THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI FRIDAY 29 JANUARY 2021



WORLD 6

Daniel Pearl case: Pak court orders release of Omar Saeed Sheikh



SPORT 8

BCCI president Sourav Ganguly undergoes 2nd heart surgery in 1 month TABLOID 16

FARMERS AND FORCES LOCKED IN A FACE-OFF AT PROTEST SITES

(Above) Tight security

arrangements at the site of

farmers' ongoing protest

against the new farm laws

(Left) Bharatiya Kisan Union

Spokesperson Rakesh Tikait

at Delhi-Ghazipur border.

addresses farmers at

at Ghazipur border on

Ghazipur border in New

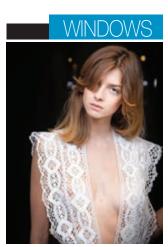
Delhi. (Right) Security per-

sonnel conduct a flag march

Monal Gajjar emerges as one of Bollywood's exciting finds during pandemic season

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www.asianage.com



French model Mathilde Charuet wearing a creation of Italian designer Sofia Crociani poses to present Aelis' Spring-Summer 2021 collection for the Paris Haute Couture Week on Wednesday.

Commercial intl flight ban extended **up to February 28**

New Delhi: Scheduled commercial international flight ban has been extended till 28 February 2021. The restriction is not applicable to international all-cargo operations and flights successfully approved by DGCA. However, international scheduled flights may be allowed on selected routes by the competent authority, the DGCA said. Scheduled international passenger services have been suspended in India since March 23 due to the coronavirus pandemic. — PTI

MP court denies bail to comedian Faruqui

Bhopal: Stand-up comic Munawar Faruqui, in jail for allegedly "insulting Hindu Gods and Goddesses" during a show, will not be released on bail, the Madhya Pradesh high court ruled, saying there was no evidence so far that he had not committed the crime. The court rejected the comedian's argument that he had made no offensive comment.

PIO with cancer kills

lady doctor, self in US

Houston: A 43-vear-old

Indian-origin pediatrician diagnosed with terminal cancer shot dead a lady doctor and then killed himself after taking hostages at a medical office in Austin, capital of the US state of Texas. The armed man was identified as Dr Bharat Narumanchi. ■ More on Page 6



Can't we offer some sops to the people of Assam, Bengal and Tamil Nadu in the budget?



Max: 18°C Min: 07°C **RH:** 63% **Rain:** 10%

Forecast: Sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana Tithi: Pushya Bahula Padyami till 11.39 pm Star: Ashlesha till 3.19 am (Saturday)

Varjyam: 4.21 pm to 5.55 pm Durmuhurtam: 9.07 am to 9.51 am; 12.51 pm to 1.36 pm Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12

> **SUNSET TODAY 5.25 PM SUNRISE TOMORROW 7.04 AM MOONRISE TOMORROW 4.10 PM MOONSET TODAY 2.51 AM**

RNI No. 57290/94, Regd No: DL-SW-05/4189/15-17

earth movers in Tikri, more forces sent to Singhu reports of farmers leaving for Delhi from Biwani, Jind

■ Clear protest site in Ghazipur, orders UP police; ■ 'Will kill self but not end protest,' says Rakesh Takait;

Farmers dig in as govt moves forces

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

Two days after Delhi witnessed violence and chaos, the Centre on Thursday moved in forces at all three major farmers' major protest sites and sent eviction notice to their leaders at Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh, asking them to vacate the site and end the protest. The farmers, who have been protesting at these sites for over 60 days against three contentious farm laws, dug their heels in and refused to budge. Their leaders said they would rather die than end

the protest.
Till late Thursday night, high tension prevailed with farmers locked in a major face-off with the UP government at the Ghazipur border after the administration cut off their water and power supply and sent in police and Rapid Action Forces in large numbers after serving a notice to farmers' leaders to vacate the

While the administra-tion said it was fully prepared to vacate the border, the farmers said they would not move till the farm laws are repealed. Bharat Kisan Rakesh spokesperson Tikait, who was earlier in the day talking of courting arrest, announced in an emotional appeal in the evening that he would rather hang himself than end the stir. He also said that he was ready to face

At the Singhu border, the government sent in earth movers and large trenches were dug, while at the Tikri border additional forces were sent, giving credence to farmers' fear that the Centre was moving in a coordinated fashion to evict the farmers forcefully. Earlier in the day at least three protest sites -- Baghpat, Fatehpur and Mathura --

were vacated. In Ghazipur, the situation became volatile after the state administration served a notice under Section 133 of Cr.PC to the farmer leader to vacate

Holding girl's

pant's zip no

SHAHAB ANSARI

hands, opening

sex assault: HC

The Nagpur bench of the

Bombay high court, whose judgment — "no

offence under POCSO is

made out if there was no

skin-to-skin touch" — in

an another judgment

passed earlier this

month acquitted a man

from provision of POCSO observing that holding a child's hand and unzipping pants do not amount to sexual

The prosecution's case

is that on February 12,

2018, the mother of a

five-year-old girl lodged

a complaint at Gadchiroli police sta-

tion that when she

returned home, she noticed the accused was

in her house and was holding hands of her

The complainant also

accused's pant zip was

open. She started shout-

ing and the accused ran

Later, the victim told

her that the accused had

unzipped his pant and

asked her to come to the

More on Page 3

that the

daughter.

bed to sleep.

133 empowers the state to

obstruction or nuisance from any public place. Refusing to budge, Mr Tikait made it clear that he would vacate the site only after the three agriculture laws are repealed. "I will commit suicide. But I will not leave this place," an emotional kissan leader said while appealing to other protesters to bring forward their tractors to form a cordon around him. He claimed that the even electricity and water supply have been cut at the site. "I will now only drink water which is brought on tankers by protesting farmers.

Mr Tikait also said there was an alleged plan to attack farmers after his arrest. "We were ready to surrender but I have come to know that a BJP MLA and his supporters is waiting to attack these farmers after we leave from

"Now, I am not going anywhere. The administration will be responsible if something bad happens here. 'Chalne do goli ab'. And one more thing, if we catch any BJP worker or MLA we, will keep them hostage here," he added.

Mr Tikait told the police that his peaceful sit-in has also been justified by the Supreme Court. "There has been no violence on the Ghazipur border. Despite this the government is adopting a repressive policy. It is the face of the Uttar Pradesh government," he said.

Mr Tikait also questioned the Delhi Police for not opening fire to stop orotesters from breaking into the Red Fort and hoisting a religion flag there. "Who was the person who maligned an entire community and organisation?

Heavy police deployment was also made at Tikri and Singhu borders the epicenter of anti-farm law protests. Some farmers at the protest sites had already returned home in the fear of detention and arrests in the aftermath of ■ Turn to Page 2

16 Opp. parties will boycott Prez speech over farm laws AGE CORRESPONDENT states and farmers' unions dent probe

NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

leaders of 16 Opposition parties said Thursday they will boycott President Ram Nath Kovind's address to both Houses of Parliament on the opening day of the Budget Session on Friday over the controversial farm

The 16 parties include the Congress, Trinamul Congress, NCP, Shiv Sena, DMK and Samajwadi Party. The remaining 10 parties are the National Conference, CPI(M), CPI, RJD, PDP, Muslim League, RSP, MDMK, Kerala Congress and AIDUF.

Announcing the decision, Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad said the 16 parties also sought an indepen-

Centre's role in the violence that shook the capital Republic Day. They also condemned the violence and expressed regret for the injuries sustained by Delhi police personnel during the violent clashes on January 26, when groups of orotesters reached the Red

In a joint statement, the Opposition leaders said the farm laws were an assault on state governments and violated the spirit of the Constitution. It said: "If not repealed, these laws will effectively dismantle the edifice of national food security that rests upon MSP, government procurement and the public distribution system. The farm bills were brought without

any consultations with

and lacked a national conscrutiny was bypassed and laws were pushed through muzzling the Opposition, in brazen violation of parliamentary rules, practices and conventions. The very constitutional validity of these laws remains in question. The joint statement noted

that while lakhs of farmers were peacefully protesting at Delhi's border for 64 days and 155 farmers had died due to the cold and rain, the government didn't budge from its position. Attacking the Centre, the joint statement said: "The Prime Minister and the BJP government remain arrogant, adamant and undemocratic in their response. Shocked by this

Turn to Page 2

Parliamentary

tion on Thursday. An FIR lodged at Noida's

Tharoor, Sardesai, others face sedition charge for tweets

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

While the Delhi Police continued it crackdown on protesters by issuing lookout notices on charges of attempt to murder, rioting and criminal conspiracy against Rakesh Tikait. Yogendra Yadav and Medha Patkar in connection with the January 26 violence, the UP police booked Member of Parliament Shashi Tharoor, journalists Tharoor, journalists Rajdeep Sardesai, Mrinal Pande and others for sedi-

Sector 20 police station stated that the MP and journalists, who included Vinod K. Jose (Caravan), Zafar Agha, the group editor-in-chief of *National Herald*, and

tweeting and spreading fake news pertaining to the death of a farmer during the tractor rally on January 26, 2021. The Delhi police's several FIRs named 37 farmer leaders, and the police has sought answers from them in three days on why the agreement with the law

enforcing agency was bro-

ken and rules flouted during

Caravan, were booked for

the tractor parade. While the Delhi Police is holding farmer leaders responsible for violating the agreed rules of the tractor parade, which they say led to clashes in parts of the capital, the farmers have said there was a conspiracy to sabotage and malign their

peaceful protest.

More on Page 2

Nitish govt sets up retirement panel for staff above 50 years

NAYEAR AZAD PATNA, JAN. 28

The Bihar government headed by chief minister Nitish Kumar has formulated a policy and set up two committees to review the performance of state government employees above 50 years of age and decide whether they should be retained in service or face retirement due to bad conduct and lack of efficiency in performing their duties.

A four-member team headed by Additional Chief Secretary has been constituted to review the performance of Group A". And a committee led by a secretary-level officer of the home department will review the performance of Group "B", 'C" and other state government employees.

Reports suggest that the meetings to analyse the review panel recommendation will be held every year in June and December. If employees are found unfit, the committee may recommend harsh action, including early retirement of these employees.

■ More on Page 4

'Access, inclusion, empowerment' to transform India: PM at Davos

New Delhi/Davos, Jan. 28: Saying the self-reliant India programme will help revive the global economy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi told the global business community on Thursday that his government aims to transform the nation through "access, inclusion and empowerment", and will also ensure complete data security.

Addressing the World Economic Forum's online Davos Agenda Summit, where he interacted with global business leaders. Mr Modi also said that India offers a predictable and friendly environment, from the tax regime to FDÍ norms.

He said the "Atma Nirbhar Bharat" movement was committed to global goods and global supply chains, while India's digital profile has been completely transformed.

He also talked of the evacuation of citizens when airspaces were closed and the supply of medicines to more than 150 countries. "Today, India is helping countries with online training, knowledge of traditional knowledge vaccines and knowledge, vaccines and vaccine infrastructure,"



He said India maintained economic activity by starting infrastructure projects worth billions of rupees and initiating special schemes for employment. "We are focused on saving lives and are also focusing on boosting the economy. India's ambition of self-reliance will strengthen globalism anew and will help Industry 4.0," Mr Modi

The PM said India was working on all the four factors of Industry 4.0 connectivity, automation, artificial intelligence or machine learning and real-time data.

India was among the countries where data charges are the cheapest and mobile connectivity and smartphones have reached far and wide. while India's automation design expert pool is vast

Today, India is helping countries with online training, knowledge of traditional knowledge, vaccines and vaccine infrastructure.

Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

and the country has made a mark in the field of AI and machine learning, the PM said.

"Growing digital infra-structure made digital solutions an everyday part of life in India. Today 1.3 billion Indians have universal ID — Aadhaar —which is connected to their account and phone. In December itself, there has been 4 trillion rupees worth of transactions through UPI," he said.

Mr Modi said India could transfer ₹1.8 lakh crores assistance through direct benefit transfers to the accounts of 76 crore Indians in the pandemic. "Digital infrastructure made public service delivery efficient and transparent. India has started a campaign for providing easy access to healthcare by giving a

Turn to Page 2

India's China ties under 'exceptional stress': Jaishankar

8-pt formula mooted as way ahead SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI NEW DELHI, JAN. 28 aged relationship, Mr

The clash between Indian and Chinese troops at Ladakh's Galwan Valley in June last year has put the India-China bilateral

relationship "under exceptional stress", with China showing a "willingness to breach peace and tranquillity", external affairs minister S. Jaishankar Thursday, as he advanced "eight broad propositions" for the "benefit of both nations" to repair ties, including that "any attempt to unilaterally change the status quo is completely unacceptable" and that "sensitivity" to the two countries' concerns "can-not be one-sided". The minister was giving the keynote address at the 13th All India Conference of China Studies organby the Chinese ised jointly Institute of

Centre. On his "eight propositions" to repair the dam-

Studies and the IIT Madras China Studies



Jaishankar said: "We said: can seek proper guidance that Jaishankar will be to the

benefit of both nations. These can be summed up by eight broad propositions. First and foremost, agree-ments already reached must be adhered to in their entirety, both in letter and spirit. Second, in handling of the border areas, the LAC must be strictly observed and respected; any attempt to unilaterally change the status quo is completely unacceptable. peace and tranquillity in the border areas is the basis for development of relations domains. If they are disturbed, so inevitably will the rest of the relationship. This is quite apart from the issue of progress in the boundary negotiations."
The minister added:

"Fourth, while both Turn to Page 2

Delhi riots: Narwal's bail pleas dismissed

New Delhi: A court on Thursday dismissed the bail plea of JNU student and Pinjra Tod member Natasha Narwal, booked under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in a north east Delhi riots case, saying allegations against her were prima facie true and provisions of anti-terror law have been rightly invoked in the present case. Narwal was arrested in the case for allegedly being part of a premeditated conspiracy in the riots. Additional sessions judge Amitabh Rawat said in a case of conspiracy of such a large scale, not having a video was not so vital as generally conspiracy, by its very nature, is hatched in secrecy and not having videos of such a conspiracy was obvious rather than doubtful. The court said in a case of conspiracy, even the presence of an accused at a site was not sine qua non (essential condition) for establishing his or her role. — PTI

MLA Bharti's 2-year jail term suspended

New Delhi: A Delhi court on Thursday suspended two years jail term awarded to AAP MLA Somnath Bharti for assaulting AIIMS security staff in a case registered in 2016. Special judge Vikas Dhull passed the directions on an appeal filed against an order of a magisterial court that had handed over the punishment to Mr Bharti on Janu-ary 23. The special court said that the appeal was going to take substantial time. The court directed Mr Bharti to pay a personal bond of ₹20,000 and one surety of like amount. The magisterial court had also imposed a fine of ₹1 lakh on Mr Bharti. The court, however, had granted him bail to enable him to file an appeal against his conviction and iail term before superior court. Advocate Mohd Irshad filed the appeal on behalf of Mr Bharti. - PTI

8,200 get Covid-19

vaccine jabs in city

New Delhi: Over 8,200 healthcare workers received Covid-19 vaccine shots in Delhi on Thursday in the second week of the vaccination drive as the city recorded a turnout of more than 77 per cent. After a sluggish start since the exercise was kicked off, the inoculation drive has picked up pace in the last several days. The targeted number for vaccination on January 28 was 10,600, officials said. "Today, 8,244 people were administered coronavirus vaccine. and AEFI (adverse events following immunisation) was reported in 15 people," a senior health department official said. Also, 100 or more healthcare workers were vaccinated at 34 sites, including 10 Delhi government hospitals. The number of those vaccinated at Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital stood at 110, while 79 people were given the shot at Indian Spinal Injuries Centre, officials said. — PTI

HC DECLINES TO INTERFERE WITH ORDER ON MCDs

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

The Delhi high court on Thursday declined to interfere with a single judge order putting on hold the operation of a notice issued by a committee, constituted by the Speaker of the Delhi Legislative Assembly, seeking certain financial information from municipal corporations. A bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh said it was not going to interfere with the December 23, 2020 order of the single judge as it was only an interim direction and disposed of the appeal filed by the deputy secretary (Committees) against the same. The bench further said that the interim order was only in operation till February 9, 2021, the next date of hearing before the single judge, and on that date the appellant here can raise their contentions before the single judge. The court said that the contentions in the appeal can be raised before the single judge who can decide the same looking at the provisions of law and facts of the matter. The bench said if it decides the appeal, then it would result in the petition before the single judge

being decided in advance.

