in the otherwise monolithic party, benefiting the rivals in the elections.

It looks like Sasikala's return to Chennai would only put the AIADMK in a cleft stick.

Jogu plans insurance
cover for the landlessPILLALAMARRI
SRINIVAS I DC
ADILABAD, JAN. 31

TRS Adilabad legislator Jogu Ramanna is likely to launch a 'health insurance scheme' with ₹5 lakh cover on behalf of Jogu Ramanna Charitable Trust for the landless poor in his Assembly constituency.

The unique aspect is that he will pay an annual premium of up to Rs 1,000 per policy to one landless member from each family. Death due to ill-health or accidents will be covered under this scheme.

Presently, farmers who own land get ₹5 lakh insurance money in case of death under Rythu Bheema scheme being implemented by the state government. Ramanna told Deccan Chronicle that landless poor are not eligible for Rythu Bheema and hence

deprived of insurance cover.

"I want to fill this gap between the landless poor and land owners. Many poor landless families suffer when the sole bread earner dies. There is no financial security to such," he said.

The MLA said, "We are identifying family members of the landless poor for the scheme and also the insurance company for the purpose. We are finalising the yearly premium and insurance cover by consulting various insurance companies."

In many cases, landless poor families are unable to arrange for funerals and generally approach local political leaders for some financial help to complete the ritual.

However, political leaders cannot extend financial help to the bereaved families for a long time. It

is said that such families can survive if they get ₹5 lakh as insurance following the bread-earners death.

Ramanna is also planning to provide free meals to 200 poor people from Adilabad town at the MLA camp office every day from Vasanth Panchami. Many poor people from villages visit the district headquarters and some of them may not afford a meal. The free lunch will be helpful to such people.

It is said that TRS MLAs are questioned by landless and tenant farmers whenever they go to villages as they were getting nothing from Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bheema schemes.

Party leaders say that Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao may consider the demand to extend Rythu Bandhu to tenant farmers.

Clear air on Covid jab
fatalities, Centre urged

Panel reports 11 deaths after taking first vaccine dose

BALU PULIPAKA I DC
HYDERABAD, JAN. 31

The Centre was on Sunday asked to come clean on the findings of the National Committee on Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI) over the death of 11 healthcare and frontline workers after they received the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine.

This request was made in a letter to Union health minister Dr Harsh Vardhan, Drugs Controller General of India Dr V.G. Somani, member Niti

● **THE LETTER** said the 11 deaths in UP, Karnataka, AP, Rajasthan, Telangana state, Haryana, Odisha, and Kerala — all reported between a few hours and five days of persons taking the vaccine Covishield — have been ascribed to cardiovascular problems or 'brain stroke'.

Aayog, Dr V.K. Paul, and secretary, department of biotechnology Dr Renu Swarup, editors of the Indian Journal of Medical Ethics, several public health experts,

researchers, doctors, and others. The letter said the 11 deaths in Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Telangana state, Haryana, Odisha, and Kerala — all reported between a few hours and five days of persons taking the vaccine Covishield — have been ascribed to cardiovascular problems or 'brain stroke'.

Though the district and state officials have stated that none of the deaths was related to the vaccine, the reports of the district, state and national AEFI committees on the assess-

ment of these deaths and other serious AEFIs have not been released. The national committee is obliged to investigate possible patterns in causative factors for these deaths, the letter said.

"The health and frontline workers who died, volunteered to take the vaccine with the trust in your decision to give emergency approval to the vaccine to protect them from a serious disease. They are owed some respect and dignity... and action based on that investigation," the letter said.

11 days after taking jab
Anganwadi teacher diesDC CORRESPONDENT
MANCHERIAL, JAN. 31

A 55-year-old anganwadi teacher died at the Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences (Nims) here in the city on Saturday after she was vaccinated for Covid-19 11 days ago. She is the third person to die after receiving the jab in the state. The health department, however, made it clear that the death of the anganwadi worker, Susheela, was not because of the vaccination but was a result of comorbidities that she suffered from.

Susheela was from Mancherial district. She received her first dose of

● **THE HEALTH** department, however, made it clear that the death of the anganwadi worker, Susheela, was not because of the vaccination but was a result of comorbidities that she suffered from.

the Covid-19 vaccine on January 19 at a Primary Health Centre in Kasipet mandal.

When she developed shortness of breath and reported feeling giddy, she was taken to Nims for treatment where she passed away on the night of January 30.

According to Director of

Public Health Dr G. Srinivasa Rao, "Death occurred due to cardio-respiratory arrest triggered by multiple morbidities such as restrictive lung disease, respiratory infection, accelerated hypertension with left ventricular failure."

Earlier, two more healthcare workers — a 42-year-old ambulance driver in Nirmal district and a 48-year-old anganwadi worker from Warangal district — have died in Telangana state after having received the vaccine. In those cases also, the health department refused to attribute the cause of death to vaccines.

TS REQUESTS
MORE DOSES
FROM CENTRE

From Page 1

While the mRNA technology is new, the minister claimed it was not unknown and has been well studied. "If anybody has doubts, they can consult their doctors, experts before taking the vaccine," he said.

The minister's comments came during his virtual address on Covid-19 vaccines at an online event organised by the Telangana State Federation of Chambers of Commerce & Trade.

The Telangana government, the minister said, is committed to making the vaccine available to everybody. But, it is the Union government which is in full control of the matter.

"We requested recently to the Union health minister to allow us to get more doses of the vaccine developed in Hyderabad to be given to more people. We are looking for the permission of the Union health ministry," Rajendar said.

● **THE** comments came during the minister's address on Covid-19 vaccines at an online event organised by the Telangana State Federation of Chambers of Commerce & Trade.

Dogs given for adoption



Dog lovers gather at Neredmet, opposite Rachakonda police commissionerate, on Sunday to collect Indian breed dogs which were being given for adoption. — DC

Eco Survey language on
health is scary: ExpertBALU PULIPAKA I DC
HYDERABAD, JAN. 31

Amidst widespread hopes among public health policy experts and state governments that the Centre will make good on the headline 'Healthcare takes centre stage, finally!' in the Economic Survey 2020-21, released on Friday, it has been pointed out that some of the language the report employs is alarming.

It is worrisome that the Economic Survey repeats the phrase "healthcare policy must not become beholden to 'saliency bias'," according to Dr Ranga Reddy Burri, president of Infection Control Academy of India.

This phrase, Dr Ranga Reddy said, and the further explanation "where policy over-weights a recent phenomenon that may represent a six sigma event that may not repeat in an identical fashion in the future" is really alarming.

'Six sigma event' refers to an extremely rare happening, and saliency bias is the tendency to focus on prominent items.

"If the policy is going to be centred around this thinking and Budget allo-

CENTRE MAY GRANT MORE FUNDS FOR
HEALTH SECTOR, HOPES ETALADC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 31

Health minister Etala Rajendar has said that there was hope that the Union budget, to be presented in Parliament on Monday by Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, will have substantial allocations of funds for the healthcare sector in the country and that the Centre will ensure good funding for the states.

"With Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaking about the state of health-

care infrastructure, we hope that in addition to good allocations, there will also be subsidies for the states that will help the latter build the required medical infrastructure," Rajendar said.

Speaking to reporters after inaugurating the state chapter of the National Integrated Medical Association here on Sunday, Rajendar said even in the upcoming State budget, it is expected that allocations for the health sector will improve.

cations are made accordingly, then we are condemned to go for next healthcare emergency unprepared. We can predict with high certainty that next and further healthcare emergencies will be yet another zoonotic origin infection," Dr Ranga Reddy said.

The section, 'Covid-19 and India's Health Care Policy', in Chapter 5 of

the Economic Survey, says "pandemics represent rare events."

This, Dr Ranga Reddy told Deccan Chronicle, represents outdated thinking with the likes of the World Health Organisation, Centres for Disease Control and the United Nations, among others, "untiringly voicing that the next pandemic is around the corner and we need to gear up."

Docs: No proof some blood
groups fight Covid betterDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 31

There is no evidence that people with certain types of blood groups develop better immunity response to Covid-19. This response is not determined by the blood group type of an individual, experts said.

Participants at a webinar, 'Vaccine and its Possibilities — Covid-19

future strategy' organised by Benjamin Franklin Memorial Club on Sunday, also addressed a slew of issues such as mutations in the Coronavirus, its infection and vaccination for stopping the disease.

The webinar was moderated by Dr Gurumoorthy, a noted entrepreneur in the healthcare space, while Dr Gita Sharma, inventor of India's first genetically

engineered vaccine, Dr C. Sreedhar, a public health specialist with WHO, and Dr V.S.C. Sekhar, family physician, spoke.

Among the issues addressed were which vaccine is best, whether people with comorbidities can take the vaccine, why individuals over 60 years, or pregnant and lactating women, are advised not to take the vaccine.

Immunisation drive



Pulse Polio immunisation drive at the Sundaralal Vigyan Kendram in Hyderabad on Sunday. — DEEPAK DESHPANDE

STATE RECORDS
163 NEW COVID
INFECTIONSDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 31

Telangana state recorded 163 new Covid-19 cases and one more death from the disease on Saturday even as the health department said that 276 people had recovered.

The total Covid-19 cases stood at 2,94,469 while the fatalities had reached 1,599, the health department said. As many as 2,240 people continued to receive treatment for Covid-19.

Only two districts, Hyderabad along with the GHMC area and Ranga Reddy district, recorded new cases in double digits, 28 and 11 respectively, while the rest of the districts reported cases in the single digits.

‘NTR, unlike Chiranjeevi, didn’t take people for granted’

A recently launched biography of the late N.T. Rama Rao, titled 'Maverick Messiah', written by journalist Ramesh Kandula, chronicles and analyses the political life of NTR and its impact on both the state and the nation. An objective assessment of the late leader, the book has been well-received for its critical insight and diligent research.

What set NTR apart from later day movie stars entering politics? Is the Telugu Desam a Kamma party meant to empower the community and is it dying? In this two-part interview with Sriram Karri, author Kandula defends the party and explains what set NTR apart.

Q. Why did NTR remain the last real actor phenomenon to achieve political success? Tamil superstar Rajanikant has now announced he won't enter politics, while Chiranjeevi and Pawan Kalyan had great fan networks but could not convert them into political parties that could debut with electoral wins.

A. Film actors who entered politics in the past, especially M.G. Ramachandran (MGR) and later on, N.T. Rama Rao (NTR), had a strong artistic urge to connect with the people. The social bonding they enjoyed with their audiences was qualitatively different from actors who strayed into politics in

recent years. Despite enormous adulation they enjoyed, neither MGR nor NTR took the people for granted when entering politics. Unlike MGR, NTR did not have a political pedigree, but spared no effort in understanding and articulating public issues that impacted the masses.

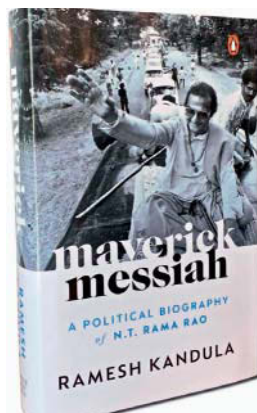
Chiranjeevi enjoyed many advantages but failed to convince the voting public that he was an alternative to the existing set-up. His campaign began with an assumption that he was a chief-minister-in-waiting and he had to just walk through elections to occupy the chair.

While NTR used his celluloid image to reach out to the public, he never relied on his glamour alone. The

political content of NTR's campaign was more focused and serious, while Chiranjeevi's was more style than substance. I think Pawan Kalyan also suffers from the same failings (as his brother). Actors cannot succeed in politics unless they carry a serious political message.

Q. Did the kind of films NTR played, particularly mythologies, give him any advantage? Why did he have such high credibility with masses? What in your estimate justifies calling him a messiah of any kind, even if of a maverick kind?

An interesting aspect of NTR's mythologies were that they were pan-Indian stories, and not directly



● The book has been well-received for its critical insight and diligent research.

PART -1

related to Telugu nationalism and pride that NTR propounded politically. During NTR's time, screen adaptations of mythologies became known for a distinctive Telugu, which was formal and ceremonial. As several researchers have pointed out, NTR's mastery over language, considered a quintessential Telugu experience, did help in his emergence as a Telugu cultural symbol.

My hypothesis is that NTR carried over the linguistic identity of these films into his political campaign, but not his screen 'divinity'. His political credibility was not a by-product of his playing godly characters. He worked towards it consciously both in his film career and later on in poli-

tics. As for the tag of messiah, NTR burst on to the political scene in 1982 as a ray of hope and captivated the imagination of the Telugus like no other leader. His campaigns were the greatest spectacles of democracy in action. Shortcomings notwithstanding, NTR emerged as a larger-than-life personality and brought a sea-change in the socio-political landscape of AP.

The maverick apart, NTR was a man of strange contradictions. He believed in the power of people, but his democratic credentials were suspect because he had no qualms in turning his party into a one-man show. He was secular to the core but exhibited a peculiar religious streak. He

entered politics on the plank of regionalism but remained a committed nationalist throughout.

Q. How did people relate to his dramatics and eccentricities?

A. His dramatics entertained the masses but some sections of people intensely disliked the theatrics he brought into politics. He carried this urge to be the centre of attraction from reel to public life. However, common folks were not particularly put off by this, because of his ability to convey seriousness of intent. Despite the nickname 'Drama Rao', NTR was a very serious man in private and rarely cracked a joke. But a common person felt warmth in his presence.

OTHER STORIES

KAVITHA GIFTS MACHINERY TO WOMAN MECHANIC

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 31

TRS MLC Kalvakuntla Kavitha on Sunday came out in support of Adilaxmi, the first woman mechanic from the state, who helps her husband in running their unit.

Kavitha provided assistance to Adilaxmi for buying the required machinery besides assuring the family of supporting the education of their daughters.

During an interaction with the family, the MLC applauded Adilaxmi's determination and the hard work she has put in to support her family.

Later, Kavitha Tweeted, "Adilaxmi and her story has inspired me. Her determination to break the predetermined shackles and to walk that extra mile for her family is so heart melting. Saluting her courage!"

The 30-year-old Adilaxmi works with her husband in their automobile repair shop at Sujathanagar, near Kothagudem. Their daughters are aged seven and nine years. The story of this dedicated mother and wife, who wanted two additional machines at her automobile unit, caught the attention of Kavitha, who instantly expressed her desire to help Adilaxmi.

TRS STRATEGISING TO TOP IN MLC ELECTION

DURGAM SRINIVAS | DC
HYDERABAD, JAN. 31

Wiser from the Dubbak and Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) poll setbacks, the TRS leadership is strategising to ensure that it emerges on top in the ensuing graduate MLC elections in the Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal (NKW) and Hyderabad-Ranga Reddy-Mahabubnagar (HRRM) constituencies, slated for March.

The party high command feels that overconfidence had led to its recent loss at Dubbak and less than expected number in the GHMC poll. In order to make amends, the leadership is planning to make full use of the party cadre at the grassroots level to win the two graduate constituencies.

According to party sources, MLC Council Whip Palla Rajeshwar Reddy has been finalised for the NKW constituency. Although the candidate for the HRRM constituency is yet to be finalised, the ministers in those districts have already started their campaigning.

The party high command has reportedly handed over the task of selection of the candidate to the concerned district ministers. The TRS leaders in NKW districts say they are already campaigning for the elections. In keeping with the directions of Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao and party working president K.T. Rama Rao, ministers Errabelli Dayakar Rao and Sathyavathi Rathod have been already appointed election in-charges.

The local MLAs, former ministers, ZP chairperson and senior leaders have been appointed as in-charge for their respective constituencies. The party hopes to allot campaigning for every 50 voters to one leader. Sources indicate that the party top guns feel only such an approach can ensure a victory.

Meanwhile, the Opposition has also taken the MLC elections as a prestigious one.

Founder of Telangana Jana Samiti Prof. M. Kodandaram is contesting from the NKW constituency. According to sources, he hopes to get the support of Left parties and the Congress, youth, students and civic organisations in the constituency.