■ Farmers asked to submit reply within 3 days ■ Group, claiming to be locals, demands area be vacated

Police issues notices to 44 farmer leaders

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

The Delhi police has issued notices to at least 44 farmer leaders, including Swaraj India president Yogendra Yadav and Balbir Singh Rajewal, for breaching the agreement regarding the tractor rally on Republic Day.

The protesting leaders were asked to reply within three days why legal action shouldn't be taken against them and other members of their organisations for the violence. The police has also registered 33 FIRs including a sedition case in connection with the violence.

The police asked the farmer leaders to submit their responses within three days, an official said, adding that the notices have been issued to these farmer leaders as they did not follow the conditions set for the trac-

tor parade on Tuesday. The action comes after Delhi police commissioner S.Ñ. Shrivastava, on Wednesday, alleged that farmer leaders were involved in the January 26 violence and warned that no culprit would be

"We have issued notices to around 20 farmer leaders, including Yogendra Yadav. They all have been asked to send their replies within three days," the official said.

On Wednesday, the police had issued a notice to another farmer leader, Darshan Pal, noting that the vandalisation at the Red Fort on Republic Day was "the most deplorable

and anti-national act."
The Delhi police will also issue a lookout circular against farmer leaders who have been named in the FIRs registered after the violence on Republic

The officials said that farmer leaders named in the FIRs will also be asked to surrender their pass-

Sidhu, Sidhana booked for violence at Red Fort

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

The protesters snatched two magazines with 20 live cartridges each from the guns of two constables at the Red Fort during violence on Republic Day, according to police

An FIR regarding the Red Fort incident has been filed at the Kotwali police station in North Delhi. According to the FIR, the protestors tried to snatch the guns. However, both the constables saved their weapons but could not save the maga-

The Delhi police has named actor Deep Sidhu and gangster-turnedsocial activist Lakha Sidhana in an FIR in connection with the Red Fort incidents. "The mob tried to

snatch the MP-5 gun of

constable Singh. He managed to save the gun but could not save the magazine, which had 20 live rounds. Similarly, the mob also snatched a magazine with 20 live rounds from constable Naresh's SLR gun," the FIR stated.

Detailing the sequence of events, the FIR said, 'There was heavy security deployment in and around the Red Fort due to the Republic Day celebration. The police allowed the tractor rally of the farmers on four routes. They were not allowed to enter the Kotwali area."

Shah visits hospital, meets injured cops

New Delhi: Union home minister Amit Shah, on Thursday, visited a hospital here to inquire about the health of the policemen injured in the violence that broke out during the farmers' tractor parade in the national capital on Republic Day, officials said. Nearly 400 policemen were injured during the tractor parade of the farmers.

The decisions have been taken following a series of meetings chaired by Union home minister Amit Shah since Tuesday when the large scale violence took place in the national capital during the farmers' tractor rally, a home ministry official

Meanwhile, a group of people, claiming to be locals at Delhi's Singhu border, staged a protest there, demanding that the area be vacated following the Republic Day violence in the city.

The tractor parade, on Tuesday, which was to highlight the demands of the farmer unions to repeal the three new agri laws, turned violent as protesters deviated from routes, attacked police, overturned vehicles, and hoisted a religious flag on the ramparts of the iconic Red Fort.

According to a senior police officer, a case under Section 124A (sedition) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) has been registered and the Red Fort incident is being investigated. The FIR regarding the

Red Fort incident has been filed at the Kotwali police station in North Delhi.



Farmers during the ongoing agitation against the Centre's new farm laws at the Singhu border in New Delhi on

Violence unfortunate but will not end stir, says Kejri

New Delhi, Jan. 28: The violence on Republic Day was "unfortunate" but it would not end the farmers' movement against the three agri laws, Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said

Thursday. He also said that "strictest punishment" must be given to those responsible for the vio-

Addressing the ninth National Council meeting of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Mr Kejriwal said the farmers' protest against the farm laws is a battle of existence for them.

violence Republic Day was unfortunate and whoever is



for it must be strictest punishment," he

"But violence will not lead to the end of the farmers movement against the agri laws, the issues still remain so the movement cannot end. We have to peacefully extend our support to the protesting farmers," the CM said.

He said whoever is responsible for the violence on Tuesday should be acted against.

Whoever is responsible for the turn of events, and I am not referring to the ones against whom police have registered fake cases. deserve to be punished. Whoever is responsible, whichever party is should be responsible against,' acted agai Kejriwal said.

The AAP has strongly come out in favour of the farmers protesting against the agri laws.

Tens of thousands of farmers broke barriers to storm the national capital on Tuesday, their tractor parade to highlight their demands dissolving into unprecedented scenes of anarchy as they fought with police, overturned vehicles and delivered a national insult hoisting a religious flag from the ramparts of the Red Fort, a privilege reserved for India's tricolour.

Special Cell will probe 'conspiracy', says police

New Delhi, Jan. 28: The Delhi police's Special Cell will investigate the "conspiracy" and "criminal designs" behind the violence during the farmers' tractor parade on January 26, officials said on Thursday.

The police claimed that there was a "pre-con-ceived" and "well coordinated" plan to break the agreement arrived at with farmer leaders to bring international embarrassment for the gov-ernment on Republic

Day.
"The Special Cell is investigating the conspiracy and criminal designs behind these unfortunate events of January 26.

"A preliminary assessment suggests there was a pre-conceived and well coordinated plan to break the agreement reached between Delhi police and the leaders of farmers organisations, to indulge in violent confrontation with the security forces, to breach the sanctity of iconic and historical structures and monuments and to create an international embarrassment for the government," the police said in

a statement. It further said a criminal case has been registered and is being investigated under provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and sections of IPC dealing with sedition.

The role and conduct of organisations and individuals based in India as well as those out of the country is being probed," it added. — *PTI*

SC irked over civil services issue

Questions Centre on no extra chance to aspirants during Covid pandemic

New Delhi, Jan. 28: The Supreme Court Thursday questioned the Centre for filing an affidavit without pechying at whose level the decision was taken for not granting one more opportunity to UPSC civil services aspirants who could not appear in their last attempt in 2020 exam due to Covid-19 pandemic.

A bench headed by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar expressed displeasure over it and said that the affidavit filed before it was not clear about at whose level this decision was taken.

The bench, also comprising Justices B.R. Gavai and Krishna Murari, observed that a routine affidavit has been filed before

199 fresh

positivity

rate 0.34%

New Delhi, Jan. 28: Delhi recorded 199

fresh Covid-19 cases

on Thursday, the sev-

enth time the daily

stood below the 200-

mark in January

even as the positivity

rate stayed much

These new cases

came out of the 57,993

tests conducted the

The positivity rate

stood at 0.34 per cent,

according to the lat-

est bulletin issued by

This is also the the seventh time, the

The infection tally

in the city stood at

6.34 lakh and the

death toll mounted to

10.835 with six new

fatalities, authorities

said on Thursday.

the 200-mark

Delhi health

of daily cases has stood below

below 0.50 per cent.

count

incidences

previous day.

department.

number

January.

Covid cases,

THE SC questioned the Centre for filing an affidavit without specifying at whose level the decision was taken for not granting one more opportunity to aspirants who could not appear in their last attempt in 2020 exam due to the pandemic

it by an under-secretary level officer.

It is a policy decision, the bench said, adding the affidavit does not say anything about at whose level this decision has been taken .

■ Continued from Page 1

nations are committed to a

multipolar world, there

should be a recognition

that a multipolar Asia is

one of its essential con-

stituents. Fifth, obviously

each state will have its

own interests, concerns

and priorities; but sensi-

tivity to them cannot be

one-sided. At the end of

between major states are

reciprocal in nature. Sixth,

as rising powers, each will

have their own set of aspi-

rations and their pursuit

too cannot be ignored.

Seventh, there will always

be divergences and differ-

ences, but their manage-

ment is essential to our

the day,

relationships

The top court has posted the matter for further hearing on Friday. The court is hearing a plea additional attempt or seeking grant of one more relaxation in age for some chance to appear in the candidates would amount UPSC's civil services to extending differential examination to those aspi rants who could not appear in their last attempt in 2020 due to the pandemic.

On January 25, the Centre had told the apex court that allowing extra attempt in UPSC civil services exam to those who could not appear in their last chance in 2020 due to Covid-19 would create a cascading effect detrimental to the overall functioning and level playing field necessary for a public examination sys-

tem. In an affidavit filed in the apex court, the Centre had said that giving an

ties under 'exceptional stress'

▶ THE MINISTER also

old better-developed

of last year's events

the long view.

border infra as 'conse-

quential' in the context

ties. And eighth, civilisa-

tional states like India and

China must always take

"The events in eastern

Ladakh last year have so

profoundly disturbed the

relationship... They not

only signalled a disregard

for commitments about

minimising troop levels,

but also showed a willing-

ness to breach peace and tranquillity. The events of

Jaishankar said:

termed China's decades-

Jaishankar: India's China

treatment to similari placed aspirants at the examination.

"It is therefore respectfully submitted that accommodating the present petitioners would crea cascading effect detrimental to the overall functioning and level playing field necessary to be provided in any public examination system," said the affidavit, filed by an under secretary in the department of personnel and training.

It had said a total of 4,86,952 candidates appeared in the October 4 last year examination. -PTI

2020 have actually put our

relationship under excep-

"The development of our ties can only be based

on mutuality. Indeed, the

three mutuals -- mutual

respect, mutual sensitivi-

ty and mutual interests --

are its determining fac-

tors. Any expectation they

can be brushed aside, and

that life can carry on

undisturbed despite the

situation at the border,

that is simply not realistic," he added.

The minister also termed

China's decades-old better-

developed border infra-

structu-re as "consequen-

tial" in the context of last

year's events.

tional stress

AAP to contest polls in six states: Kejriwal "In the next two years,

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN, 28

Delhi chief minister and AAP national convenor Arvind Kejriwal, on Thursday, said the party will contest elections in Sia C.
Uttarakhand, Goa,
Himachal Pradesh, and Gujarat. made

announcement at the 9th National Council meeting of the AAP. "Other parties have no

vision and that is why they are talking about the past. AAP is the only party talking about the future and has the vision of 21st and 22nd century," Mr Kejriwal said.

AAP will be contesting elections in six states— UP, Uttarakhand, Goa, runjab Himachai Pradesh, and Gujarat," the AAP national convenor added.

He urged AAP members to strengthen the party at grassroots level. "I urge the party members to strengthen the grassroots-level hold of the party across the country. The organisation has to be strengthened on a very large scale. The country is important for us and AAP is the vehicle and we need to work towards the development of the party," he said.

'Access, inclusion, empowerment'

■ Continued from Page 1 Unique Health ID to its citizens," he added.

The Prime Minister told the global business community that the nation's 'massive consumer base will further grow and help the global economy. India, along with possibilities, is filled with confidence and drive as there was continued emphasis on reforms and incentive-based stim-

In the question-answer session, the PM told Siemens CEO Joe Kaeser that making India a manufacturing and export hub was a big part of the government's vision. In a reply to ABB CEO Bjorn Rosengren, Mr Modi list-

ed the ongoing infrastructure projects in India and that under the national infrastructure pipeline, projects worth \$1.5 trillion will be implemented in the next five

to transform India: PM at Davos

To Mastercard's Ajay S. Banga, Mr Modi Banga, Mr Modi explained the massive financial inclusion that has taken place in India in recent times and the steps taken to strengthen the MSME sector.

Replying to an observa-tion by IBM's Arvind Krishna, the Prime Minister emphasised the depth of digital India. Mr Modi said the country's digital profile has been completely transformed.

country through "access, inclusion and empowerment", while always ensuring the privacy of the user.

To Nobuhiro Endo, NEC Corporation chairman, Mr Modi explained the country's approach towards the opportunities created by urbanisation. 'India is focusing on sustainable urbanisation, with focus on the ease of living, ease of doing business and climate sensitive development. This commitment has led to investment of \$150 billion in urban India during 2014 to Prime Minister Modi said.

Opp. parties to boycott Prez speech

■ Continued from Page 1 insensitivity of the government, we, the following Opposition parties, reaffirming the collective demand for the repeal of the anti-farmer laws and in solidarity with Indian farmers, have decided to

boycott the President's

address to both Houses of Parli-ament on Friday, January 29.' The signatories include

Ghulam Nabi Azad (Congress), Sharad Pawar (NCP), Derek O'Brien Congress), (Trinamul Sanjay Raut (Shiv Sena), Abdullah

(National T.R. Baalu (DMK), Ram Gopal Yadav (Samajwadi Party), Manoj Jha (RJD), Binoy Viswam (CPI), E. Kareem (CPI-M), N.K. Premachandran (RSP), Nazir Ahmed Laway (PDP) and Badruddin Ajmal (AIUDF), among others.

Farmers dig in as govt moves forces ■ Continued from Page 1 demned the violence and

the violence. Tension prevailed at Singhu border after some locals from Bakhtawarpur protested Hamidpur against the farmers camping there. Carrying banners and placards, locals and BJP supporters conurged the police to clear the protest site. Earlier in the day, the

administration got a protest site vacated in Bhagpat, but denied using "The elderly people, including a mentally unsound person, were sent

to their homes," Baghpat additional district magistrate Amit Kumar Singh said. The administration said it got the area vacated after receiving a request from the Highways Authority of India (NHAI) over its pending construction work.



HC: Opening pant's zip no sexual assault

SHAHAN ANSARI MUMBAI, JAN. 28

The Nagpur bench of the Bombay high court, whose judgment on "no offence under POCSO is made out if there was no skin-to-skin touch", in an another judgment passed earlier this month acquitted a man from provision of POCSO observing that holding a child's hand and unzipping pants do not fall under the POCSO Act.

The prosecution case is that on February 12, 2018 the mother of five-year-old lodged a complaint at Gadchiroli police station that when she returned from her duty, she noticed the accused was in her house and was holding hands of her daughter. The complainant also noticed that the zip of the pant of the accused was open. She started shouting at the accused and soon her neighbours also gathered, but the accused ran away. Later, the victim told her that the accused had unzipped his pant and asked her to come to the bed to sleep.

The trial court convicted the accused under two different counts and sentenced him to suffer rigorous imprisonment for one year and five years, concurrently.

The accused challenged this judgment before the high court Pushpa Justice Ganediwala decided the appeal on January 15, in which she held that, "The acts of 'holding the hands of the prosecutrix', or 'opened zip of the pant' as has been allegedly witnessed by PW-1 (the girl's mother), in the opinion of this court, does not fit in the definition of 'sexual assault'

In a detailed judgment the judge said that the accused is prosecuted for the charge of 'aggravated sexual assault'. As per the definition of 'sexual assault', a 'physical contact with sexual intent without penetration' is essential ingredient for the offence. The definition starts with the words -

JUSTICE PUSHPA

Ganediwala decided the appeal on January 15 held that, 'The acts of 'holding the hands of the prosecutrix, or 'opened zip of the pant' as has been allegedly witnessed by PW-1 (girl's mother), in the opinion of this court, does not fit in the definition of 'sexual assault'.' In a detailed judgment, she said that the accused is prosecuted for the charge of 'aggravated sexual assault'.

"Whoever with sexual intent touches the vagina, penis, anus or breast of the child or makes the child touch the vagina, penis, anus or breast of such person or any other person or does any other act with sexual

According to the judgment 'the words 'any other act' encompasses within itself, the nature of the acts which are similar to the acts which have been specifically mentioned in the definition on the premise of the principle of 'ejusdem generis (of the same kind).' The act should be of the same nature or closure to that. Hence the judge said, "The acts of 'holding the hands of the prosecutrix', or 'opened zip of the pant' as has been allegedly witnessed by PW-1, in the opinion of this Court, does not fit in the definition of 'sexual

'The minimum sentence for this offence is five years imprisonment. Considering the nature of the offence and the sentence prescribed, the aforesaid acts are not sufficient for fixing the criminal liability on the appellant/accused for the

alleged offence of 'aggravated sexual assault'. At the most the minor offence punishable under Section 354-A(1)(i) of the IPC r/w Section 12 of the POCSO Act is proved against the appellant," the court held. With the above observations the court reduced his sentence

Farmers stir on UP NH ends

Protesters allege cops entered their tents, chased them away

Baghpat (UP), Jan. 28: A farmers' protest against three farm laws of the Centre, which was continuing on a national highway in this Uttar Pradesh district since December 19 last year, has come to an end with the protesters alleging use of force by police.
The police, however,

claimed that the matter was resolved through deliberations and the protesting farmers were home Wednesday night.

The protesters have alleged that police personnel entered their tents late on Wednesday night, used force on the sleeping farmers and chased them away. Thamba Chaudhary,

Brijpal Singh, Baljaur Singh Arya, Vikram Singh and other farmers who took part in the protest on Thursday said their agitation against the farm laws was going on on one side of the national highway. Late Wednesday night, a large number of police personnel entered their tents, resorted to lathicharge on the sleeping farmers and chased them away, they told reporters.

Charging the police with adopting repressive measures, they claimed that their tents were uprooted. About 40 farmers were present at the spot at that time.

Refuting the charges, circle officer Alok Singh said the protest ended after deliberations with the farmers and the police did not resort to lathicharge on the pro-

Meanwhile, ADM Amit Kumar Singh said the Project Director of the Highways of India National Authority (NHAI), Sanjay Misra, had written a letter com-plaining that work on the Delhi-Saharanpur highway was being hampered because of some anarchic elements.



A police officer pastes a notice for a farmer leader after an FIR registered against him in connection with Republic Day violence during the protest against the new farm laws at Ghazipur border in New Delhi on Thursday.

Parl likely to pass resolution against violence on R-Day

YOJNA GUSAI NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

Narendra Modi government is likely to bring a motion condemning the Red Fort incident on the Republic Day, during the budget session of Parliament beginning from Friday.

government, sources said, wants Parliament to pass a res-olution condemning the incident after "considering the sense of the House.'

For the government, which was otherwise bracing itself to face the Opposition's onslaught over the farmer unions protests against the three laws, among other issues, tables seem to have turned as the incident caused a national uproar, with even the Opposition porting the farmer rampart of the Red Fort unions protests, con-where tricolour is hoistprotests, condemning the incident.

The motion in all likelihood will be supported by all political parties, including Opposition parties, some of which had blamed the government for its failure to prevent the incident.

The ruling BJP, which had called the incident "an attack on the democracy," had blamed the Congress, in particular its leader Rahul Gandhi and the Communists for instigating farmer unions against the three laws.

An angry mob of protestors who were participating in the "tractor parade' organised by farmer unions on January 26, flouted the routes as agreed between unions and the Delhi Police, and unfurled the Sikh religious flag at the

ed, which attracted widespread condemnation.

Farmer unions have been agitating against the laws for more than a month at Delhi borders and some of the ruling party members had been claiming that Khalistani and anti-social elements had infiltrated the protest sites and provoking the agitating farmers.

Meanwhile, activist Deep Sidhu, who has been accused by farm bodies of trying to defame their agitation and termed a "traitor", has hit out at farm leaders for allegedly spreading false propaganda and hatred against him.

He claimed that youth did not agree to follow the route which was decided by farmer leaders and the Delhi police.

Lens on funds for farmers protest

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

Following FIRs on farmer leaders in connection with the violence on the Republic Day, intelligence agencies have started a massive investigation to trace all hawala channels and operators through whom funds are coming from abroad for the ongoing farmers agitation.

In view of the violence reported from different parts of the Capital by farmers during the tractor rally, the home ministry has been acting extremely tough. As a first step, a number of FIRs have been lodged against union leaders and some other in connection with the violence and events that unfolded at

NEW OKHLA INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida G.B. Nagar,(U.P

E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tender are invited from firms/ contractors registered with UPLC Lucknow for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on NOIDA Authority's official website: www.noidaauthorityonline.com & http://etender.up.nic.in Please ensure to see these websites for any changes: amendments & corrigendum etc.

- 41/CGM/SM(WC-3)/2020-21, Name of Work:- M/o Road (P/L Interlocking tiles on patri of 18mtr wide road near Gate No.-2 of Gardenia Glory Group Housing Society of Sector-46), Noida Cost - Rs. 29.68 Lacs
- 42/CGM/SM(WC-3)/2020-21, Name of Work:- M/o Road (Repair of footpath & drain Sector-34 side of MP-3 Road), Noida Cost - Rs. 24.27 Lacs

Which can be uploaded by date 11.02.2021 upto 5.00PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date 12.02.2021 at 11.00AM. Chief General Manager

CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA

APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION



General public is hereby informed that an unidentified person (depicted in the photo) Namely Unknown S/o Unknown R/o Unknown Age: about 35 years, Height: 5'2", Complexion: Wheatish, Built: Thin, Face: Long, Hair: Black & black beard, Wearing: Blue colour lower, Black colour sweater with Black colour lining inner & bare feet has been found

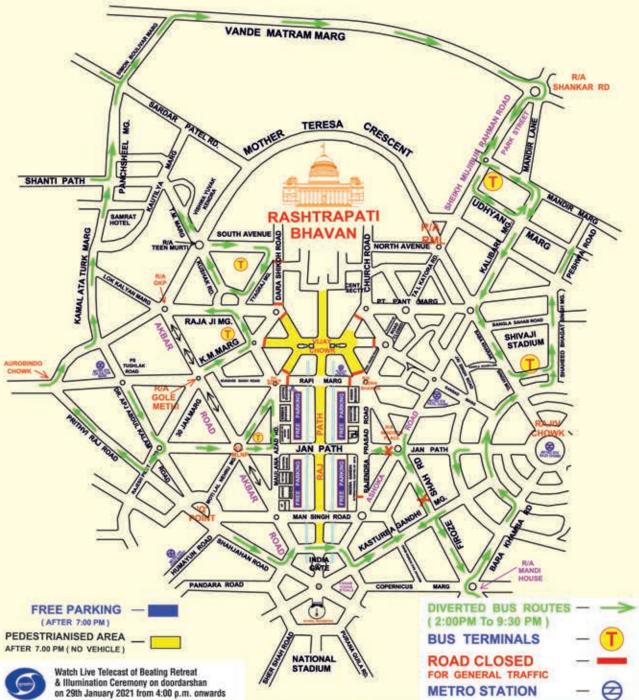
dead in the jurisdiction of P.S. Anand Vihar, Delhi on 23.01.2021. In this regard a case vide DD No. 29A dated 23.01.2021 has been lodged at P.S. Anand Vihar, Delhi.

Any person having any information or clue about this dead found person may kindly inform to the following:-

P.S. Anand Vihar, Delhi Shahdara Distt. Delhi Tel. No. 011-21210294 21210296, 8851417104

DP/344/SHD/2021





Police has made elaborate arrangement for Beating Retreat Ceremony and Illumination of Rashtrapati Bhawan, North Block,

TRAFFIC RESTRICTIONS

The following traffic restrictions will be put in place on 29.01.2021 from 1400 hours to 2130 hours.

- 1. Vijay Chowk will remain closed for general traffic.
- Traffic will not be allowed on the following stretches:-(a) Rafi Marg between R/A Sunehri Masjid and R/a Krishi Bhawan.
 - Raisina Road from R/a Krishi Bhawan towards Vijay Chowk.
 - (c) Beyond R/a Dara Shikoh Road, R/a Krishna Menon Marg and R/A Sunehri Masjid towards Vijay Chowk.

(d) Rajpath between Vijay Chowk and "C" hexagon.

General public/motorist are advised to take alternate routes i.e. Ring Road, Ridge Road, Aurobindo Marg, Madarsa 'T' Point, Safdarjung Road, Kamal Ataturk Marg, Rani Jhansi Road, Minto Road etc.

DIVERSIONS FOR BUSES

D.T.C and other city buses shall be diverted from their normal routes from 1400 hours to 2130 hours on 29.01.2021 to facilitate the vehicles of invitees and spectators and to avoid traffic congestion on roads round the venue of the ceremony and India Gate.

- Buses bound for Central Secretariat and Connaught Place 6. coming from Shanti Path - Vinay Marg - Sardar Patel Marg will take Panchsheel Marg - Simon Boliver Marg - Vande Matram Marg - R/a Shankar Road - Sheikh Mujibur Rahman
- 2. Buses bound for Central Secretariat will terminate at Udyan Marg and return via Kali Bari Marg - Mandir Marg - Shankar
- Connaught Place bound buses will take Mandir Marg Kali Bari Marg - G.P.O.- Baba Khadak Singh Marg and reach Connaught Place & return via Bhagat Singh Marg - Peshwa Road - Mandir Marg - Shankar Road and Vande Matram
- 4. Buses coming from South Delhi on Tughlak Road and bound for Connaught Place/ Central Secretariat will be diverted from Aurobindo Chowk to Safdarjung Road - Kamal Ataturk Marg -Panchsheel Marg - Simon Boliver Marg and follow the route as mentioned at Serial No. 1.
- 5. Buses coming to Mandi House and Feroz Shah Road and proceeding to Connaught Place via Barakhamba Road will terminate at Shivaji Stadium and return via Kasturba Gandhi Marg/Barakhamba Road.

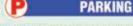
METRO STATION

Entry/ Exit gates at Rail Bhawan & Udyog Bhawan/ Central

Secretariat Metro Station will remain closed from 02:00 PM to

06:30 PM on 29.1.2021.

- Connaught Place bound buses coming on Shahjahan Road will proceed to Shivaji Stadium via Aurobindo Chowk -Safdarjung Road - Kamal Ataturk Marg - Panchsheel Marg and beyond. Buses bound for Old Delhi Railway Station, Red Fort and ISBT
- Kashmiri Gate coming from South side will take Ring Road from AIIMS towards Dhaula Kuan and then Ridge Road, Rani Jhansi Road. Buses bound from Old Delhi Railway Station, Red Fort and
- ISBT Kashmiri Gate coming from Ashram side will take Ashram Chowk - Ring Road towards Sarai Kale Khan and proceed further via Raj Ghat. Buses coming from Old Delhi Railway Station, Red Fort,
- Kashmiri Gate and bound for South and South East will take Delhi Gate - Jawahar Lal Nehru Marg - Rajghat - Ring Road -Sarai Kale Khan - Ashram Chowk.
- Buses coming from Vikas Marg and bound for South will take Ring Road - Sarai Kale Khan - Ashram Chowk.
- Buses coming from Connaught Place via Kasturba Gandhi Marg towards India Gate will take Minto Road - DDU Marg -I.P.Flyover - Ring Road - Sarai Kale Khan.



Parking will be available for those coming to see illumination at Vijay Chowk behind the water channels between Rafi Marg and "C" Hexagon (after 7:00PM).

INSTRUCTIONS TO GENERAL PUBLIC

- In case of any unidentified object or suspicious persons being seen, information must be conveyed to the nearest policeman on duty.
- General public and motorists are advised to keep patience, observe traffic rules & road discipline and follow directions of traffic personnel and remain updated through Traffic Police Facebook page, Twitter handle and Traffic Police Section 1. Helpline. People are requested to plan their journey accordingly to avoid inconvenience.









METRO STATION





FOR IMMEDIATE POLICE HELP CALL 112

SHORT TAKES

TWO YOUTHS SLIT 8-YR-OLD GIRL'S **THROAT IN ODISHA**

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO BHUBANESWAR, JAN. 28

An eight-year-old girl hailing from Sorala village in Odisha's Ganjam district is battling for her life after two miscreants on Thursday slit her throat following an attempt of sexual assault on her.

The girl was rescued in a critical condition from a closed room of a deserted house on the outskirts of the village. It is alleged that two youths lured the girl to the deserted house by offering her chocolates and then tried sexually assault. They later slit her throat fearing that she might disclose the heinous act to her parents.

"We have taken the two accused into custody and interrogation Preliminary investigation suggests that one of the culprits attempted to kill the girl after making sexual assault bid on her," said local superintendent of police Pinak Mishra.

"The girl was playing near the house. We don't know what happened with her. After getting news, we rushed to the spot and rescued her in critical condition," said a relative of the injured girl.

The family members further said that a group of villagers managed to nab one person from the spot while the other one was apprehended a few minutes later from his house.

"I am not aware why the two youths attacked my daughter. 1 had no enmity with anyone, said the victim's father.

MAHARASHTRA HOME MINISTER WARNS BJP

SONU SHRIVASTAVA MUMBAI, JAN, 28

NCP leader and Maharashtra minister on Thursday Deshmukh threatened police action against BJP for calling BJP Raksha 'Homosexual' on the party's official website. Interestingly, soon many netizens pointed that Khadse's constituency is Raver and its Hindi translation as per Google Translate is 'homosexual' and hence it was likely the case of someone using Google to translate

English content in Hindi. State BJP said it will investigate the matter, but also questioned Maharashtra home minister's intention. While Khadse said there was no mistake on her party's official website, but she received screenshots of an online page 'save Maharashtra from BJP' that published the doctored

Khadse said that it is good that the home minister has taken cognizance of it but he should have avoided sharing the post, which is controversial. "The home minister should have not shared a screenshot of the objectionable content. Political leaders should not indulge in politics over a woman's insult,'

ODISHA: BODIES OF **MIGRATORY BIRDS TO BE PRESERVED**

AGE CORRESPONDENT BHUBANESWAR, JAN. 28

The Odisha forest department is mulling to conserve the specimens of the migratory birds at the Regional Museum of Natural History (RMNH) in the capital city here.