Political analysts are of the view that the Opposition front is planning to support the Congress, in return, in the HRRM seat. It is believed that TRS will face stiff competition if such an arrangement materialises.

Meanwhile, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is contesting both seats, is brimming with confidence following the impressive showing in Dubbaka and GHMC elections. The party cadre is in good spirits and this can help them on D-Day, analysts opine. N. Ramachander Rao, the MLC for the HRRM constituency, is eyeing an encore while the party is yet to finalise its nominee for NKW constituency.

● The party high command has reportedly handed over the task of selection of the candidate to the concerned district ministers



(Left)BJP activists throw chairs at the house of Parkal TRS MLA Challa Dharma Reddy on Sunday. (Right)BJP activists protesting outside the house of Parkal TRS MLA Challa Dharma Reddy on Sunday.



— BY ARRANGEMENT

BJP stones MLA's house after remarks on temple fundraiser

Challa is the second TRS MLA to speak against the fund collection drive

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, JAN 31

Parkal TRS legislator Challa Dharma Reddy on Sunday once again spoke on the Ram mandir in Ayodhya, the second time in four days, alleging that the BJP was using Lord Rama for political gains and giving fake receipts after collecting money.

He is the second TRS MLA to speak against the fund collection drive, after party colleague from Korutla, K. Vidyasagar Rao.

Dharma Reddy alleged that fake books were prepared to collect funds in the name of the Ram temple at Ayodhya. He asked where the funds collected for the Ayodhya temple are going.

"When the government spent ₹2,900 crore for the Sardar Patel statue, why can't it spare another ₹11 crore for Ayodhya," he asked.

On January 28, the MLA had said, "We have Lord Rama in Bhadrachalam. Why do we need your Lord Rama in Ayodhya?"

On Sunday, Dharma Reddy said, "It is outrageous that the BJP leaders are collecting donations. Only after showing the proper documentation of the funds must they resume collecting funds. The people are being intimidated in the name of donations. I am a true devotee of Lord Rama and built a temple

for Him in my hometown," he said.

Following the comments by Dharma Reddy, BJP leaders led by BJP Warangal Urban district president Rao Padma pelted stones at the residence of Dharma Reddy in Hanamkonda.

Party activists in large numbers, chanting the 'Jai Shri Ram' slogan, tried to force themselves into the house of the MLA but were prevented by the police. They squatted in front of the house and raised slogans against the MLA. They broke the furniture in front of the house and threw it at the building.

The BJP activists resorted to throwing stones and damaged the glass panes of the house and also the flower pots. Police forces rushed to the spot and baton-charged the angry mob. A scuffle ensued as the police tried to arrest the protestors and shift them in vehicles. Police arrested the mob and lodged them at the Subedari police station.

On January 21, TRS Korutla legislator Kalvakuntla Vidyasagar Rao had asked the people not to donate money for the construction of the Ram mandir. He had alleged that the BJP leaders were playing a new political drama by raising funds for the construction of the temple.

"Why should people from the state give money for the temple, which is

KTR condemns BJP workers attack on Challa's house

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, JAN. 31

TRS working president K.T. Rama Rao on Sunday strongly condemned the attack by BJP activists on the house of party MLA Challa Dharma Reddy. He said there is no place for such physical attacks in a democracy.

Rama Rao called for all democrats to condemn the BJP's attempt to make its point across by means of physical attacks on other parties instead of convincing the people with their argument.

"The BJP has tried physical attacks in the past. Beyond the rational criticisms in politics, the BJP's repeated incursions into physical attacks are not at all desirable for Telangana politics. The TRS party wants value politics to continue in Telangana,"

he said.

Rama Rao cautioned the BJP leaders to remember that the TRS has the power, the strength, the force to protect every activist. If the TRS workers lose their patience, the BJP will not even be able to roam outside.

Rama Rao said that as a responsible political

party, the TRS was moving forward with restraint and patience.

"We warn the BJP not to forget that the TRS is a party that emerged for a cause. We appeal to the people of the state to take note of the BJP's insidious attempts to wreak havoc in the peaceful Telangana community," he said.

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State to enact new scheme for women empowerment

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, JAN. 31

Panchayatraj minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao announced that the state government is implementing a scheme for women called Stree Nidhi Suraksha - B. Under it, eligible beneficiaries pay a one-time fee of ₹690 to become a member of the scheme.

Needy women will then become eligible to avail loans, which can be repaid in easy instalments over a period of three years. In case a member enrolled under the scheme dies, her family will get an amount of up to ₹1 lakh, the minister explained.

Addressing women beneficiaries of Stree Nidhi at Thorur and Peddavangara mandals in Mahabubabad district on Sunday, he reiterated that the government is committed to development of women.

"Development of your family, society and country is in your hands. You must ensure that loans you take support your growth. During 2020-21, the state

government is providing loans totalling to ₹2,400 crore under Stree Nidhi. So far, ₹1,140 crore have been given to 2.74 lakh women members in the state. Authorities have been directed to pay the remaining amount by March 31, 2021," Dayakar Rao underlined.

Loans totalling to ₹19.9 crore under Stree Nidhi were handed over to 1,500 members of Mahabubabad district on Sunday. Of this, ₹14.02 crore were for purchase of dairy cattle, ₹75 lakh for electric vehicles and the remaining for other purposes.

The minister suggested that beneficiaries buy cattle of better breed that yield more milk. For the purpose, the loan amount could be increased from ₹60,000 to ₹75,000.

DRDA project director Vidya Chandana, DPOs, MPPs, ZPTCs, sarpanches, MPTCs, ward members, women from various Dwakra communities, officials of Stree Nidhi and Poverty Alleviation Agency were present at the meeting.

ROAD SAFETY AWARENESS RALLY TO BE HELD TODAY, IN HYDERABAD

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 31

The Rachakonda police will be conducting a road safety awareness rally on Monday at Saroornagar Indoor Stadium as part of the National Road Safety Month, which is being observed in India for the 32nd time. According to the

police, a motorcycle rally will start from the stadium and proceed till Victoria Memorial, take a U-turn there and return to the stadium. "The event will also see a photo exhibition, with an aim to bring about awareness on traffic safety and inculcate the sense of adhering to traffic rules among drivers.

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Schools, colleges in Karimnagar set to reopen amid Covid-19 guidelines

PULI SHARATH KUMAR DC
KARIMNAGAR, JAN. 31

After 10 months of unprecedented shut down due to coronavirus, schools and colleges in the erstwhile Karimnagar district are set to reopen on Monday, albeit by strictly adhering to the Covid-19 protocol.

Approximately 4,42,226 students are studying in around 3,573 high schools in undivided Karimnagar district.

Of them, about 1,37,955 students are studying in around 1,150 schools in the present Jagtial dis-

trict, about 1,43,275 in around 1,000 schools in Karimnagar, around 89,226 in 773 schools in Peddapalli and about 71,781 students are studying in around 650 schools in Rajanna Sircilla district.

Schools and colleges started online classes for all classes in September but the results have not been satisfactory.

When the education department of the four districts conducted surveys about the progress of online classes, data indicated that more than half of school students did not have internet

facility and 40 per cent of them were without television at their homes while 10 per cent had no electricity.

Now the institutions are all set to run offline classes for college students and those in ninth and 10 standard.

The district administration of Karimnagar, Peddapalli, Jagtial and Rajanna Sircilla districts conducted a review meeting with officials of concerned departments and issued guidelines and necessary precautions as the pandemic situation remains in the state.

Focusing mainly on

sanitation with the help of Vidhya Committees, the classrooms are cleaned with water and later sanitized, toilets are kept clean along with sprinkling bleaching powder while weeds have been removed and arrangements have been made for providing drinking water and electricity facilities.

Managements have obtained the written consent of parents and guardians. Sanitizers and masks have been kept ready and directions are to allow only a maximum of 20 students in each classroom and after thermal screening.

TWO MINORS ARRESTED OVER ATM ROBBERY

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 31

Two minors who were trying to break open an ATM in Shamshabad on Saturday night were caught by a police patrol that noticed them inside the kiosk.