The RMNH already houses several varieties of skeletons and remains of animals including elephant, dolphin, rhinoceros, African zebra, cheetah, insects and reptiles. Now, the department is planning to conserve dead bodies of migratory birds which throng Chilika Lake every

A record 1,105,040 migratory birds belonging to 184 species have arrived in Odisha's Chilika Lake this year.

In 2020, 1,047,978 birds belonging to 183 species had arrived at the lake on their

annual sojourn. Chilika Lake is Asia's largest brackish water lagoon. Not only the avian species, the Regional Museum of Natural History is contemplating to preserve carcasses of animals. birds and other species that naturally die in the zoos, parks and sanctuaries across the

Odisha's Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) has also urged the concerned zoos and parks in the state to inform the museum authorities regarding the death of any bird or animal

Cong, Left seal deal for Bengal polls

Allies decide on 193 out of 294 constituencies; to organise joint rally on Feb. 28

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, JAN. 28

The Congress and Left Front, which are fighting the coming West Bengal Assembly election in an alliance, have amicably finalised their seat-sharing formula in 193 out of 294 constituencies with a plan to resolve their partnership equation in the remaining 101 seats soon.

The two allies also decided to organise a joint mega rally on February 28 at the Brigade Parade Ground to put up a united face. They are in the process of inviting their central leaders Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi and Sitaram Yechury as key speakers at the event, according to sources. Out of the 193 Assembly seats, the Congress will contest in 92, the Left will field its candidates from 101, said state Congress president and Berhampore MP Adhir Chowdhury at the state party headquarters after the talks between the two sides there on Thursday.

"Based on each other's co-ordination, we reached this level unanimously. It is a successful and fair step towards a poll-alliance," he added. The list of 193 seats includes 77 seats which were sorted out by the two sides in their last round of meeting on January 25.

Going by the name and number of the seats they had won in the 2016 Assembly election, the Congress and the Left decided to field their candidates in 44 and 33 constituencies respectively this time also.

In Thursday's meeting, the two partners shared 116 seats 68 for the Left and 48 for the Congressamong themselves, said Front chairman n Bose. "To unseat ruling Trinamul Biman Bose. ruling Congress from power and beat the BJP, all are welcome to get accommodated to the alliance of Congress and Left," he added.

A tight bargain is however expected between them in the next round of talks as the Congress, which secured 92 seats altogether in its tally for contest, has already sought to contest in as many as 130 out 294

NAYEAR AZAD

PATNA. JAN. 28

of age.

duties.

The Bihar government

has formulated a policy to

review the performance

of state government employees above 50 years

Reports suggest that

meetings to analyse the

review panel recommen-

dation will be held every year in June and December. If employees are found unfit the com-

mittee may recommend

harsh action which also

includes early retirement.

Sources said that last year the General Administration Department (GAD) had

issued a directive to peri-

odically review the work

efficiency and ethics of personnel above 50 years

of age. To implement this,

the state home depart-

ment has constituted two

A four-member team headed by Additional

Chief Secretary has been constituted to review the

performance of Group

A". On the other hand, a

committee being led by a

secretary-level officer of the Home Department will review the perform-ance of Group "B", "C"

and other state govern-

formed to check the effi-

ciency and conduct of

government servants who

have crossed 50 years of

age. If any deficiency is

such employees

ment employees.

"Committees

separated committees.

Bihar may retire

non-performing

govt employees



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee pays tribute to Lala Lajpat Rai on the occasion of his 156th birth anniversary, in Kolkata on Thursday.

PARLIAMENT BUDGET SESSION STARTS TODAY

New Delhi, Jan. 28: The crucial Budget session of Parliament is set for a stormy start with as many as 18 opposition parties announcing their decision to boycott the President's address to a joint sitting of both houses on Friday, in solidarity with the farmers agitating against the three contentious farm laws.

The session is also likely to witness acrimonious scenes, with the opposition all set to corner the government on issues like recession, job losses, handling of Covid crisis, LAC stand-off with China and the WhatsApp chat leaks of Arnab Goswami.

Alleging that the farm laws have been pushed by the BJP government without a consensus, the Opposition announced their decision to boycott the President's address, a move termed as "most unfortunate" by parliamentary affairs minister

SOURCES SAID two

committees have been

formed to take a decison

on the fate of employees

COMMITTEES ARE

formed to check the efficiency and conduct of

will face retirement", a

circular issued by the

Bihar home department

The move has triggered

strong reactions in Bihar.

A section in Bihar Police

Association has opposed

the state government's

According to the state president of Bihar Police

Association, Mrityunjay

Singh, "Besides fieldwork,

the police department also

requires office job. No one

should forget that they

have shed their sweat and blood for the protection of

law and safety of the pub-

should think of benefit-

ting from their long experience instead of retiring

them. Such kind of move

may create a crisis in the

The development has

also generated political heat in Bihar. The opposi-

tion RJD on Thursday

ment is forcibly showing

the way out to those who

are in jobs to reduce gov-

ernment expenditure. If

the so-called inefficiency

is any measure, then what right does this govern-

ment and chief minister

has to continue'

that "the govern-

police department"

The department

drive

retirement

government servants

More India-made vaccines will be available soon: PM

New Delhi, Jan. 28: India will soon make available many more Covid-19 vaccines to other countries after two Made-In-India jabs have already been introduced to the world, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday while emphasising the country's global responsibility in fighting the pan-

demic. In a special address at the World Economic Forum's Davos Agenda Summit, Modi also said he wants to assure the global business community that situation will now change rapidly on the economic front also and invited businesses from all over to participate in the country's

growth journey.
Mr Modi said that some had said in February-March 2020 that India would be the worst affected country by Covid-19 and would face a "tsunami of corona infections". "Some had talked about

Sleeping Buddha

70-80 crore people expected to get infected in India, while some talked about over 20 lakh possible deaths but India did not

let the disappointment get

better of it," he said.
"When Covid arrived, India had its share of problems. At the beginning of last year, several experts and organisations had made several predictions that India would be most affected by the pandemic. Looking at the condition of countries with better health infrastructure, the world was right in worrying about us," he said.

The Prime Minister, however, said in the midst of numerous doubts, he was here with "a message of belief, positivity and hope from over 1.3 billion Indians'

Mr Modi said, "We transformed the fight against coronavirus into a peo-ple's movement and today India is among the most successful countries in

saving lives." Mr Modi said India has started the world's largest coronavirus vaccination programme and its speed can be imagined from the fact that over 23 lakh health workers have been vaccinated in just 12 days.

In the next few months, we would complete our target of vaccinating 30 crore old people and people with co-morbidities, he said. He said India has ensured that it follows its global responsibility by sending essential medicines to over 150 countries while Covid-19 vaccines are also being sent to other countries.

"While two India-made vaccines have already been introduced to the world, many more vaccines will be made available from India," he said. "India's upcoming vaccines will help other countries at a swifter pace to

fight the pandemic," he

ASSAM: BJP TO CONTEST POLLS WITH ITS NEW **ALLY UPPL**

MANOJ ANAND

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party has made it clear that it would contest the upcoming Assembly polls in alliance with its new ally, the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), instead of its existing ally Bodoland People's Front (BPF). The BJP fought against the BPF in the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) polls in December despite ruling Assam together since 2016 along with the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP). The BPF still has three ministers in the Sarbananda

Sonowal government.

The senior BJP leader and finance minister Himanta Biswa Sarma made this announcement while addressing a public meeting at Udalguri. He said, "The BJP has decided to contest forthcoming Assembly polls in coali-

"We would announce seat sharing with UPPL in February," said Sarma at the public meeting, organised to celebrate the first anniversary of the signing of the Bodo peace accord with the Central government on January 27, 2020 in New Delhi in the presence of Union home minister Amit Shah.

"It is final that the BJP and UPPL would contest the Assembly polls togeth-er. In BTC areas, BJP contest Assembly election under the leadership of UPPL, said Sarma, who is also the convener of the BJPled North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) alliance of regional parties.

The BJP on Wednesday also flagged off mobile vans to seek public views on the party manifesto. Assam Chief Minister Sarbanada flagged off the mobile vans in presence of state party president Ranjeet Kumar Dass, Sarma and Guwahati MP Queen Oja.

BOEING GETS NOD TO OFFER ITS FIGHTER JET TO IAF

PAWAN BALI NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

Boeing said Thursday that it has received a licence from the US government to offer its F-15EX fighter jet to the Indian Air Force (IAF).

Boeing also said that it will manufacture six Apache attack helicopters for the Indian Army in India itself at Tata Aerospace Boeing Limited facility in Hyderabad. The production will start this year. The company expects more orders for Apache attack helicopters from the Indian Army given neighbourhood deterrent values provided by these helicopter. Boeing completed the deliveries of all 22 AH-64E Apache helicopters to the Indian Air Force in 2020. IAF has them deployed Ladakh and can be seen

hovering in the sector. Ankur Kanaglekar, director, India Fighters Lead, Boeing Defense, Space & Security said that earlier discussions on the F-15EX had taken place earlier between the two governments, including US Air Force and Indian Air Force.

"Now that we have the marketing licence it allows us to talk to the Indian Air Force directly about the capability of the fighter. We have started doing that in a small way," he said.

TRAVESTY OF JUSTICE: INDIA ON DANIEL PEARL **KILLER'S RELEASE**

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

India on Thursday termed the freeing of dreaded terrorist Omar Saeed Sheikh by the Pakistani Court as a "travesty of justice", adding that "this case truly demonstrates Pakistan's intent on taking action on the terror front". Sheikh was earlier convicted in Pakistan for the beheading of Wall Street Journal correspondent Daniel Pearl in 2002.

spokesperson

MEAAnurag Srivastava said, "I had mentioned earlier about the very low conviction rate in Pakistan when it comes to sentencing of terror accused. This case truly demonstrates Pakistan's intent on taking action on terror front. It is a travesty of justice not to find Omar Saeed guilty of any charges in this heinous act of terror. Our position on Pakistan taking sus-tained, verifiable, credible and irreversible action against terrorism and terrorist funding emanating from all territory under its control remain unchanged.'

Sheikh was among the terrorists freed by India in December, 1999, to secure the release of passengers on board the aircraft of erstwhile Indian Airlines that was hijacked by Pakistanbacked terrorists from Kathmandu and finally taken to Kandahar in Afghanistan that was then ruled by the Pakistan-supported

Sources said two comwho have crossed 50 mittees have been formed years of age to ascertain whether such employees should be ▶ RJD SAID that 'the retained in service or face government is forcibly retirement due to bad showing the way out to conduct and lack of effiemployees to reduce ciency to perform their government expenditure'

Workers make a large Buddha statue in Kolkata on Thursday. Clay modeller Mintu Pal is making the 100-foot-tall statue, which he claims is the largest in the country, for installation at a temple in Bodh Gaya. The statue in a reclining posture is being made in parts at a ground at Ghoshpara area of Baranagar. - PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

COMMUNAL I HARMONY HC says there is prima facie evidence against accused

MP HC rejects Faruqui's bail petition

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, JAN. 28

Madhya Pradesh high court on Thursday rejected bail plea of standup Munawar comedian Faruqui and organiser of his show Nalin Yadav, saying that "No case is made out for grant of bail".

Justice Rohit Arya of Indore bench of Madhya Pradesh high court said there was prima facie evidence to suggest that the two bail applicants had intended to outrage religious feelings "under the garb of standup comedy".

collected so far suggest that in an organised public show under the garb of standup comedy at a public place, on communal lines, prima facie; scurrilous, disparaging utterances, outraging religious feelings of a class of citizens of India with deliberate intendment; were made by the applicant," the court said. 'It is not a case of no evi-

dence", the order said. The court added that the investigation was still in progress and the possibility that more incriminating material may be collected regarding involvement of



statement alleged in the criminal complaint, saying that the witnesses in the case coupled with the video footage of the show were in contravention of his submission.

tention that he had not made any

THE COURT rejected Faruqui's con-

others cannot be ruled out. 'Further, it has come on record that similar nature of offence has been registered against the applicant at police station George Town, Prayagraj, state of Uttar Pradesh," the court said referring to UP police's recent move to his submission. seek custody of Faruqui for his statement made in

May 2020. The court rejected Faruqui's contention that he had not made any statement alleged in the criminal complaint, saying that the witnesses in the case coupled with the video footage of the show were in contravention of

The court observed that there was a constitutional

state to promote harmony and the spirit of brotherhood irrespective of religious, linguistic, sectional and regional diversities. The state must endeavour to ensure that "this

ecosystem and sustenance of coexistence in our welfare society is not polluted by negative forces" Faruqui was arrested on

January 1 following the complaint by Eklavya Singh Gaur, chief of Hindu Rakshak Sanghathan, that the former had made derogatory remarks against Hindu deities in a recent standup show.



THE ASIAN AGE

29 JANUARY 2021

Budget: A challenge

and an opportunity

inance minister Nirmala Sitharaman would present her third
Union Budget on Monday. In normal circumstances, it would have
been an annual, monotonous and predictable affair that would have
consisted mailly of a statement of the government's intent and allocation of money for different purposes. With consumption tax going out of the Central government's jurisdiction after the rollout of the Good and Services Tax, the Budget speech had lost even the power to influence prices

– a fear factor that had made the Union Budget so special and frightening. This year's Budget, however, could be special, especially in the wake of Covid-induced economic catastrophe in the country. There is a hope among people and businesspersons that the government — the country's biggest consumer — would come out in support of the economy. The country needs a path-breaking Budget to bring back the tottering economy on the growth track and revive investor confidence in the country.

While the Covid pandemic offers a great opportunity for the finance min-

The government could consider exiting all public sector banks, which will unburden taxpayers and bring in new capital and employment. The SBI and Postal Bank could be used for government schemes and welfare purposes

ister to reset the economy and administer bitter medicine for its health, it also increases expectations that could be difficult to fulfil. For example, people belonging to the middle class want lower income-tax outgo, companies want tax concessions, and farmers want freebies. In a nutshell, everybody wants to pay less or nothing. Therefore, instead of opting for a welfare budget, the finance minister should support sectors such as infrastructure and construction that could have a greater and faster positive effect on reviving the economy. She could also try to put more money in the hands of the people who could use it for consumption. A few thousands of rupees more in the pockets of a middle-class family would invariably boost retail sales.

The next issue is how does the minister raise money for boosting the economy. As tax collection could be a tad lower than normal, the government appears to be ready to go easy on borrowing more money. The minister, however, should exhaust all options before going on a borrowing spree. The Central government owns hundreds of companies, which have been undervalued because of their poor performance and bureaucratic interference. Navratna companies like Coal India, NMDC, Sail and Bhel among others could see a great appreciation in value if the government followed the model of the joint venture between Maruti Udyog Limited and Suzuki Motors by letting private partners run the company. The government could also consider exiting all public sector banks, which will unburden taxpayers and bring in new capital and employment. The State Bank of India and Postal Bank with a vast pan-India network could be used for government schemes and welfare purposes.

In history, very few people get an opportunity to prove their mettle. This Budget could become a Manmohan Singh moment for Ms Sitharaman to script the second turnaround story for India. If the opportunity is lost, it would be a tragedy for her as well as the country.

Inconsequential homecoming?