According to the police, the two boys had allegedly spent almost an hour attempting to extract money from the machine.

"They were caught on the spot and brought to the station," said the police, adding that their attempt was caught on the CCTV cameras installed inside the kiosk.

LORRY RAMS INTO 35-YR-OLD, ROAD AUTHORITIES HELD

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 31

The Shadnagar police of Cyberabad booked road authorities after a 35-year-old was run over by a lorry while attempting to avoid a pothole on the old National Highway on Sunday. According to the police, the victim, Narasimha, a daily wage labourer, swerved to the right suddenly in an attempt to avoid the pothole and was run over by a lorry coming from the opposite direction. "Following a complaint from the lorry driver and after an inspection, we booked cases against the authorities under Section 198-A (failure to comply with standards for road design, construction and maintenance) of the Motor Vehicle Act as the road was causing inconvenience to the commuters said Shadnagar inspector A. Sreedhar.

Rythu vedikas are knowledge hub for farmers, says Koppula

DC CORRESPONDENT
PEDDAPALLI, JAN. 31

Given that a robust agriculture sector, which provides livelihood to over 60 per cent of the population, was essential for a good and healthy society, Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao has set in motion Rythu Vedikas for the well-being of farmers in the state, said welfare minister Koppula Eshwar.

He was speaking after inaugurating a Rythu Vedika and a newly constructed agriculture market here on Sunday.

stating that only Telangana boasts of such Rythu Vedikas, he said farmers must evolve a consensus while fixing prices for their produce. As it needed a platform whereupon farmers can gather at one place, the Rythu Vedikas are being constructed. They will be useful for farmers to exchange and explore farming options, be updated with the latest techniques and learn about



The Welfare minister, Koppula Eshwar inaugurates the newly constructed Rythu Vedika in Peddapalli district on Sunday.

— BY ARRANGEMENT

measures that can help derive maximum returns for their produce, he said. He said Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bhima were introduced to strengthen the agriculture sector, while the government is also supplying power freely, and has been distributing fertilizers and seeds to farmers.

Due to lockdown, Telangana faced a financial crisis as it lost out on around ₹50,000

crore investments. Undeterred, the government deposited around ₹7,357.02 crore in the bank accounts of about 59.21 lakh of farmers under Rythu Bandhu scheme, he pointed out, which is unprecedented in the national context, he added. MLA D. Manohar Reddy, library department chairman Raghuveer Singh, ZPTC B. Ram Murthy were present along others.

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SHORT TAKES

MP COP TOUCHES BJP LEADER'S FEET, STIRS ROW

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, JAN. 31

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MAOIST LEADER GUNNED DOWN IN ODISHA

AKSHAYA KUMAR SHAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, JAN. 31

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

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

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

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

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

NADDA SLAMS CONG OVER GRAFT IN PUDUCHERRY

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

Alleging that corruption was rampant under the Congress government led by Chief Minister V. Narayanasamy, he said the BJP would win 23 of the 30 seats in the Union Territory Assembly in the polls, likely in the next few months.

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

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

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

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

Don't want govt to bow down: Tikait

Naresh Tikait says government must prepare an environment conducive for talks

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

— PTI

Scribes held: Media bodies flay action

New Delhi, Jan. 31: Media bodies on Sunday condemned the police action against two journalists who were picked up during the farmers' protests at Delhi's Singhu border for allegedly misbehaving with police personnel.

They said such crack-downs impinge on the media's right to report freely and interferes with its right to freedom of expression. Freelance journalist Mandeep Punia and Dharmender Singh (with Online News India) were detained by Delhi Police last evening for allegedly misbehaving with personnel on duty.

While Singh was later released, the police arrested Punia on Sunday. The Indian Women's Press Corps, Press Club of India and the Press Association demanded Punia's immediate release and said no journalist should be disturbed while carrying out their duties at any place.

"Such crack-downs impinge on the media's right to report freely and interferes with its right to freedom of expression, and freedom of the press as guaranteed by the Constitution of India," the bodies said in a joint statement.

They said Punia has been reporting on the farmers' agitation right from the beginning and his arrest "is part of the government crackdown on journalists to prevent them from doing their job independently and freely." — PTI

Cong hits out at govt for FIRs on journos

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

The Congress on Sunday launched a scathing attack on the arrest of a journalist who was covering the farmer protest at the Singhu border. Senior leader Rahul Gandhi tweeted, "Those who fear truth arrest honest journalists."

He also tagged a video purportedly showing journalist Mandeep Punia being held by police at the border protest site. Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi said journalists covering the farmers' movement are being arrested, cases are being slapped against them and the internet is being shut down in many places. She tweeted, "The BJP government wants to trample upon the voice of the farmers, but they have forgotten that the more you suppress, the more voices will rise against your atrocities."

On Saturday also the Congress had hit out against BJP governments for filing cases against journalists and Congress Lok Sabha MP Dr Shashi Tharoor. Priyanka Gandhi had tweeted in Hindi "Respecting democracy is not the government's prerogative but it is its responsibility. The atmosphere of fear is like poison for democracy. The BJP has torn to shreds the dignity of democracy by FIRs against senior journalists and public representatives."

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

Irani deputised for Union home minister Amit Shah at the programme in Howrah district.

Shah's two-day visit to the state was cancelled at the last minute due to the ongoing protest by farmers in Delhi and an explosion near the Israeli Embassy on Friday. He addressed the rally through video-conferencing.

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

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

PM SADDENED BY 'INSULT' TO NATION FLAG ON REPUBLIC DAY

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

Breaking his silence on the shocking events that took place at the Red Fort just after the majestic Republic Day parade on January 26, when unruly elements brandishing swords and sticks had attacked policemen and hoisted a flag other than the national tricolour at the iconic venue, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday that the "country was saddened by the insult to the tricolour on January 26 in Delhi".

Delivering his monthly "Mann ki Baat" address, Modi said "we have to infuse the times to come with new hope and novelty". This was the only direct, but brief, reference to the tumultuous events of that day in his speech, that otherwise focused on India's vaccine programme, the Padma honours for "unsung heroes", innovation, self-reliance and development.

It may be recalled that these shocking events had taken place in Delhi shortly after noon when some irate farmers, mostly from Punjab, Haryana and western UP, had taken out a "tractor rally" as part of their protests against the three farm laws. The government has always backed the rationale behind the farm laws but their implementation has already been stayed by the Supreme Court.

Modi said, "The country was saddened by the insult to the tricolour on Jan. 26 in Delhi. We have to infuse the times to come with new hope and novelty. Last year, we displayed exemplary patience and courage. This year too, we have to work hard to attain our resolves. We have to take our country forward at a faster pace."

On India's Covid vaccination drive, Modi said: "Our vaccination programme too is turning out to be exemplary to the world."

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

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

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

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

She said in Bihar, the investigation was carried out in the districts of East Champaran, Muzaffarpur, Begusarai and Patna covering 20 fish farms. 100 per cent of the fish farms had toxic levels of lead and cadmium, scoring extremely poor on the public health hazard scale (0.25/1).

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

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

PM to launch 3 projects in WB

RAJIB CHOWDHURI DC KOLKATA, JAN. 31

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

— PTI

TMC looted rations given by PM: Irani

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Fish from farms not safe: Report

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SUPERIOR | AVIONICS Upgraded version to have bigger fuselage, longer range among other facilities

Tejas Mark II to roll out next year: HAL Chief

New Delhi, Jan. 31: A more potent version of the indigenous Tejas multi-role combat jet featuring a much powerful engine, greater load carrying capability, next-generation electronic warfare system and an array of superior avionics is expected to be rolled out next year and its first high-speed trials will start in 2023, Chairman and Managing Director of Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd R. Madhavan has said. He said the structural

package and other work on the Tejas Mark II is progressing well and its production is likely to start somewhere around 2025.

He said the upgraded version will have a bigger fuselage, longer range, better maintainability, greater load carrying capability, much stronger engine power and superior net-centric warfare systems.