There will be hype and hoopla, possibly a grand reception evoking a wide range of sentiments like excitement, anticipation and fear. Yes, it is V.K. Sasikala, who has been released from the Parappana Agrahara prison on completion of her four year prison term, who will be evoking all these and even more when she comes home to Chennai on her discharge from hospital. However, the common man wants to know if she can turn the politics of Tamil Nadu upside down. Indeed many find it intriguing as to how someone who has never ever run for any office, not even a panchayat ward councillor post, could invoke such extraordinary fear in the minds of the top honchos of the ruling AIADMK. Even in the party she had held the post of general secretary for a very brief insignificant period before being unceremoniously thrown out.

But when the party leaders crack down on an ordinary cadre in a district for putting out a wall poster welcoming Ms Sasikala, it only points to the fear that has gripped them. The inauguration of the mausoleum and the memorial for former chief minister J. Jayalalithaa in a jiffy is another pointer to the pervading fear. Even when Edappadi K. Palaniswami avers that he was made chief minister not by Sasikala, the fear is palpable.

It's an open secret that as the reigning confidant of the former party head and chief minister. Ms Sasikala was calling the shots in the party and the government and obviously there had been too many beneficiaries of her largesse and kind heartedness, who would have enjoyed power or made pelf. And not all of them would be as amnesiac as Mr Palaniswami. But even if hordes of avid loyalists and grateful souls rush in to welcome her, Ms Sasikala's say and stay in politics would depend solely on the will of the people, who would decide with their valuable votes.

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Subhani



Vaccine diplomacy is India's finest hour



Sreeram Chaulia

Foreign Pulse

peration "Vac-cine Maitri", launched earlier this month, is a milestone in the history of India's assistance to fellow developing countries. As millions of India-made Covid-19 vaccines, packed in boxes labelled with the uplifting Sanskrit verse Sarve Santu Niramaya (may all be free from disease), reach countries across South and Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America, India's stature as a Good Samaritan and a responsible power in the world is rising.

The most remarkable feature of India's mission to supply the much-sought-after doses to a pandemicplagued world is its timing. Within days of approval from India's regulatory authorities and their foreign counterparts, the export of vaccines began in earnest. India's domestic vaccine rollout, which is a humungous task in itself due to the vast size of its and population did not in any way delay its health rescue diplomacy towards countries near and far such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, the Maldives, Seychelles, Mauritius, South Africa, itius, South Bahrain, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Brazil.

A friend acting speedily in a time of need is the best Bhutan's Prime Minister Lotay Tshering articulated how important India's support at the present critical juncture was by saying: "It is of unimaginable value when precious commodities are shared even before meeting your own needs. Unlike some countries that imposed export bans on essential medicines, pro-tective equipment and vaccines in order to attend solely to their own citizens' pressing needs, India has threaded the needle right since the coronavirus pandemic broke out to share whatever it could with less endowed nations.

The ethos driving "Vaccine Maitri" and the earlier export of Covid-19 treatment drugs and medical gear is summed up by external affairs minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar's formulation that "we are more nationalistic, but at the same time we don't see a tension between being nationalistic and being international".

Guided by the holistic philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family), India is extending a helping hand to other with the convince. to others with the conviction that if sickness pre-vails in any corner of the world, then Indians themselves remain vulnerable. In today's interconnected world, the well-being of 1.3 billion Indians cannot be isolated from that of the remaining 6.3 billion inhabitants of the planet.

With many recipient countries getting Indian vaccines either free of cost or minimally actual production cost, and India also training medical personnel in some nations to administer the vaccines, the global public goods India is supplying are truly invaluable. "Vaccine Maitri" is India's reputationenhancing initiative, not a money-making enterprise or a bargaining chip to extract concessions and impose conditions. Unlike China, which has explicitly demanded diplomatic, geopolitical and economic quid pro quos for its masks gowns and vaccines, India is not expecting anything

material in return. That is why the gushing gratitude from the recipients towards India is so genuine and quoteworthy Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro tweeted an image captioned "Dhanyawaad Bharat" and "Obrigado *India*", depicting the epic hero Hanuman carrying

from India. The analogy was to Hanuman bringing the lifesaving Sanjeevani medicinal herb by lifting an entire mountain with his superhuman power and flying from the Himalayas to the battlefield in what is considered to be present-day Sri Lanka. For Brazil, one of the

worst sufferers from Covid-19, the Indian vaccines mean a lot because of its tortuous experience with Chinese vaccines. Mr Bolsonaro's political rival, João Doria, governor of São Paulo state, had bypassed the federal government and banked heavily on Chinese vaccines. In the end, for all the propaganda and hype whipped up by China about its Covid-19 vaccines, clinical trials in Brazil found their efficacy to be barely 50 per cent. India-made vaccines, both indigenously researched ones as well as foreign-contracted ones, are more reliable.

India has a huge comparative advantage in terms of credibility and capability of development and manufacturing of vaccines. Like space exploration, commercial satellite launches and information technology-enabled services, this is a niche scientific area where India is way ahead of many countries, even richer ones. Extensive cturing and partnerships with Western pharmaceutical companies, such Britain's AstraZeneca, give Indian firms a distinct edge over their Chinese and Russian competitors.

India's vaccine diplomacy rests on this qualitative and quantitative leverage. It does not take a lot of persuasion or salesmanship by New Delhi for countries to ask for Indian vaccines because their track record is proven, given the multi-

To argue that India rose to the occasion and is winning the hearts and minds of the world is not a public relations claim but an internationally recognised reality

ple dozens of Indian vaccines which have previously been pre-approved by the WHO. While China beats India overall in manufacturing, in this particular sector, one must place on record that China's top vaccine maker Shenzhen Kangtai can't hold a candle to India's Serum Institute

in Pune in churning out billions of doses per

With China ending 2020 as the only major economy eking out a positive economic growth rate, some have adjudged it as the big winner riding out the storm of a global pandemic that China itself had spawned. But given its plummeting soft power resulting from hegemonic overreach, as evident from public opinion surveys, and the cloud hanging over Chinese vaccines owing to their safety and debt trap risks, it is obvious that oth ers have to step up and show leadership in a world

reeling from the pandemic. To argue that India rose to the occasion and is winning the hearts and minds of the world is not a public relations claim but an internationally recognised reality. It bears reiteration here that India's altruism does have concrete goals and objectives. The goodwill being accumulated from India's vaccine diplolonger-term benefits of increased bilateral and regional trust and faith, which is why New Delhi prioritised neighbouring nations to be the initial beneficiaries.

Vaccine Maitri's scale, speed and positive reception in country after country mark India's finest hour as a net provider of international security. Playing to one's strengths and maximising potential gains from them in the global arena have been cardinal principles of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's foreign policy. Critics who instinctively pounce on him for all acts of omission and commission should tip their hats for a job well done and well planned.

The writer is a professor and dean at the Jindal School of International

LETTERS

GOVT SCORES A WIN

Two farm unions, Rashtriya Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan and the Bharatiya Kisan Union, calling off the protests against the three farm reform laws must come as a minor victory for the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre. The unions have also cancelled their plans to march to Parliament on February 1, when the Union Budget will be presented, but have vowed to continue their agitation peacefully. The farmers' unions have been pushed onto the back-foot because of the Republic Day violence and hoisting a religious flag at Red Fort.

N.J. Ravi Chander Bengaluru

DON'T SHAME FARMERS

IT WAS AN invasion, not a desecration of the Red Fort precincts by a hardline faction of farmer agitators on Republic Day. But they left when told. Why then the pious nonsense peddled by the media and the Opposition? Where was the same outrage when police ambushed and thrashed a different group of farmer agitators at Ghazipur border under cover of darkness? Deep Sidhu may be a government agent or an indeonerator wh ships are being blown out of proportion by a partisan-puritan political culture but is the din relevant? Stop shaming

Priyanka Mathur

THE IRAN CONUNDRUM

WITH THE JOE Biden-Kamala Harris team now taking the office in the White House, there are plenty of issues to resolve. The most pressing one is America's relations with Iran given the concern that the present scenario may upend Washington's non-proliferation strategy and increase tensions in the energy-rich Gulf region. Donald Trump's policy of exerting maximum pressure has brought Iran much more closer to weaponisation which is alarming for all nations. Once bitten, twice shy, Iran now seems to be more vigilant. It remains to be seen what step the Biden administration will take in such a situation.

Tushar Anand

Anand K. Sahay **Far & Near**



Can Rahul or anyone salvage Congress, or will it break?

onia Gandhi is in frail health. She had to leave New Delhi for a while on medical advice in order to escape the winter pollution. Is there a vacancy at the top that can be filled in orderly fashion and even routine party functioning restored, or will the old firm break? India's founding party may just be at that sort of moment.

Should the Congress break, it is unlikely to become two as in 1969, and then again become one under a decisive leader. There is no such leader on the horizon. It will therefore likely become several regional entities, and then probably scatter like the Janata Party, which had some big names in it but no stalwart with mass, nationwide, appeal. Mrs Gandhi had pulled a rabbit out

of the hat when she produced two UPA governments at the Centre on the trot through sheer political sagacity, coalition-building prowess, and light-touch political management. This reprieve for the Congress was gained in 2004 in the face of sheer adversity and was the more remarkable for that.

The circumstances then were not propitious. The BJP had come into its own and formed governments at

the Centre under a well-liked figure. In contrast, the Congress had haemorrhaged. Key party leaders -Pawar and Mamata Banerjee — had split away in the late 1990s, with Ms Banerjee even joining the BJP-led NDA alliance for a while and Mr Pawar doing tactical manoeuvres with the BJP as per his convenience, although he would later join the UPA government.

While Mrs Gandhi's shepherding of her party in such circumstances is the stuff of folklore, it is now equally plain that in those years of wielding power (2004-14) the Congress leadership did little to ground the party organisation and nurture it, although it was clear that a cadre and ideology-based national party — so far on the fringes — had already emerged as an alternative.

The Congress had little to offer to counter the ideological propaganda of the RSS-BJP. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's government had delivered a sustained average rate of economic growth of nearly eight per cent per annum over a 10-year period. The Congress gullibly thought this would be enough to see it through in the elections.

This was a gross underestimation

of the power of industrial-scale communal propaganda, aided by a hostile media which, effectively, acted as a force-multiplier. The media's stance was an indication that India's big business was far from pleased with the Manmohan-Sonia govern-ment. The reason was that the government had gone well outside the prism of a hundred-per-cent-market focus to extend benefits to poorer communities. This was too much for the corrupt, self-serving, elite.

At the same time, the small and medium companies and the urban middle classes and the rural communities — the very sections for whom Congress rule had been benign — became hostage to the continuous stream of a vicious, communal, mind-bending, propaganda onslaught. These in fact participated, happily, in preparing the ground for the mythical hero to arrive one who will slay every demon.

The Congress comprehensively failed to meet the challenge of majoritarian right-wing elements because it had frittered away the thought-and-action system nurtured by Mahatma Gandhi. Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Subhash Chandra Bose, Maulana Azad and countless fearless men and women who gave their lives for an ideal that would necessarily unify India, rather than divide it, or cater only to particular sections of it.

Rajiv Gandhi downwards, the Congress projected itself merely as a party of governance — and not one that united the people on the basis of effective policies, effectively

communicated. This is fundamentally why it permitted itself, in slow stages, to overlook the importance of having a worthwhile party organisation. Even when a party has an active ideological ingredient, it is of no use when there is no organisation to back it, and to disseminate it. And the Congress, for long, has become a party which, in the main, has left its ideology on a museum shelf. It also

lacks an organisation. Ideology and organisation are indeed inextricably bound. There is some irony in the fact that prominent Congress dissidents — who go under the rubric of G-23 — rightly underline a democratically elected organisation but do not even men-

tion ideology. That is a fool's errand. Once the Congress' demise is guaranteed, how long many of the socalled secular regional parties, or those on the Left, survive is also a matter of conjecture. Historically, these are — in the main — a derivative of the wider "Congress system" that Rajni Kothari spoke of, although each emphasised specific concerns (some caste, some class) and arose in opposition to the

This question needs be considered in the face of entrenchment in power of a far-right, chauvinist, cadrebased, party whose priority is to mobilise the resources, agencies, departments and all institutions of the State — including the uniformed forces and the judiciary — to obliterate other political parties, big or small. The Constitution of India can then simply be dispatched to a dusty corner of the archives.

Rahul Gandhi, an honourable and intelligent man, had resigned as party president on a point of principle. He supports democratic elections from top to bottom. He must be permitted to have his way. Among the contemporary generation, he alone displays an ideological will. Let him provide that ballast to his party and not be distracted by the













SHORT TAKES

CANNES FEST POSTPONED TO JULY 2021

Cannes, Jan. 28: The 2021 edition of the Cannes Film Festival has been postponed and will now take place in July.

In a brief statement, the festival's organisers said that the festival has been pushed by two months due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. "As announced last autumn, the Festival de Cannes reserved the right to change its dates depending on how the global health situation developed,"

Cannes said in the statement. "Initially scheduled from May 11 to 22, 2021, the festival will therefore now take place from July 6 to 17, 2021," it added. The announcement comes after days of specula-tion that the festival might be postponed as cases continue to surge across Europe.

Last year's edition was cancelled due to the pandemic and replaced by a low-key event in October.

2 INDONESIANS CANED 77 TIMES FOR GAY SEX

Banda Aceh (Indonesia), Jan. 28: Two men in Indonesia's conservative Aceh province were publicly caned each 77 times Thursday after neighbours reported them to Islamic religious police for having sex.

Dozens of people witnessed the caning at Banda Aceh's Tamansari city park. It's the third time that Aceh, the only province in Indonesia to practice Shariah law, has caned people for homosexuality since the Islamic law was implemented in 2015 as a concession made by the government to end a long-running separatist rebellion. The men, aged 27 and 29, were whipped across the back and winced with pain as a team of five enforcers wearing robes and hoods took turns, relieving one another after every 40 strokes. The men were arrested in November after residents became suspicious and broke into their rented room where they

CONTINUE WITH AFGHAN TALKS, **KHALILZAD TOLD**

Washington, Jan. 28: The Biden Administration has asked Zalmay Khalilzad, who served as a Special US Representative for Afghan reconciliation under the previous Trump Administration, to continue with his peace talks, a top merican diplomat said on Wednesday. At the same time, the Biden Administration has started the process of reviewing the peace deal with the Taliban, Secretary of State Tony Blinken told reporters at his maiden news conference here. "With regard to Afghanistan, one of the things that we need to understand is exactly what is in the agreements that were reached between the United States and the Taliban to make sure that we fully understand the commitments that the Taliban has made as well as any commitments that we've made," Blinken said in response to a question.

"And, with regard to Ambassador Khalilzad, we've asked them to continue the vital work that he's performing," Blinken said in response to a question.

SCHOOL NAMES: WASHINGTON, **LINCOLN TO GO**

San Francisco, Jan 28: The San Francisco school board has voted to remove the names of Washington and Abraham Lincoln from public schools after officials deemed them and other prominent figures, including Sen. Dianne Feinstein, unworthy of the honour. After months of controversy, the board voted 6-1 in favour of renaming 44 San Francisco school sites with new names with no connection to slavery, oppression, racism or similar criteria, the San

Francisco Chronicle reported. Feinstein's name was added to the list because as mayor she replaced a vandalised Confederate flag that was part of a long-standing flag display in front of City Hall. Critics called the process slapdash, with little to no input from historians and a lack of information on the basis for each recommendation. In one instance, the committee didn't know whether Roosevelt Middle School was named after Theodore or Franklin Delano. "I must admit there are reasons to support this resolution, but I can't," said community member Jean Barish.

Russia detains allies of jailed leader Navalny

Moscow, Jan. 28: Several allies and supporters of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny were detained in Moscow early Thursday after mass protests last Saturday demanding his release from pri ding his release from prison drew tens of thousands to the streets in over

100 Russian cities.
Navalny's top ally Lyubov Sobol, Dr. Anastasia
Vasilyeva from the Alliance of Doctors union backed by Navalny and Maria Alyokhina from the Pussy Riot punk collective have been detained for 48 hours along with Navalny's brother Oleg.
All four are reported to

be suspects in a criminal probe into alleged violations of Coronavirus regulations during the mass rally in Moscow. The raids came four days before new protests that Navalny's supporters have called for Sunday. The 44year-old Navalny, the most well-known critic of President Vladimir Putin's government, was arrested January 17 upon his return from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin. Russian authorities have rejected the accusations. The overnight detentions of his supporters came after more than a dozen raids on apartments and offices of Navalny's family, associates and supporters in connection to the probe.

Searched locations included Navalny's apartment, where police detained his brother, and a rented apartment where Naval-ny's wife, Yulia, has been living. Also Thursday, Russia's Investigative Co-mmittee said it opened a criminal probe against Navalny's top strategist Leonid Volkov, accusing him of encouraging minors to participate in unauthorised rallies.

In a further challenge to Putin, two days after Navalny's arrest, his organisation released an extensive video report on a palatial seaside compound allegedly built for Putin. It has been viewed

HR SITUATION IN **RUSSIA CONCERNS U.S.: BLINKEN**

Washington, Jan. 28: The United States is con-cerned about the human rights situation in Russia and is worried about the safety and security of the Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, US Secretary of State Tony Blinken told reporters here on Wednesday.

'We've already expressed our deep concern for the treatment of Mr Navalny specifically and more generally with the human rights situation in Russia, and it remains striking to me how concerned and maybe even scared the Russian government seems to be of one man, Mr Navalny," Blinken said at his maiden news conference.

Across the board, he said the US is reviewing all of these actions that are of deep concern to the United States, whether it the treatment of Navalny or the apparent use of a chemical weapon in an attempt to assassinate him.

— PTI

over 98 million times, further stoking discontent. Demonstrations calling for Navalny's release took place in more than 100 cities across the nation last Saturday, a strong show of rising anger toward the Kremlin.

Nearly 4,000 people were reported arrested at those protests. Navalny fell into a coma while aboard a domestic flight from Siberia to Moscow on August 20. He was transferred from a hospital in Siberia to a Berlin hospital two days later. Labs in Germany, France and Sweden, and tests by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, established that he was exposed to the Soviet-era Novichok

Ukrainians' 'taxing' stir



Demonstrators, including small businesses owners, holding flags reading "Save small business" take part in a march to demand the recall of the law cancelling the simplified tax system in Kiev. Ukraine on Thursday

Release Pearl murder prime suspect: Pak SC

Daniel, the WSJ South Asia bureau chief, was killed in '02

Jan. Pakistan's Supreme Court on Thursday dismissed appeals against the acquit-tal of British-born al-Qaeda terrorist Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh in the kidnapping and murder of American journalist Daniel Pearl in 2002 and ordered his release in the sensational case.

Pearl, the 38-year-old South Asia bureau chief for The Wall Street Journal, was abducted and beheaded while he was in Pakistan investigating a story in 2002 on the links between the country's powerful spy agency ISI and al-Qaeda. Sheikh and his three aides were convicted and sentenced in • A THREE-JUDGE bench of the apex court led by Justice Mushir Alam on Thursday dismissed the Sindh government's appeal against the Sindh High Court's decision to overturn the conviction of Sheikh in the Pearl murder case.

case of Pearl in Karachi in 2002. Pearl's murder took place three years after Sheikh, along with Jaishe-Mohammad Masood Azhar and Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar, was released by India in

sage to Afghanistan in exchange for the nearly 150 passengers of hijacked Indian Airlines Flight 814. He was serving a prison term in India for kidnappings of Western tourists

in the country.

A three-judge bench of the apex court led by Justice Mushir Alam on Thursday dismissed the Sindh government's appeal against the Sindh High Court's (SHC) decision to overturn the conviction of Sheikh in the Pearl mur-der case. The beheading of the American journalist in 2002 had grabbed international headlines.

According to the short verdict, the bench also directed to release the susbench opposed the decision. The bench upheld the SHC order by rejecting the appeals and ordered Sheikh should be set free, his lawyer Mahmood Sheikh told the media.

In April 2020, a two-judge

Sindh High Court bench commuted the death sen-tence of 46-year-old Sheikh to seven years imprisonment. The court also acquitted his three aides Fahad Naseem, Sheikh
 Adil and Salman Saqib who were serving life terms in the case, almost two decades after they were found guilty and jailed. The Sindh government and family of Pearl filed petitions in the apex court, challenging the high

Islands. That stance was echoed by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who told Japanese counterpart Nobuo Kishi on Saturday that the contested islands were covered by the US-Japan Security Treaty. Austin affirmed that the United States "remains opposed to any unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the East China Sea," according to a Pentagon statement on the call.

BIDEN WARNS

BEIJING OVER

EXPANSIONISM

Washington, Jan. 28:

One week into the job,

US President Joe Biden

has sent a clear warning to Beijing against any expansionist intentions in East and Southeast

Asia. In multiple calls

and statements, he and

his top security officials

have underscored support for allies Japan, South Korea, Taiwan

and the Philippines, sig-

nalling Washington's rejection of China's dis-puted territorial claims

On Wednesday, Biden told Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga

that his administration

is committed to defending Japan, including the

Senkaku Íslands, which are claimed both by

Japan and China, which

calls them the Diaoyu

in those areas.

Meanwhile, three days into the Biden adminis-tration, State Department spokesman Ned Price menacing Taiwan after it repeatedly sent more than a dozen military fighters and bombers through the island's air defence zone.

US PUTS HOLD

ON FOREIGN

ARMS SALES

MEXICO'S NEW ALMOST 28,000

Mexico City, Jan. 28: Mexico posted its highest one-day total of newly confirmed Coronavirus cases Wednesday, with 27,944 infections, and a near-record 1,623 confirmed deaths.

That brings the country's total so far to just over 1.8 million cases and 153,639 deaths. However, Mexico has an extremely low rate of testing, and estimates of excess deaths suggest the real toll is over 195,000.

A group of over a dozen of the country's top universities and medical institutes also r e c o m m e n d e d Wednesday that the use of face masks be made mandatory in Mexico, a move that President Andrés Manuel López Obrador and his advis-

ers have long opposed. The president himself seldom wears a mask, and over the weekend tested positive Coronavirus.

Pfizer vax effective against mutations Paris, Jan. 28: The vaccine made by Pfizer and BioNTech appears to retain its effectiveness

against Coronavirus mutations in worrying new variants that have emerged recently in Britain and South Africa, the firms said Thursday.

Several new variants each with a cluster of genetic mutations — have sparked fears over an increase in infectiousness as well as suggestions that the virus could begin to elude immune response, whether from prior infection or a vaccine

Pfizer/BioNTech, which had previously said it was unlikely that the strain originally found in Britain could escape vaccine protection, said Thursday that early tests suggest their immunisation would be similarly protective against the variant in South Africa.

In a statement, the two companies said these pre-liminary findings "do not indicate the need for a new vaccine to address the emerging variants".

They said they are "prepared to respond" if a new

strain is shown to be able to evade the immunity of the vaccine, adding that they can produce updates to their jab if needed.

The statement comes after US biotech firm Moderna this week announced that lab studies suggest its vaccine should protect against the variants first found in the United Ki-

ngdom and South Africa. The latest Pfizer/BioNTech research, which has not yet been peer reviewed, was carried out by researchers from Pfizer and

the University of Texas. The authors compared the antibodies of 20 people who had received two doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine during clinical trials with lab-engineered sets of mutations present in the variants that emerged in Britain and South Africa.

The new variants along with another linked to Brazil — have mutations to the Coronavirus' protein, which enables the virus to latch onto human cells and therefore plays a key role in driving infections.

US DEMANDS 'ROBUST' VIRUS ORIGIN PROBE

Washington, Jan. 28: The United States demanded a 'robust and clear" international probe into the origins of the Coronavirus pandemic, as a team of World Health Organisation experts in China waited Thursday for the green light to begin its long-awaited probe. The call came as Coronavirus infections shot past 100 million and governments scrambled to get their hands on scarce vaccine doses, with a bitter row erupting between the European Union and Britain over the supply of AstraZeneca shots.

Beijing has so far frustrated international efforts to track the origins of the virus, which has killed more than 2.1 million people globally, and only recently allowed the WHO team into China after repeated delays. Colombo, Jan. 28: Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on Thursday thanked India for its generosity after he received 500,000 doses of Covishi-

eld vaccine donated by the country under the 'Neighbourhood First' policy. India last week announced that it will send Covid-19 vaccines under grant assistance to Sri Lanka and seven other countries — Bhutan, the Maldives, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and Seychelles, Afghanistan and Mauritius. Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and the Maldives have already received India's Covid-19 vaccines under grant assistance in sync with its "Neighbourhood First" policy.

President Rajapaksa was at the Colombo international airport to receive the consignment of free Indian Covid-19 vaccines

free Indian vaccines which arrived on a special Air India flight.

Lanka Prez receives

"Received 500,000 #COV-ID?19 vaccines provided by #peopleofindia ...Thank you! PM Shri @narendramodi & #peopleofindia for the generosity shown towards #PeopleofSriLanka at this time in need, Rajapaksa tweeted. The consignment was packed in 42 boxes. Rajapaksa was joined at the airport by the Indian envoy in Colombo Gopal Baglay.

"The arrival of 500,000 doses of Covishield vaccines happens on blessed Poya Day, which marks the 1st visit of The Buddha to Lanka. High Commissioner offered prayers at the sacred Gangaramaya Temple for the health and well being of the people of Lanka on auspicious Duruthu Poya Day," the Indian High Commission here tweeted.

Washington, Jan 28: The Biden administration

has put a temporary hold on several major foreign arms sales initi-ated by former President Donald Trump.

Officials say that among the deals being paused is a massive \$23 bill-ion transfer of stealth F-35 fighters to the United Arab Emirates. That sale and several other massive purchases of US weaponry by Gulf Arab countries had been harshly criticised by Democrats in Congress.

The officials did not identify the other sales that had been temporarilv halted. The new administration is reviewing the sales but has not made any determination about whether they will actually go through, the

State Department said. "The department is temporarily pausing the implementation of some pending US defence transfers and sales under Foreign Military Sales and Direct Commercial Sales to allow incoming leadership an opportunity to review," the department said.

LOCAL I SIGN Result of fighting case in EU against India move to get it registered as its product

Pakistan gets GI tag for its Basmati rice

Jan. Pakistan has received the Geographical Indicator (GI) tag for its Basmati, paving the way for creating a local registry for the particular strain of rice and making a case in the international market, as the country fights a case in the EU against India's move to get Basmati rice

registered as its product. A GI tag is a sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess origin-based qualities and reputation in the region. Pakistan is fighting a case in the 27member European Union against India's move to get Basmati rice registered as its product. Laws require that before

applying for registration of any product in the int-ernational market it has to be protected under the geographical indication (GI) laws of that country. A top Pakistan official said on Tuesday that the country had received the Geographical Indicator (GI) tag for its Basmati. "I am glad to inform you that Pakistan

has registered Basmati

THE ISSUE of protecting Basmati rice as a product of Pakistan came to the forefront after India submitted an application to the European Union claiming sole ownership of the commodity in September last year.

Rice as a Geographical Indication (GI) under the Geographical Indications Act 2020. Under this Act, a GI registry has been formed which will register GIs and maintain the

basic record of proprietors & authorised users of GI," Commerce Advisor Abdul Razak Dawood announced on Twitter. "This will provide pro-

tection of our products against misuse or imitation & hence will guarantee that their share in the international market is protected. I encourage you to send your suggestions of products that can be registered as GIs to the Intellectual Property Organisation of Pakistan," he said. It is believed that a GI tag would strengthen

Pakistan's case in the EU. The issue of protecting Basmati rice as a product of Pakistan came to the forefront after India submitted an application to European Union claiming sole ownership of the commodity in

September last year. In its application, India claimed that "Basmati" is special long grain aromatic rice grown and produced in a particular geographical region of the subcontinent. After highlighting the brief history of Basmati rice, India also

EU was challenged in December and the main argument by Pakistan was that Basmati rice was a joint product of India and Pakistan. Pakistan exported 500,000-700,000 tonnes of Basmati rice annually to different parts of the world out of which 200,000 tonnes to 250,000 tonnes is being shipped to EU coun-

claimed that the region is

a part of northern India,

below the foothills of the

Himalayas forming part of

The Indian claim to the

the Indo-Gangetic plain.

FRIDAY | 29 JANUARY 2021 | NEW DELHI

quick

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46874.36	-1.13
Nifty 50	13817.50	-1.07
S&P 500*	3,817.04	1.77
Dollar (₹)	73.04	-0.16
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.82	0.32
Euro (₹)	88.42	-0.03
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,183▼109	0.22
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	55.70	-0.20
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.933	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.048	0.034
* As of 8:30 PM IST		

US economy shrinks 3.5% in 2020

The US economy grew at a 4 per cent annual rate in the final three months of 2020 and shrank last year by the largest amount in 74 years. For 2020 as a whole, the economy contracted 3.5 per cent and clouded the outlook for the coming year. The Commerce Department estimated that the US GDP slowed sharply in the October-December quarter from a record 33.4 per cent surge in the July-September quarter.

Swaminathan, Tewari take over as SBI MDs



Ashwini Kumar Tewari

State Bank of India said Swaminathan J. and Ashwini Kumar Tewari have taken charge as managing directors. They would be holding this position for up to three years, the lender said in a release. Before this, Swaminathan was the deputy managing director (finance) at the bank. Tewari served SBI Card as MD&CEO before he was appointed as an MD of the bank. SBI chairman Dinesh Khara is assisted by four MDs.

IDBI Bank posts Q3 net of ₹378 cr as NII grows

LIC-owned IDBI Bank reported a standalone net profit of Rs 378 crore for December quarter 2020-21 on the back of healthy growth in interest income. The lender, which is under the RBI's prompt corrective action (PCA) since May 2017, had reported a standalone net loss of Rs 5,763 crore in the year-ago quarter. On a consolidated basis, its PAT stood at Rs 393.15 crore versus a loss of Rs 5,728.70 crore last year.

Laurus Labs Q3 net jumps nearly 4-fold to ₹273 cr

Drug firm Laurus Labs reported a nearly 4-fold jump in its consolidated net profit to Rs 272.85 crore for the December quarter against Rs 73.47 crore in the year-ago quarter. Consolidated revenue from operations stood at Rs 1,288.42 crore against Rs 729.59 crore. "Our consolidated revenue for the quarter increased by 76 per cent driven by growth in all the divisions," founder and CEO Satyanarayana Chava said.

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■Demand contracts 35 per cent in 2020

Gold demand dips to lowest in 25 yrs

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JAN. 28

Despite the recovery made in the December quarter, gold demand contracted 35 per cent in 2020 to the lowest level in 25 years.