With increase in range and payload capability, Madhavan said the new

variant will be much superior than Tejas Mark-IA, 73 of which are being procured by the Indian Air Force from the HAL under a ₹48,000 crore deal that was approved by the government on January 13.

"Tejas Mark II is likely to

roll out by August-September of 2022 after that the first flight will take some time. The first high-speed trial of the jet will start in 2023 and we expect the production to start somewhere around 2025," Madhavan said.

Asked about the weapon package for Tejas Mark II, Madhavan did not give a direct reply and said it will be decided at a later stage depending on requirement and changing dynamics. Tejas is a single

engine and highly agile multi-role supersonic fighter manufactured by the state-run HAL.

The aircraft is a potent platform for air combat and offensive air support with reconnaissance and anti-ship operations as its secondary roles.

The Tejas Mk-1A will be equipped with an active electronically scanned array radar, beyond visual range missile, electronic warfare suite and air-to-air refuelling system.

On the next generation advanced multi-role combat aircraft (AMCA) project, the HAL chairman and managing director said the aim was to implement the project under the framework of a special purpose vehicle also involving private sector players.

India is working on the fifth-generation medium weight deep penetration fighter jet and the project is estimated to cost around \$5 billion. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

GUNMEN OPEN FIRE IN PAK, KILL POLICEMAN

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

PALESTINIAN KILLED FOR KNIFE ATTACK

Jerusalem, Jan. 31: The Israeli army said it killed a Palestinian who carried out an attempted knife attack Sunday in the Gush Etzion area of the occupied West Bank. “A knife attack was reported at the Gush Etzion junction, south of Bethlehem,” the army said in a statement. “The attacker was neutralised.” The attacker “is dead”, the army said, confirming that the military had killed the assailant. The military later said the incident took place at a bus station, where soldiers were providing security to Israelis, with the suspect “running” at the forces while brandishing a stick with three knives fastened to it. It said no military personnel were wounded in the attack. Gush Etzion is a bloc of two dozen Israeli settlements and outposts near Bethlehem. There is frequent friction at the nearby junction, which has been the site of numerous so-called lone wolf Palestinian attacks. Israel has occupied the West Bank since the 1967 Six-Day War.

MEXICO: FOUR OF 19 BODIES IDENTIFIED

Ciudad Victoria, Mexico, Jan. 31: Mexico has identified at least four of the 19 bodies found shot and burnt near the US border, prosecutors said Saturday. Two Guatemalans — believed to be migrants — and two Mexicans were identified by their DNA after authorities discovered the bodies on January 22, the prosecutor’s office in the northern state of Tamaulipas said in a statement. It said members of the Interior Ministry’s national search commission had been added to the investigation for “greater transparency”, in collaboration with the foreign ministry and the Guatemalan embassy in Mexico. “It was determined that 16 correspond to the male sex, one to the female sex, and two are pending clarification” due to the severity of the burning, the prosecutors said. A team of forensics experts, dentists, geneticists and criminology specialists has been formed to identify the victims. Residents of the Guatemalan town of Comitancillo suspect at least a dozen of the victims are their relatives, according to authorities in the Central American country.

CYCLONE IN FIJI: ONE DEAD, FIVE MISSING

Suva, Fiji, Jan. 31: At least one person was dead and five were missing Sunday as Fiji was battered by a tropical cyclone for the second time in a month. Cyclone Ana, a Category Two storm, slammed into the South Pacific island nation with winds up to 140 kilometres an hour and heavy rain, causing widespread flooding. The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) said a 49-year-old man drowned while four fishermen and a three-year-old boy were missing. More than 7,600 people, many of them rescued from flooded villages, were taking shelter in evacuation centres. Local media reports said the three-year-old went missing when he accompanied his grandfather to check their boat. NDMO director Vasiti Soko said people continued to ignore warnings against venturing out during the storm. “We are in the midst of a cyclone with widespread flooding throughout the country, yet we continue to receive reports of members of the public, adults and children alike wandering around,” she said. In December, four people died and 23,000 people fled their homes when super cyclone Yasa flattened entire villages with wind gusts of up to 345 kilometres an hour.

New UK visa for HK residents who want to flee

Hong Kong, Jan. 31: A new visa scheme offering millions of Hong Kongers a pathway to British citizenship went live on Sunday as the city’s former colonial master opens its doors to those wanting to escape China’s crackdown on dissent. Anyone with a British National (Overseas) passport and their dependents can now apply online for a visa allowing them to live and work in the United Kingdom. After five years, they can apply for citizenship. The immigration scheme is a response to Beijing’s decision last year to impose a sweeping national security law on Hong Kong to snuff out the huge and often violent democracy protests. Britain has accused China of tearing up its promise ahead of Hong Kong’s 1997 handover that the financial hub would maintain key liberties and autonomy for 50 years, and has argued it has a moral duty to protect its former subjects. “We have honoured our profound ties of history and friendship with the people of Hong Kong, and we have stood up for freedom and autonomy,” Prime Minister Boris Johnson said of the



Daniel Pearl

PEARL’S FAMILY TO CHALLENGE ACQUITTALS

Islamabad, Jan. 31: The family of American journalist Daniel Pearl will challenge an order by Pakistan’s top court to release a British-born militant acquitted of masterminding his kidnapping and brutal murder in 2002. The Supreme Court on Thursday upheld the acquittal of Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and three other men last year, triggering outrage from the US. Pearl was the South Asia bureau chief for *The Wall Street Journal* when he was abducted and beheaded by jihadists in Karachi in January 2002 while researching a story about Islamist militants. “The Pearl family intends to file a review petition against the illegal and unjust majority decision,” parents Ruth and Judea Pearl said in a statement that was tweeted by the murdered journalist’s friend and former *Wall Street Journal* colleague Asra Nomani. They join both the federal government and Sindh provincial government in launching a plea for the latest verdict to be reviewed. Lawyers for Pearl’s family have argued that Sheikh played a crucial role in organising the abduction and detention of the journalist before ordering his captors to kill him. — AFP

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scheme this week. The website for visa applications went online at 5pm in Hong Kong (0900 GMT). China has reacted with fury to the visa offer, announcing that it would no longer recognise the passports as a legitimate travel or ID document. The move was largely symbolic as Hong Kongers tend to use their own passports or ID cards to leave the city. But Beijing said it was prepared to take “further measures”, raising fears authorities might try to stop Hong Kongers from leaving for Britain. On Sunday, the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of China’s State Council said it strongly condemned the British for violating its promise not to give BNO(O) passport holders right of residence. — AFP

Los Angeles, Jan. 31: Protesters briefly disrupted a coronavirus vaccination distribution centre at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles, United States media reported Saturday. Several dozen people carrying signs demanding the end of lockdowns and promoting anti-vaccination conspiracy theories gathered at the entrance to the site, one of the largest in the US, social media posts showed. “There appears to be only about 30 protesters total. It’s not clear why they’ve shut off the whole facility,” tweeted social media user Mikel Jollet. Officials shut the site down for nearly an hour, US media reported, citing fire department officials — though the Los Angeles police department later insisted that the site had not been shut down and that all the vaccines would be distributed. The incident represents just the latest challenge to the vaccine rollout in the US, which has the highest number of cases and deaths in the world from Covid-19. More than 26 million people have been infected and 439,000 have died in the country since the start of the pandemic, a tally kept by Johns Hopkins University showed Saturday. President Joe Biden has pledged to have 100 million people vaccinated within his first 100 days — but the rollout began slowly under former President Donald Trump. Los Angeles county, where Covid-19 cases have surged this winter, is currently only vaccinating frontline medical workers and people aged 65 and over. Even among those groups, appointments are extremely difficult to obtain, with Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna shots in limited supply. — AFP

THOUSANDS JOIN FUNERAL, FLOUT RESTRICTIONS

Jerusalem, Jan. 31: Thousands of ultra-Orthodox Jews defied Israel’s Coronavirus restrictions to attend a rabbi’s funeral on Sunday, prompting Defence Minister Benny Gantz to demand the community’s repeated breaking of lockdown rules must end. A huge crowd, many not wearing masks, packed the streets in Jerusalem for the funeral of 99-year-old Rabbi Meshulam David Soloveitchik, head of the influential Brisk yeshiva, or religious educational institute. Soloveitchik died earlier on Sunday. — AFP