The gold demand for the full-year 2020 was 446.4 tonnes compared to 690.4 tonnes in 2019—a decline of 35 per cent, according to data from the World Gold Council. This was the lowest demand since

The year 1995 had seen one of the lowest yearly demand of 462 tonnes since the World Gold Council has been recording annual gold demand.

'India's gold demand dropped by over a third in 2020, settling at 446.4 tonnes, on the back of Covid-induced lockdowns and lifetime high prices. However, the drop was significantly lower when viewed in value terms, 14 per cent lower than 2019 as prices were up 34 per cent, hovering around Rs 50,000 per 10 gm for most part of the year," said Somasundaram P.R., managing director, India, World Gold Council.

Jewellery demand fell 42 per cent to 315.9 tonnes and investment demand fell by 11 per cent to 130.4 tonnes in 2020.

In the first three quarters of 2020, gold demand stood at 252 tonnes, which was 49 per cent down from 496 tonnes in the same period last year. In the fourth quarter of festivals, however, demand



India's gold demand dropped by over a third in 2020, settling at 446.4 tonnes, on the back of Covid-induced lockdowns and lifetime high prices. However, the drop was significantly lower when viewed in value terms, 14 per cent lower than 2019 as prices were up 34 per cent, hovering around Rs 50,000 per 10 gm for most part of the year

—Somasundaram P.R. MD, India, World Gold Council

was just 4 per cent down at 186.2 tonnes compared to 194.3 tonnes in the same quarter of 2019.

While jewellery demand was down by just 8 per cent at 137.3 tonnes, investment demand was up by 8 per cent at 48.9 tonnes against 45.3 tonnes in Q4 of 2019.

"The demand for bars and coins had gone up not just during the auspicious occasions but even otherwise,' said Somasun-

Import of official gold was down 46 per cent in 2020 and the restrictions on international travel due to the pandemic also saw the grey market supply shrinking by one-fourth of last year's 115 tonnes.

Closure of stores and retail establishments also saw the quantum of recycled gold coming down to 95.5 tonnes compared to 119.5 tonnes in 2019. Globally, annual demand

was 14 per cent down to 3,759.6 tonnes and 2020 saw the demand falling below 4000 tonnes for the first time since 2009. The largest gold con-

sumer, China, saw the demand shrinking by 28 cent. However, any's investment Germany's demand grew in 2020, replacing India from the second slot.

Sundaram **AMC** buys **Principal AMC**

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD

Sundaram Management Company, a 100 per cent subsidiary of Sundaram Finance, announced the purchase of the asset management businesses of Principal Asset Management.

Sundaram will acquire the schemes managed by Principal Asset Management, besides buying 100 per cent share capital of Principal Asset Management, Principal Trustee Company, and Principal Retirement Advisors, said a release issued by Sundaram AMC.

The transaction is subject to the receipt of necregulatory approvals and Sebi preapprovals and self pre-scribed processes, and Principal will continue to operate the businesses until the deal is closed," the release added.

Sundaram is a significant player in the fund management space with a 25-year track record.

Principal Asset Management has assets under management of Rs 7,447 crores a on December 31, 2020, with about 90 per cent of this in equity-oriented schemes

Commenting on the Sunil acquisition, Subramaniam, managing director, Sundaram AMC said, "This transac-tion will strengthen our presence in the marketplace with the addition of a range of schemes with a good long-term performance

Maruti Suzuki net rises 24% on higher sales

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JAN, 28

Maruti Suzuki, India's biggest car maker, on Thursday posted a 24.1 per cent year-on-year rise in the December quarter standalone net profit at Rs 1,941.4 crore, thanks to higher festive sales and preference for personal mobility amid the pandemic that raised the demand for its small cars.

In the corresponding quarter of the previous financial year, Maruti Suzuki's net profit stood at Rs 1,564.8 crore.

The maker of popular models like Swift and Vitara Brezza reported a 13.3 per cent YoŸ rise in revenue at Rs 23,457.8 crore against Rs 20,706.8 crore in Q3FY20.

The revenue numbers



were slightly below the market expectations. A CNBC-TV18 poll had estimated the revenue numbers to the tune of Rs 23,655 crore.

The company's earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation, or Ebitda, grew 5.9 per cent YoY to Rs 2,226 crore against Rs 2.102 crore in the correspon

ding quarter last year. The Ebitda margin for the quarter stood at 9.5 per cent against 10.1 per cent a year ago.

Maruti Suzuki said its operating income rose on higher sales volume, cost cuts and lower sales promotion. But the increase was partially offset by an increase in commodity prices and adverse foreign exchange movement.

The company sold a total of 4.95 lakh vehicles during the December quarter, higher by 13.4 per cent compared to the same period in the previous vear.

Sales in the domestic market stood at 4.67 lakh units, growing by 13 per cent. Exports stood at 28,528 units, higher by 20.6 per cent.

Airtel says it has 5G ready network

FC BUREAU HYDERABAD, JAN. 28

Bharti Airtel on Thursday said its telecom network is now 5G ready after it has demonstrated live fifthgeneration (5G) service over an existing commercial network in Hyderabad.

"Today, we have conclusively demonstrated that as far as Airtel is concerned, we are 5G ready,' Bharti Airtel MD and CEO Gopal Vittal said at a virtual conference.

He said the company had seamlessly operated 5G and 4G concurrently with-in 1800 mHz spectrum



using dynamic spectrum sharing in Hyderabad.

"Every single part of our network is now fully 5G ready...and can use any spectrum band to click on 5G experience in a matter of months," Vittal said.

The 5G service offers ultra high-speed internet, which allowed users during a demo run in

The government could

Swanim

Mumbai-based

ing on home loan interest,

Hyderabad to download a movie in a few seconds. The latest demonstration

underscores the company's technology capabilities for the 5G roll-out whenever adequate spectrum is made available.

"Even on existing bands of spectrum, 5G can be turned on but the full power of the experience will be felt only when the adequate spectrum is available from the govern-ment... The moment we receive government approvals and we have the right spectrum bands in adequate quantities, we will be able to roll this out, immediately," he said.

Indias small investors rush to join GameStop frenzy

ABHIRUP ROY

India's small investors are snapping up shares of US retail investor favourite GameStop Corp, making the video game retailer the most traded stock on some Indian brokerages after anonymous social media posts fuelled a frenzied rally.

Shares of GameStop have surged 1,700 per cent since January 12 as amateur US investors, monitoring social media comments, have piled in and forced professional shortsellers to abandon their positions with heavy loss-

es.
This week, GameStop accounted for 19% of the trades on Vested Finance, an Indian investment firm that helps Indians buy or sell U.S. stocks, and 15% of the trades on its rival Stockal, making it the most traded stock on both

"It's quite surprising to see Indian investors jumping on the GameStop bandwagon," Stockal co-Sitashwa

Srivastava told Reuters. This shows a marked shift in investor behaviour from just using U.S.



stocks to diversify their portfolios to rushing after a rally based on social discussions. could be reckless but it works for some.

Despite India's highly restrictive cross-border investment rules, Indians have been placing big bets on U.S. equities this year as American stocks recovered quicker than markets in India from a crash sparked by the coron-

avirus pandemic. Indian investors venturing into U.S. stocks usually prefer top global companies such as Apple, Amazon, Facebook and Tesla as they look to diversify their holdings in India. — Reuters

TIM COOK: INDIA **BIZ DOUBLED, FEEL GOOD ABOUT TRAJECTORY**

YOSHITA SINGH NEW YORK/NEW DELHI,

Apple has doubled its business in India in the December quarter on the back of strong performance of its online store, and the tech giant sees a good growth trajectory going ahead, its CEO Tim Cook said.

The Cupertino-based tech giant posted an alltime record revenue of \$111.4 billion globally for the first quarter ended December 26, 2020, up 21 per cent year-on-year.

International accounted for 64 per cent of the quarter's revenue.

... If you take India as an example, we doubled our business last quarter compared to the year-ago quarter. But our absolute level of business there is still quite low relative to the size of the opportunity," Cook said during an analyst call.

The company, which competes with players like Samsung and OnePlus in the premium smartphone segment, has been aggressively ramping up its presence in the Indian market.

Realtors seek tax sops, industry & infra status

estate developers expect the government to provide industry as well as infrastructure status for the sector, increase the corpus of Rs 25,000-crore stress fund, and more tax sops for both homebuyers and builders in the upcoming Budget to boost property demand.

They also hope for single-window clearance for projects, measures to boost liquidity, reduction in the GST rates and availability of input tax credit on the GST paid in the Budget 2021-22, which will be presented on February 1.

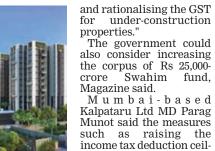
"We sincerely hope that Budget 2021 brings some much-needed relief to homebuyers as well as developers," Tata Realty and Infrastructure MD & CEO Sanjay Dutt said.

As the sector's growth relies heavily on the upcoming financial amendments, he said the government should grant industry status to the real estate sector and a singlewindow clearance mechanism for faster completion of projects.
"One GST, one or no



stamp duty regime and reduction in registration charges across states are some of the other recommendations which will make a significant difference to the cost of a project and will definitely encourage home buyers to invest," Dutt said.

Anshuman Magazine, chairman and CEO (India, South East Asia, Middle East and Africa) of CBRE, said, "Budget 2021 could go a long way towards meeting this goal by way of introducing tax reforms such as enhancing the principal deduction limit on home loans under Section 80C of the IT Act, 1961; lowering the long-term gains tax for sale of house property;



input tax credit on GST, and expanding the ambit of affordable housing to properties up to Rs 1 crore in Super Tier 1 cities such as Mumbai and Delhi, will significantly incentivise buying. "It would give the sector a muchneeded boost and accelerate the mission to provide housing for all by 2022.

Salarpuria Sattva MD Biajay Agarwal demand ed the industry status to the real estate sector and a single-window clearance system.

PropTiger and Housing. com CEO Dhruv Agarwala said the liquidity crunch being faced by the sector needs to resolved and the subvention scheme reintroduced in the Budget.

INDIGO REPORTS **FOURTH STRAIGHT QUARTERLY LOSS, REVENUE HALVES**



Bengaluru, Jan. Interglobe Aviation Ltd, which runs India's biggest airline IndiGo, reported its fourth straight quarterly loss on Thursday, as the Covid-19 pandemic kept air travel well below normal levels.

Its loss in the December quarter was smaller than in the previous two quarters, when the health crisis had brought global air travel to a halt, but the company's revenue halved from a year earlier, signalling that a full recovery was still far away.

The festive season in October and November saw more air travel, and domestic traffic has now recovered to about 80 per cent of pre-pandemic levels, mitigating some of Interglobe's losses during

the quarter.

IndiGo also benefited from lower fuel costs, which plunged nearly 66 per cent year-over-year.

"The low level of international capacity continues to remain a major concern for us and continues to hurt our financials,' CEO Ronojoy Dutta said on a conference call with analysts.

IndiGo expects to reach 50 per cent of its pre-pan-demic international capacity only by mid-2022, and 100 per cent by end-

2022, Dutta said. "We'd like to hit the seasonally strong first quarter next year with all cylinders running, and at full capacity, at least domestically," he added.

IndiGo said it expects current-quarter average seat kilometers—a measure of passenger-carrying capacity—to be 75-80 per cent of the capacity of the same period last year. The New Delhi-based air-

line's daily average cash burn had halved to Rs 15 crore in the quarter from June-quarter levels.

Reuters

NEW | STREAM | Walmart Connect eyes top 10 ranking in 5 years Walmart aims to be advertising titan another instalment in the

THOMAS BUCKLEY

Walmart Inc plans to ramp up growth in its digital media business as the world's largest retailer seeks to become a top-ten advertising platform in the US within five years.

The media group, which will be renamed Walmart Connect, will offer targeted ads on e-commerce platforms such as Walmart.com and the Walmart app to shoppers as they're purchasing in real time, the company said on Thursday in a statement. Walmart will also allow brands to advertise on almost 170,000 digital screens at



self-checkout kiosks and on TV walls in more than 4,500 stores.

With a major brick-andmortar footprint tied to a growing e-commerce business, Walmart is trying to position itself as a premier destination for companies to advertise

wherever-and howev er-a customer chooses to shop. "We've built a substantial business that can serve clients in a way no one else can," chief cusofficer tomer Janev Whiteside said in the statement. Walmart Connect is

company's long-running bid to diversify its income away from its core operations. The move comes as the company seeks to simplify its shopping experience to better compete with Amazon.com Inc enhancing the reach of its advertising clients. Last fiscal year, Walmart's digital advertising operations nearly doubled in revenue and signed up more than twice the number of advertisers from a year earlier, the company said. Walmart shares rose less than 1 per cent in premarket trading in New

- Bloomberg



RENAULT UNVEILS KIGER SUV, LAUNCH IN Q1

MICHAEL GONSALVES

French car giant Renault on Thursday made a global unveil of its much-awaited Renault Kiger, a subcompact SUV, in Índia in the production form, ahead of its launch in the Q1 this year when its price would be revealed.

Auto experts said it could be aggressively priced at Rs 5.5 lakh to Rs 9.5 lakh to take on competition.

The sporty Renault Kiger will be first sold in India followed by other global markets. The car maker, which

sells Duster and Kwid models, revealed its SUVs specifications, the features available in top-spec form, the design, its interiors and the engine and gearbox options on offer.

The Kiger is powered by the 72HP, naturally aspirated petrol and 100HP, 1.0litre turbo-petrol engine.

SHORT TAKES

Ronaldo breaks Covid rules?

Rome: Cristiano Ronaldo broke coronavirus travel restrictions with a trip to a mountain resort, according to media reports Thursday, Juventus striker Ronaldo allegedly travelled to Courmayeur, 150 kilometres north-west of the Serie A club's Turin headquarters, for his girlfriend Georgina Rodriguez' birthday.

Rodriguez, who turned 27 on Wednesday, apparently posted a video of the couple on a snowmobile on Instagram. She later removed it, but it was picked up by several Italian news sites.

The Gazzetta dello Sport newspaper said Ronaldo and Rodriguez spent Tuesday night in a hotel and took a ride in the snow the next morning, before returning to Turin. Under current Italian coronavirus rules, the couple should not have left the town of Turin. They each risk a fine of \$485. — AFP

Virus hits Olympic test competition

Tokyo: The first Tokyo Olympics test event of 2021 has been postponed because of travel restrictions under Japan's coronavirus state of emergency, organisers confirmed on Thursday. The artistic swimming event will double as the sport's final qualifier for the virus-postponed Games. It was due to be held on March 4-7 in Tokyo but

will now take place two months Tokyo 2020 organisers said a decision to delay it had been taken for reasons including "ensuring the fairest possible conditions for athletes to participate" and ongoing entry

restrictions in Japan. The qualifier has now been rescheduled for May 1-4 at the Tokyo Aquatics Centre.

Oly uncertainty hurting athletes

Geneva: IOC president Thomas Bach hit back at the continuing speculation about whether the Tokyo Olympics may be cancelled or postponed again, saying that such talk is damaging for the thousands of athletes preparing to take part this year. The International Olympic Committee and organisers in Japan have repeatedly insisted there is no Plan B for the Tokyo Games, which were already postponed by one year during the coronavirus pandemic. Last week, Japan's government quickly and firmly dismissed a report that it had concluded the games would have be canceled. However, talk about whether the games can go ahead refuses to go away. "All these speculations are hurting the athletes in their preparations," Bach said after a monthly meeting of the IOC

76ers hand Lakers first road defeat

Los Angeles: Tobias Harris drove in the final dagger as the Philadelphia 76ers thwarted a late Los Angeles Lakers rally to hand the reigning NBA champions their first road defeat of the season - 107-106. In a bruising heavyweight clash, the Eastern Conference leading Sixers made a statement against the league-leading Lakers. The Brooklyn Nets escaped with a 132-128 overtime victory over the Hawks in Atlanta. — AFP

Live on

BADMINTON BWF World Tour Finals: Group

matches from 9.30 am on Star

CRICKET Pakistan vs South Africa: First Test,

Day 4 from 10.30 am on Sony Ten 2

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

Syed Mushtag Ali Trophy T20 **Tournament:** Semifinal — Tamil Nadu vs Rajasthan from 11.55 am; Punjab vs Baroda from 6.55 pm on

Star Sports 1, HD **FOOTBALL**

Italian League: Torino vs Fiorentina from 1.15 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

WWE

SmackDown: Bouts from 6.30 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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Burns eyes Rory return

England opener joins team after paternity break

Rory Burns.

Instagram

C. SANTOSH KUMAR

When England's Test cricketers were preparing for their subcontinental tour by training on worn surfaces at ECB's high performance centre in Loughborough, opener Rory Burns had other thoughts. Burns, who had spoken candidly about the effect of the bio-bubble environment in the summer, knew his most important preparation would be for the mental side of the game.

Burns, who has returned to the England Test squad after skipping the Sri Lanka tour for the birth of his first child, admitted that it was tough leaving his newborn daughter and wife back at home. "But, I'm ready to get back to work," said Burns who has scored 1,233 runs in 21 Tests.

The 30-year-old Epsomborn is also taking a short course in Psychology to fill the long hours in the hio-hubble

"It's going to take quite a bit of my off-time. If I maintain a healthy headspace, I can focus well on my cricket. The break (paternity) helped me freshen up.

The time that my child was giving me, I saw more of the India-Australia series than our series against Sri Lanka. Because I was getting up and doing my own training back home," he said.

On his maiden India tour, Burns is hoping to train with his teammates Jofra Archer and Ben Stokes for the first time in Chennai on Sunday. The rest of the squad who arrived on Wednesday from Colombo will commence their training only on Tuesday.

"It is obviously a challenge, we can't do much about the schedule. If you waste time thinking about that, it won't be any good to you. We have three days to put in the

TN HOLD AN EDGE

OVER RAJASTHAN

IN T20 SEMIFINAL

Ahmedabad, Jan. 28: Big

odied Shanrukh Khan's

brute power will be coun-

tered by experience and guile of Chahar brothers

Deepak and Rahul, when

a formidable Tamil Nadu

lock horns with spirited

Rajasthan in the semi-

final of the Syed Mushtaq

With IPL auction set for

February 18, players from

both side wouldn't like to

miss out on an opportuni-

ty to impress the talent

scouts of various IPL teams like Shahrukh did

Pradesh during Tamil

Nadu's quarter-final win.

hand have been a steady

side with a host of young

Mahipal Lomror in bat-

ting and Chahar along

with last IPL's find Ravi

Bishnoi and left-armers

Khaleel Ahmed and

Aniket Chaudhary in

bowling department.

T20 specialists

Rajasthan on the other

against

Himachal

— PTI

Ali Trophy on Friday.

work and try to get used to the conditions here. Then it's a mental switch. I guess that's the challenge and I have been around for a while now so I have some experience to draw from," said Burns.

The Surrey cricketer, however, doesn't expect the wickets in India to turn straight away.

"I think we will get good cricket wickets that will spin as the game goes on. I have drawn on various people's experience who I have worked with, they tend to suggest about India as opposed to Sri

RAJIB CHOWDHURI

BCCI president Sourav

Ganguly, admitted at

another angioplasty, on

Thursday afternoon, in

which two more stents

were implanted for the

removal of blockages in

the two other arteries of

The 48-year-old former

Indian cricket team cap-

tain had received the

first one in one of his

three affected arteries at

Woodlands Hospital after

suffering a 'mild' heart

The second angioplasty.

which was then deferred

by the doctors by two-

weeks,

planned after Sourav was

examined by eminent

cardiac surgeons — Dr Devi Shetty and Dr

attack on January 2.

Gleneagles

underwent

KOLKATA, JAN. 28

Apollo

Hospital,

his heart.

Lanka which is slightly fast forward from the start with regards to spin. We are preparing in that respect," he said.

India's Burns said Jasprit Bumrah is a hard bowler to prepare for.

'He is obviously unique in terms of how he comes and bowls. It would just be about working those angles. I saw the recent series between India and Australia and they are in a pretty handy form, not necessarily their first playing XI at different points, but still, they managed to get over the

Ganguly undergoes a

The 48-year-old

captain and BCCI

received the first

one in one of his

suffering a 'mild'

heart attack early

The private hospital

and the team comprising

Dr Ashwin Mehta, Dr

Devi Shetty, Dr Ajit Desai, Dr Saroj Mondal

and Dr Saptarshi Basu

successfully performed

angioplasty on Mr Sourav Ganguly." It added, "Two stents

were placed. The proce-

dure was uneventful. Mr

Ganguly is stable and

"Dr Aftab Khan

second angioplasty

former Indian

president had

three affected

arteries after

this year.

the day.

cricket team

big challenge in their own conditions, looking forward to it," added Burns. India would be fielding their full-strength side with Virat Kohli back to bolster the batting lineup. Burns knows India are in pretty handy form.

"India could not necessarily play their first eleven, but they still managed to get past Australia, which is testament to the side. They will be a big challenge in their conditions and they are No. 1 in the added the 30-

under close observa-

One of the doctors said

Mamata

Jagdeep

Sourav

President

the angioplasty took an hour. West Bengal chief

Banerjee visited Sourav

"Sourav received two

stent implantation. The

operation was success-

ful. He is stable and

doing well. He also spoke

to me. I wish him all the

best and congratulate the doctors also," she said

Dhankhar tweeted, "Got

an update on health of

Ganguly, President Board of Control for

Cricket in India @BCCI

under treatment in

Kolkata. As per doctors

and family members his

Sourav is likely to be

released from the hospi-

minister

later.

Governor

@SGanguly99

condition is fine.'

in the evening.

TEST SERIES TV RIGHTS STILL UNDECIDED

London, Jan. 28: The television rights in the UK for England's tour of India remain undecided with just a week left for the series-opener in Chennai from February 5.

Telegraph Sport reported that Star India, the host broadcaster of the series, was considering showing the tour via its streaming app Hotstar instead of selling it to a conventional broadcaster like *Sky*.

"But India's win in Australia and good audience figures on Sky for England's recent series in Sri Lanka, has increased the market for the rights with even *Channel 4* showing an interest," claimed the report.

The rights, worth around £20 million, are expected to be awarded soon for the four-Test series, which is part of World

Championship. Sky remains the frontrunner to secure them, having shown most of England's tours over the past three decades, the report stated.

The England squad flew into Chennai on Wednesday from Sri Lanka, where they trounced the hosts 2-0. Both England and India players are in the middle

of a six-day quarantine. The first two Tests will be played in Chennai and the final two, including a day-nighter, in Ahmedabad, followed by five T20s at the same venue and three ODIs in

With most of the people working from home in the Working from nome in the UK due to Covid-19 induced lockdown, the Tests are expected to attract record viewership.

— PTI

YASIR STRIKES LATE TO PUT PAK IN CHARGE

Karachi. Jan. Pakistan's spinners Yasir Shah and Nauman Ali grabbed three wickets in the space of ten runs to halt South Africa's fightback on the third day of the first Test here.

When it looked like South Africa would end the day at parity after wiping out Pakistan's big 158-run first innings lead, Yasir struck twice and Nauman once to leave the tourists on 187-4 at close.

Nightwatchman Keshav Maharai was unbeaten on two and skipper Quinton de Kock was yet to score, as South Africa now lead by 29 runs with six second innings wickets in hand.

Earlier, hosts scored 378 to take a crucial lead over South Africa's first innings total of 220.

Brief scores: South Africa 220 & 187/4 (Markram 74, van der Dussen 64, Yasir 3/53) vs Pakistan 378 (Fawad 109, Rabada 3/70, Maharaj 3/90).

WORLD TOUR | FINALS

Sindhu, Srikanth out of reckoning

Bangkok, Jan. 28: Indian shuttlers P. V. Sindhu and Kidambi Srikanth were virtually out of contention for the knockout stage after losing their respec-tive second round matches in the BWF World Tour

Finals here on Thursday.

A week ago Sindhu had suffered a demoralising defeat to Ratchanok Intanon and there was no shange of fore for the change of fate for the World Champion this time too as she went down 18-21, 13-21 to the third seeded

Thai.
"It wasn't my day Losing the first game made the difference. My timing was a bit off, so a bit disappoint-

ed," Sindhu said. Srikanth enjoyed a 3-0 head-to-head count against Wang Tzu Wei ahead of his match but it mattered little as the Taiwanese world no 12 claimed a come-from-behind 19-21, 21-9, 21-19 win over the Indian. "I have to figure out a

way to pull out these close matches. I was dominating him for most part of third game," Srikanth said after losing yet another threegame contest.

"I think it's about match

practice, playing against top players continuously. We haven't played for a year, and before that I wasn't playing against top eight players continuously. I feel I'm almost there."

With only the top two players from each group making it to the semifinals, the twin defeat almost sealed the fate of the Indian duo in the tourna-

Earlier, Srikanth and Wang fought tooth and nail right from the start, moving together 5-5 to 9-9 before Srikanth managed to grab a slender 11-10 lead with a smash.

Srikanth opened up a significant 15-11 lead with Wang sending the shuttle wide twice.

Srikanth continued to dominate the rallies with his angled returns to reach

Wang, however, narrowed it down to 18-19 with Srikanth committing few errors but the Indian managed to grab two game points with a smash. He lost one before converting the next with Wang making a poor judgement at the



Sheffield United's Oliver Burke (left) is congratulated by teammate Chris Basham after scoring against Manchester United in their English Premier League match at Old Trafford in Manchester on Wednesday.

Man United's title hopes suffer blow

Jan. Zulunited's Premier League title hopes suffered a nuge blow on Wednesday with a 2-1 defeat by bottom side Sheffield United as Chelsea started the Thomas Tuchel era with a goalless draw against Wolves.

The shock result at Old Trafford leaves Pep Guardiola's Manchester City a point clear at the top with a game in hand and looking increasingly hot favourites to win a third title in four years.

Elsewhere on a busy night of midweek action, Leicester drew 1-1 with Everton, Burnley beat Villa 3-2 Aston Brighton drew 0-0 with Fulham.

TUCHEL ERA

Earlier, former Paris Saint-Germain boss Tuchel took charge at Stamford Bridge against misfiring Wolves less than 24 hours after replacing the sacked Frank Lampard.

Chelsea struggled to

28: make an impression ed's against Nuno Espirito opes Santo's men, whose form has nose-dived after forward Raul Jimenez fractured his skull in late November.

The home side dominated territory and possession, but created few clear-cut

MESSI BANG ON TARGET FOR BARCA

Lionel Messi marked his return from suspension with a goal in the Copa del Rey on Wednesday as Barcelona survived a scare against Ravo Vallecano to reach the quarter-finals.

With Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid already out, another upset looked on the cards when Fran Garcia gave Rayo a sur-prise lead at Vallecas early in the second half.

But Messi tapped in Antoine Griezmann's pass to equalise before turning creator, sending Jordi Alba through, with Frenkie de Jong at the back post to seal a 2-1 victory.

Allrounder Kapil now drives on golf courses

MOSES KONDETY HYDERABAD, JAN. 28

India's greatest fast-bowling allrounder Kapil Dev has a word of caution for new speed sensation Mohammed Sirāj: Slow and steady wins the long race.

India's 1983 World Cup winning captain, who has never missed a match because of injury in his 131-Test career spanning 16 years between 1978 and 1994, is impressed by the exploits of the Hyderabad quick in the recent Test series in Australia but says the onus is now on the pacer to keep performing. "Siraj is a good bowler who has done extremely well but he has to go a long way," Kapil told this newspaper during his visit to Hyderabad on

Thursday. "He needs to carry on for at least five seasons. I get scared about the fast bowlers because they get injured very fast,"

So many of them have come

up in the last 10 years but have got injured — Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Ishant Sharma, Ashish Nehra are examples. It's tough yes, but you can overcome the difficulties if you are passionate about playing for the country," he added.

was

The 62-year-old lauded Team India that emerged on top Down Under. "They have done wonderfully well. I never ever expected a performance like that when more than half the side was injured... hats off!"

"Your captain, the most important player, is not there, and there are so many on the injury list and then you come back and play so well... I haven't seen better cricket than that in the 40 years that I have played and watched the game. The series win in Australia was definitely the cherry on the cake, Kapil continued to heap praise. "After such a high in Australia, I hope and pray that they maintain the momentum

in the upcoming home series



against England," Kapil added. Asked if it was time for India to have separate captains for Tests, ODIs and T20s, Kapil was non-committal. "Let's leave that to the selectors and their collective wisdom. If one captain is overburdened, try and lessen his workload so that he is more relaxed. It's nice to see Ajinkya Rahane doing so unbelievably well in the absence of Virat

It's the beautiful, serene surroundings that draw me to golf. Just imagine strolling and playing your strokes in a 150-acre garden. It's green all around. You feel the breeze, smell the grass and simply love nature. I wish my house was in the middle of a golf course. As long as the sun is up I can be out there. KAPIL DEV

India's World Cup winning cricket captain says he can play golf all day

Kohli. Then there were Rohit and Ashwin too as a back-up. So I would say we have enough players and experience to lead the side, thanks to IPL and domestic cricket," he said.

Who are his favourite crick-ters? "They keep changing. eters? When I was playing it was G. R. Vishwanath, then Sunil Gavaskar. Sachin (Tendulkar) was everyone's hero... mine was

Rahul Dravid. When the youngsters play so well, I like to look up to them. I never expected Washington Sundar to do so well in Australia. You feel proud about your next generation and you look for your heroes in them. There is no shortage of talent in the country but the focus on future is the key," Kapil said.

Speaking about the sporting culture in India, Kapil said: "I can say that we are getting better but have still have a very long way to go in order to catch up with other sporting nations. Parents in our country first give their children cricket bats and balls but those are snatched away when the kids are 12 or 13, when the focus shifts to academics. However, I have been a sportsman all through my life...

God has been kind to me.' The sporting icon then switched to golf. After retiring from cricket, his playing field only got bigger. What draws him to the expansive courses,

moreso after suffering a heart attack that required an emergency angioplasty only two months ago? "It's the beautiful, serene surroundings," he says. "Just imagine strolling and playing your strokes in a 150acre garden. It's green all around. You feel the breeze, smell the grass and simply love nature. I wish my house was in the middle of a golf course."

Kapil says he can play golf all

day. "It depends on the sun — as long as it stays up, I can be out there on the course, just wanting to play and enjoy myself."

He's very proud of the progress India has made in golf. The Vooty Golf County near Hyderabad, the Bangalore, Ahmedabad, DLF are the new courses that have come up in our country. About 30 years ago we used to wonder 'can we ever have a course like the ones we see in Europe or America?' Today we have better courses than those," he tees off triumphantly.