3,000 held in pro-Navalny stir

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

Moscow, Jan. 31: Police detained more than 3,000 people across Russia and blocked off the centre of Moscow Sunday in a massive clampdown on protests demanding the release of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny. Thousands of protesters defied government warnings to rally from Vladivostok to Saint Petersburg in a second weekend of mass demonstrations over the arrest of President Vladimir Putin’s most prominent critic. Navalny was detained at a Moscow airport in mid-January after flying back to Russia from Germany where he was recovering from an August poisoning he blames on the Kremlin. The 44-year-old anti-corruption campaigner is being held in a Moscow detention centre and faces years of potential jail time in several different criminal cases, despite calls from Western governments for his release. In moves not seen in years in Moscow, authorities locked down the centre of the capital Sunday, with hundreds of police lining the streets, central Metro stations closed and the movements of pedestrians restricted. Protesters who had hoped to gather outside the headquarters of the FSB security service were instead scattered to various parts of the city as organisers made last-minute



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

changes in locations. AFP journalists saw dozens of protesters detained and taken into police vans. It was unclear amid the chaos how many people took part in the demonstration. Independent monitor OVD-Info said at least 3,062 people had been detained across the country, including 844 in Moscow, and arrests were continuing. It

reported more than 4,000 detentions during similar protests last Saturday. The Russian Union of Journalists said around 35 people working for media outlets were also detained on Sunday. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Twitter condemned “the persistent use of harsh tactics against peaceful protesters and journalists

by Russian authorities for a second week straight.” The Russian foreign ministry hit back, accusing the United States of “gross interference” in its affairs and of using “online platforms controlled by Washington” to promote the protests. Hundreds marched through the centre of Moscow chanting “Freedom!” and “Putin is a thief!” before

arriving outside Matrosskaya Tishina prison where Navalny was being held. Several dozen were detained at the prison, with police chasing down protesters in the snow outside the complex. “The people in power don’t want to listen to anything or to anybody,” 34-year-old vet Darya said at the Moscow rally. — AFP

Protesters disrupt vaccination site in LA

Pentagon pauses vax plan for Guantanamo detainees

Washington, Jan. 31: The Pentagon said Saturday it was putting on hold a plan to give Covid vaccines to terror detainees at Guantanamo, following an outcry as the United States struggles to deliver jabs to frontline workers and vulnerable elderly Americans. “No Guantanamo detainees have been vaccinated,” Pentagon spokesman John Kirby tweeted. “We’re pausing the plan to move forward, as we review force protection protocols. We remain committed to our obligations to keep our troops safe.” The Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba houses detainees in the US “war on terror,” including top Al-Qaeda figure and alleged 9/11 attack planner Khalid

Sheikh Mohammed. The Department of Defence told US media earlier in the week that it would offer vaccines to its detainees and prisoners, to be administered “on a voluntary basis.” Backlash came from Republican lawmakers, including the party’s top congressman, Kevin McCarthy. “President Biden told us he would have a plan to defeat the virus on day 1. He just never told us that it would be to give the vaccine to terrorists before most Americans,” he said on Twitter. Added New York congresswoman Elise Stefanik: “It is inexcusable and un-American that President Biden is choosing to prioritize vaccinations for convicted terrorists in Gitmo

over vulnerable American seniors or veterans.” The United States has been the world’s hardest-hit country by the Coronavirus pandemic, in absolute terms, with 436,000 deaths and nearly 26 million cases. President Joe Biden has pledged to vaccine 100 million Americans in his first 100 days in office, but so far the country’s mass inoculation drive has been beset by stumbles, including a shortfall in vaccines and widespread technical difficulties for eligible Americans trying to make appointments. According to health officials, the US has so far administered just under 30 million of the nearly 50 million doses distributed in the country. — AFP

VACCINE DELAYS: GERMANY MULLS LEGAL ACTION

Berlin, Jan. 31: Germany’s government on Sunday threatened legal action against laboratories failing to deliver Coronavirus vaccines to the European Union on schedule, amid tension over delays to deliveries from AstraZeneca. “If it turns out that companies have not respected their obligations, we will have to decide the legal consequences,” Economy Minister Peter Altmaier said. “No company can favour another country over the EU after the fact,” he added. There has been growing tension in recent weeks between European leaders and the British-Swedish pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca, which has fallen behind on promised deliveries of its vaccine. — AFP

ISRAEL TO GIVE SOME VACCINES TO PALESTINIANS

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

PERTH GOES INTO SNAP LOCKDOWN OVER SINGLE CASE

Sydney, Jan. 31: The Australian city of Perth will begin a snap five-day lockdown after a security guard at a quarantine hotel tested positive for Covid-19, authorities announced Sunday. Roughly two million residents of the city must stay at home as of Sunday evening, as will those living in the nearby Peel and South West regions. A scheduled return of schools on Monday will be delayed, with locals only permitted to leave their homes for exercise, medical care, essential work or to buy food. The new rules follow the first case of community transmission in Western Australia state for 10 months, officials said. — AFP

Tycoon Carlos Slim leaves hospital after Covid bout

Mexico City, Jan. 31: Mexican telecoms billionaire Carlos Slim, one of the world’s richest men, has been discharged from hospital and is doing well after a bout with Covid-19, a source close to his family said Saturday. The 81-year-old tycoon “has been at home since January 28 and is in very good health,” the source with the Slim family’s Grupo Carso said. On Monday Slim’s son, Carlos Slim Domit, announced on Twitter that his father was being treated for Covid-19 and had only

mild symptoms. “He’s very well. He is making very good progress with Covid-19 after more than a week of minor symptoms,” Slim Domit wrote at the time. Slim and his family, who control mobile telecom giant America Movil, are worth an estimated \$58.5 billion, according to *Forbes* magazine, making him Latin America’s richest man. Through his foundation, he is helping to fund joint production in Mexico and Argentina of the Coronavirus vaccine developed by AstraZeneca and the University of Oxford for distribution in Latin America. Slim’s infection came a day after Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador announced he had tested positive for Covid-19. On Friday Lopez Obrador said he still has the disease but “the critical phase is passing.” Mexico has officially registered around 1.8 million Coronavirus cases and more than 155,000 deaths, one of the world’s highest fatality tolls. — AFP

STIMULUS | PROPOSAL

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

Biden, Dems seek hike in US minimum wage

New York, Jan. 31: When President Joe Biden unveiled a \$1.9 trillion stimulus proposal earlier this month, few were surprised by the plan’s hefty price tag or sweeping scope. More striking was Biden’s inclusion of a measure to more than double the federal minimum wage to \$15. The move, backed by leading Democrats including left-wing Senator Bernie Sanders, establishes the fight for higher wages as a top priority for the new administration, potentially leading to one of

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

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

more than 32 million US workers, according to the Economic Policy Institute, a progressive think tank. The Sanders bill proposes “a significant increase in the minimum wage,” Ben Zipperer, an economist at the institutesaid.

“Unfortunately, we have quite a big hole to dig out of in terms of providing what low-income workers need.” The bill would put the United States on par with a growing number of states and cities that have already enacted the hike at the urging of the “Fight for \$15” movement launched by fast-food workers in the early 2010s. “The bump up made it a little bit easier,” said Maggie Breshears, who works at grocery store and retailer Fred Meyer in Seattle and has gone from

making about \$10 per hour in 2013 to \$17.59 after Seattle lifted its minimum wage in 2014. The US minimum wage was first enacted in 1938 as part of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal reforms. The measure has been periodically increased since then, most recently in 2007, when Congress lifted it gradually from \$5.15 to \$7.25 an hour, which would equal a \$15,000 annual salary. Barack Obama was unable to win a boost during his eight-year presidency from 2009 to 2017. In

2019, the House of Representatives approved an increase, but the bill died in the Republican-led Senate. Supporters of an increase draw hope from rising public support apparent in 2020, when Florida voters backed a hike to \$15 per hour at the same time the state voted for Republican President Donald Trump, who ended up losing re-election. In Arkansas, another Republican state, 68 percent of voters in 2018 backed gradually increasing the wage to \$11 an hour. — AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

1 FEBRUARY 2021

Pass a resolution on MSP, drop cases against farmers

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

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

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

There is a further legal hurdle to be crossed. It appears that while a government can repeal a law passed by Parliament, it has no authority to "suspend" a law. The most it can do is to delay framing the rules for the implementation of laws. But what's to happen after 18 months? The government's refusal to yield on the MSP question makes the gap between the government's stand and that of farmers unbridgeable.

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

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

Judicial correction

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

The two judgments triggered widespread outrage among the general public as well as the legal circles.

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

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

DECCAN CHRONICLE

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Subhani



Elite clubs bastions of hereditary entitlement



Mohan Guruswamy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS

DESTITUTE

Elderly destitutes live a miserable life (*Elderly destitute left on roadside, DC, Jan. 31*). What happened in Indore shows the pathetic state of our society and authorities. Why they did such an inhuman thing is for the political class to answer. When PM Modi and Amit Shah took control of the BJP, the elders who built the party were sent to a Margdarshak Mandal. If politicians can do this, how a municipality treats elderly destitute should not surprise us.

N. Nagarajan
Hyderabad

QUEUE JUMPERS

This is another instance of misuse of authority and circumvention of the rule by the influential (*People jump vaccine queue, shame state, DC, Jan. 31*). Such people are not only shameless but also do not have any guilt or social consciousness. Regular monitoring by the health ministry and strict punishment for violators are required.

Dr O. Prasada Rao
Hyderabad

GOOD INITIATIVE

It is a laudable initiative by Cyberabad police (*Police launches initiative to help distressed senior citizens, DC, Jan. 31*). It is heartening to learn about the police move to help distressed seniors. The coverage may be extended to seniors outside gated communities and apartments also.

B. Raghunadha Rao
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Rs 4.4 crore relief granted to city

HYDERABAD, JANUARY. 31 The Central Government had sanctioned Rs 4.4 crore towards various measures for providing relief to the victims of the floods in the twin-cities.

It has sanctioned another sum of Rs 2.5 crore for flood relief works in Nizamabad district.

Chief Minister, Mr K. Brahmananda Reddi, who returned from Delhi here today, told reporters that of the amount sanctioned for the twin cities, Rs 230 lakh was marked for repairs to the surface and underground drainage systems including the embankments of the Musi river and Rs 75 lakh for repairs to roads and buildings.

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

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

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

Kishwar Desai
London Diary



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

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

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

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

stronger and smarter.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

quick BITES

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

* As of Friday/Saturday

GST revenues touch record ₹1.20 L cr in Jan.

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

Sitharaman to present Union Budget today



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

Power demand touches all-time high of 189.6 GW

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

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

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



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

New Delhi, Jan. 31: The government may give Cairn Energy one of the surrendered oil fields such as Ratna R-Series in lieu of the \$1.4 billion it has pay to the British firm, helping prevent seizure of foreign assets in case of default as well as get an experienced operator in the struggling E&P sector, sources said.

Cairn Energy gave India its biggest onland oil discovery but exited the country after it was slapped with a Rs 10,247-crore tax demand using a legislation that gave the government the powers to tax companies retrospectively. The firm has now won an international arbitration against the tax demand and the government has been ordered to return the value of shares of Cairn it had sold, dividends it had seized and tax refund it had withheld to recover the tax demand.

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

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



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

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

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

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

back," another source said.

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

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

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

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

—PTI

CEA PITCHES FOR PRIVATE SECTOR-LED BAD BANK



K.V. Subramanian

KUMAR DIPANKAR & CHANDRA SHEKHAR
NEW DELHI, JAN. 31

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

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

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

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

—PTI

Crypto players want to be heard before ban decision

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JAN. 31

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

China giant reports \$10 bn fraud

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

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

listed CCOOP Group Co said late on Friday.

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

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

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

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

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

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

—Reuters

Stocks encounter Budget hurdle

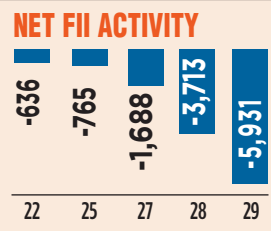
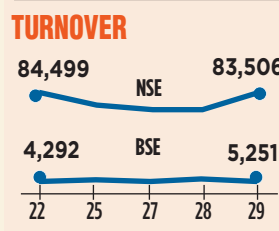
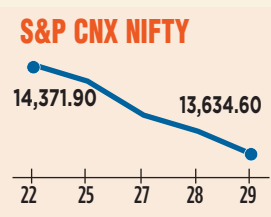
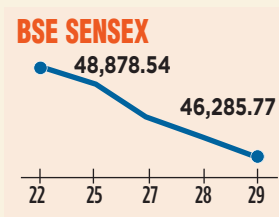
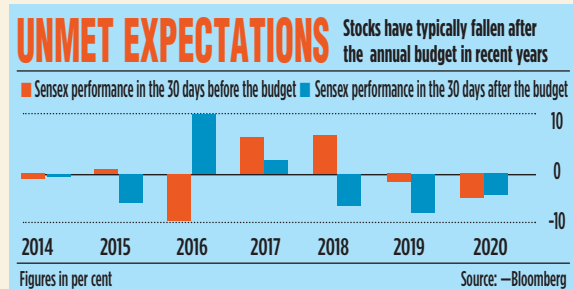
NUPUR ACHARYA & RONOJOY MAZUMDAR
JAN. 31

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

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

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

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



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

early May from its peak in January.

—Bloomberg

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

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

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

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

—PTI

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JAN. 31

Trade, hotels, transport and communication will see the steepest decline of 21.4 per cent in gross value added (GVA) in FY21. Except the primary sector, which includes agriculture, all the other sectors will see a decline in GVA, finds the Economic Survey.

As per the first advance estimate for FY21, the real GVA at basic prices of trade, hotels, transport and communication sectors will be around Rs 20.26 lakh crore against the provisional estimate of Rs 25.77 lakh crore in FY20—a decline of 21.4 per cent. These sectors had recorded a growth of 3.6 per cent in FY20 and 7.7 per cent in FY19.

Manufacturing might see a decline of 9.3 per cent to Rs 33.19 lakh crore in FY21 against Rs 36.59 lakh crore in the previous fiscal. Manufacturing, too, has been witnessing positive growth for the past several years, though in FY20, the

growth was almost flattish at 0.7 per cent. However, in the previous two years, manufacturing was growing at 6 and 6.5 per cent.

In the case of financing, insurance, real estate and business services, the decline will be marginal at 0.8 per cent to Rs 28.91 lakh crore. In FY20, these sectors had grown by 4.6 per cent and 6.8 per cent in FY19.

Community, social and personal services, which had grown by 10 per cent in FY20, also will see a decline of 3.7 per cent. The primary sector, which includes agriculture, fishing, mining and quarrying, is the saving grace. These sectors will grow their real GVA by 0.9 per cent to Rs 23.25 lakh crore against Rs 23.03 lakh crore in the previous fiscal.

As per the provisional estimate of FY20, these sectors had grown by 3.9 per cent. The total GVA added at basic prices will decline by 7.2 per cent against a growth of 3.9 per cent in the previous fiscal.

MAKING | IN INDIA

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

Mait seeks ₹20K cr PLI for IT hardware

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

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

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

Mait president Nitin Kunkolienker told PTI,



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

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

for the past 10 years to push manufacturing, and even it does not come under ITA-1 (information technology agreement).

"You gave them (mobile industry) duty arbitrage earlier. There was some base created for mobile manufacturing; whereas for PC, laptop, servers and tablets, there was an inverted duty regime from 2005 to 2014 that impacted manufacturing of these products. Now, we need to re-invent," Kunkolienker

said.

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

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

Kunkolienker said there is a need to recreate and reposition India's market. "At least Rs 20,000 crore is required (under PLI). It is based on value addition potential that exists in the country."

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

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

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

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

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

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



MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, JAN 31.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Olectra already operates 150 buses in Pune.

SHORT TAKES

Messi's contract biggest in sports

Madrid: Lionel Messi's most recent contract with Barcelona is worth up to 555 million euros (\$673 million) over four seasons, the *El Mundo* newspaper reported on Sunday.

The Spanish daily said it had access to the document Messi signed with the Catalan club in 2017, which included fixed incomes and variables that could reach nearly 138 million euros (\$167 million) each season. The newspaper said it is the most expensive contract ever agreed with an athlete in any sport.

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

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

Hyderabad FC too hot for Chennaiyin

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

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

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

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

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

Gill blazes to title in Coimbatore

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

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

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

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

Jesus wins it for Manchester City

London: Manchester City opened up a three-point lead at the top of the Premier League with a game in hand to come as Pep Guardiola's men beat Sheffield United 1-0, while Manchester United played out a goalless draw at Arsenal on Saturday. Gabriel Jesus scored the only goal inside the first 10 minutes at the Etihad as City extended their winning run to 12 games in all competitions. Ferran Torres and Jesus were two of five changes made by Guardiola and they combined to make the breakthrough. — AFP

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Odisha vs Jamshedpur from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

WWE

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

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MOEEN TARGET

England allrounder Ali looks to get Test career back on track

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR | DC CHENNAI, JAN. 31

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

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

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

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

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

"That is my biggest motivation. I still feel I've got wickets and runs in me and match-winning performances within me. I have small targets I want to achieve first.

"I am not too far away from getting 200 wickets. I know people say they don't look at these things but it would be something I would look at. Then I would set another target after that," said Moeen.

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

Moeen said he is fit and raring to go now.

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



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

— ECB

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

— MOEEN ALI
England allrounder

ease'. Hopefully there is ease after this," said Moeen.

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

removing the Indian skipper early.

"How do we get him out? He's obviously an amazing player, world-class, he's very motivated to do well and I'm sure he'll be even more motivated after they did well in Australia and he had to leave for the birth of his child," said Moeen.

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

AFTER FRESH GUIDELINES, 50% SPECTATORS LIKELY FOR 2ND TEST

New Delhi, Jan. 31: Spectators might be allowed in the second India-England Test in Chennai after the central government's fresh Covid-19 guidelines permitted crowd attendance at fifty per cent of capacity at sporting venues.

The BCCI and the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association had deliberated on entry of spectators earlier also before deciding that the first two matches would be held closed doors. But the fresh home ministry guidelines on easing of restrictions on public movement

have changed the scenario.

"There is no time to allow entry of spectators for the first Test starting on February 5 as we only received the government notification on Saturday. You can't organise entry of spectators at such a short notice," a senior TNCA official said on conditions of anonymity.

"But yes, now with fresh guidelines, there is every possibility that second Test starting from February 14 might have spectators as per notification," he added.

The Chepauk has a capacity of 50,000. — PTI

Strike-rate doesn't really matter at times: Pujara

New Delhi, Jan. 31: There are times when balls faced matter a lot more than runs scored and the recent tour of Australia was all about that for India's Test batting mainstay Cheteshwar Pujara, who finds the "strike-rate talk" overrated.

Pujara had collected a lot more runs (521 at 41.41 strike rate and three hundreds) in his player of the series performance to ensure a historic win in Australia two seasons ago but considering the "extraordinary circumstances" of the recent showdown that just went by, he rates his effort (271 at 29.20 and three half-centuries) equally special.

"Both tours have been fantastic for the team and personally I did well on both tours but the cir-



Cheteshwar Pujara

cumstances were completely different. This time I was starting up after a long time, almost eight months (due to Covid-19), there were no first class games also," Pujara said.

The 31-year-old stood like a rock through the series, quite literally in the final Test in Brisbane, where he took multiple blows on the body to keep a relentless

Australian attack at bay. "It wasn't easy at all in terms of preparation and the Australian team had a thorough game plan for each of us. To get back into rhythm took a little bit of time but luckily all went positive in the end.

"Numbers wise, it may not look like a very, very good series for me but if you look at the pitches, not many runs were scored this time. It was more challenging than last time without a doubt."

The 81-Test veteran said the balls faced, 928 to 1,258 two years ago, mattered more than runs scored, given the challenging pace attack, nature of pitches and barrage of injuries that the Indian team suffered through the four games. — PTI

DOMESTIC | TWENTY20

TN pip Baroda for second title

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

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

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

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

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

Tamil Nadu reached 61/1 after 10 overs.

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

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

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

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

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

BRIEF SCORES

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

Antonsen, Tai emerge champs

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

The all Danish men's singles final was equally nail biting as Anders Antonsen denied Viktor Axelsen a third tournament win in three weeks.

Marin beat the Taiwanese 26-year-old two weeks in a row during the previous Thailand Open tournament finals.

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

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

In the second game Tai dominated early and dictated a commanding pace, eventually triumphing 21-

8. The decider was filled with fast and furious rallies — both players yo-yoed up and down the scoreboard — but two late spectacular drop shots were critical in sealing Tai's victory 21-19.

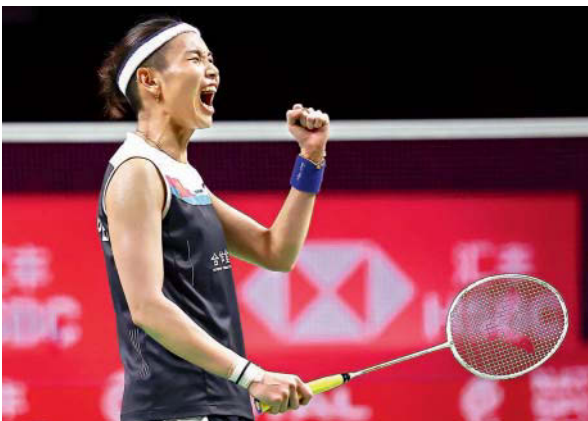
"Before this match today I kept telling myself that I had to play patiently. In the previous matches, all my mistakes were caused (by) my own impatience," Tai said.

Thailand has hosted three consecutive badminton tournaments in a bio-secure bubble to guard against the pandemic.

Axelsen, ranked fourth, couldn't control his nerves — losing the first game 16-21 — his body language showing immense frustration as errors piled up and shots landed wide.

He managed to regroup to win the second game 21-5.

But in the decider Antonsen had all the right answers, triumphing 21-17 to claim the game and the hour-long match against an increasingly ruffled Axelsen. Antonsen is the only man to beat Axelsen in three weeks. — AFP



Taiwan's Tai Tzu-ying reacts after beating Carolina Marin of Spain in the women's singles match at the World Tour Finals in Bangkok on Sunday.

— BADMINTON ASSOCIATION OF THAILAND/AFP

Ranji survived World War, freedom struggle but not Covid



Hemant Kenkre
Silly Point

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

most important contest to be played by Indian cricketers, barring Test cricket.

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

threats still being posed by the pandemic) prompted the BCCI to take this unfortunate step to put player and public safety on top priority.

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

The way the bench players put their hands up to take India to a convincing win over the Australians just goes to show how deep cricket has penetrated into the country. Performances by members of the team (who started the tour down under as 'net bowlers') wowed audiences in India and also passed a strong message to followers of the game abroad that Indian cricket cannot be taken lightly. The strength of any team does not lie only in its playing stars but is uncovered when their replacements show their hunger for success. And that's what was on show during the series, particularly in the final Test match at the Gabba.

Former Australian great, Greg Chappell commended the domestic structure in India and called it the main reason for the superb

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

In a summation, Chappell went on to call their young cricketers 'weekend warriors' as compared to their Indian counterparts. He mentioned the cut-throat competition that a young Indian cricketer has to survive from the Under-16 age

group level till he reaches the first class level, saying: "As cricket is THE major sport in India, the best athletes in the country are playing the game and competition for state places is fierce." Indian legend Sunil Gavaskar has often written about the 'hunger' that a young Indian cricketer has as he undertakes the sharp climb, up from the age group level to the Ranji Trophy.

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

corners of the country playing the Ranji Trophy to reach the IPL level.

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