

SHORT TAKES

Delhi records 119 new Covid cases

New Delhi: Delhi recorded 119 new Covid cases on Sunday and a positivity rate of 0.22 per cent while the death toll rose to 10,879 with two more fatalities, authorities said. The national capital had recorded 96 coronavirus cases on January 27, the lowest in over nine months, and it was the first time that the daily count of new incidences had stood below the 100-mark in that month. Also, on Friday, the fatality count was two, same as on February 2, which was the lowest in the last 10 months. These 119 new cases came out of the 54,247 tests conducted the previous day. The positivity rate stood at 0.22 per cent, according to the latest bulletin issued by the Delhi health department. The total number of tests conducted the previous day, included 34,102 RT-PCR tests and 20,145 rapid antigen tests, the bulletin said. The infection tally in the city rose to 6,36,035 and the death toll mounted to 10,879 with two new fatalities, authorities said. — PTI

Robbery: 2 women shot dead, 3 hurt

Ghaziabad: Two women were shot dead and three children sustained injuries in a robbery here, police said on Sunday. The incident took place at Saraswati Vihar Colony under the Masuri police station area on Saturday night, police added. The dead were identified as Dolly (30) and Anshu (18). The injured were identified as Gauri (10), Meenakshi (7) and Rudra (5). Police said Anshu was teaching Dolly's children when two acquaintances of the family, Uma and Sonu, reached there. They held the entire family hostage at gunpoint after having tea. When the victims resisted, Sonu shot Dolly and Anshu dead. Thereafter, he attacked the children with a knife and screwdriver. Senior superintendent of police Kalandihi Naithani said the injured children were rushed to a nearby hospital. After killing the two women and injuring the children, the accused robbed cash and valuables for which they were planning since long, the SP said. — PTI

BJP picks candidates for municipal bypolls

New Delhi: The Delhi BJP on Sunday declared its candidates for the upcoming bypolls to five municipal corporation wards. The battle lines are drawn for the tri-cornered contest in five wards with main rivals declaring their candidates. The AAP and the Congress declared their candidates on Saturday. Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta released the list of party candidates, including Rajesh Goel, Rohini-C, Surabhi Jaju, Shalimar North, Om Prakash Gugarwal, Trilokpuri, Siyaram Kanojia, Kalyanpuri, and Mohammad Nazir Ansari, Chauhan Bangar. The bypolls will be held on February 28. — PTI

DMF BRINGS NEW LIGHT IN CHHATTISGARH

Raipur: Chhattisgarh government has utilized the DMF fund significantly for the overall development of the All sectors including education, health, infrastructure development, electricity, water and sanitation have been developed with the help of DMF fund in all districts of the state. Besides, the fund is also used in building Atmanand government English-medium schools in various districts of state to provide quality education to children. Moreover, it has been used in improving the health infrastructure and providing relief to the people of during corona crisis. As per the official DMF collection status of the year 2018-19, an average of ₹1200 crore has been collected annually from 27 districts across the state. In a bid to overcome shortcomings regarding DMF fund in previous government regime and to ensure those in need must get the benefit of the allotted funds, the Congress government has made several important reforms in the old provision to provide benefits directly to the affected people government spokesperson said.

'This government is sensitive towards farmers' issues' Farmers' protest: Govt ready to resume talks, says Goyal

New Delhi, Feb. 7: Union minister Piyush Goyal on Sunday said the government is ready to resume talks with the farmers protesting the new farm laws but asserted that despite repeated proposals, the protesters have not come up with any "concrete suggestion" so far. Reiterating Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal to farmer unions that the government was "just a phone away" to discuss any issues raised by them, Goyal said "but for that somebody at least has to make call so that we can move forward."

"This government is sensitive towards farmers' issues. The PM and the government is ready to discuss it with them. The PM even said he was just a phone call away, but somebody at least has to call so that we can move forward," the minister



Farmers participate in a 'Kisan Mahapanchayat' in support of their agitation against farm reform laws near Haryana-Rajasthan border in Nuh district on Sunday. — PTI

said during a press conference here.

He added that the farmers were being misled on a few issues and some people have been successful at confusing them.

"We even proposed to make the laws stricter through change of word-

ings, we proposed to suspend the laws for 18 months. We keep reading in news 'tareekh par tareekh' (date after date) but it should be 'prastav par prastav' (proposal after proposal). But we are yet to hear a concrete suggestion from the farm-

ers," said Mr Goyal, who is also the minister of Railways and Commerce and Industry.

The government has held 11 rounds of talks with farmer leaders, the last one being held on January 22 before the tractor parade on January 26 which ended in violent clashes between the police and the protestors.

The minister also condemned the act of hoisting a religious flag at the Red Fort during the tractor parade on Republic Day, calling it "unfortunate", while insisting that the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the whole government was ready to resolve the issue.

He added that when the government brings a bill it is for the benefit of the people and if anyone has issues with it, they should bring it up instead of depriving others of it. — PTI

Farmers plant flowers in response to 'iron nails'

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

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

"Our motivation is simple. The government had

fixed iron nails. But we are planting flowers, fruits and crops. We are farmers, this is what we do," Ramraj, who hails from Jind in Haryana, said at UP Gate (Ghaziipur).

The 54-year-old farmer is among the several who are now curating the nurseries for which seeds and saplings are being sourced from nearby nurseries in Ghaziabad.

Another protestor volunteering for the work said the nursery has flowers like rose and marigold besides varieties of plants like palm, pine and others

set in planters.

"We had also planted flowers next to the iron nails fixed near the barricading by police. We give flowers and crops in exchange for nails," he said. Farmers from Dhurana village in Sonapat planted flowers at Singhu border protest site.

Satyanaryan, 74, said his group even brought soil from their village to plant the flower saplings.

"It is our message to the government that we will spread love even if it uses force to suppress us," he said. — PTI

30-yr-old wanted for killing police constable arrested after gunfight

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

The Delhi police has arrested a 30-year-old man, wanted for allegedly killing a Delhi police constable last year, after a brief exchange of fire in the national capital.

The accused, identified as Mohammad Hassan, a resident of Loni in Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad district, had been absconding for the last five months after robbing and killing constable Manish Yadav in September last year.

According to DCP (Special Cell) Pramod Singh Kushwaha, Hassan was arrested on Friday after a brief exchange of fire when a police team received inputs that he would come from Wazirabad on a Yamaha superbike and would go towards Usmanpur to commit a crime in the area.

"On September 7 last year, Hassan along with three other associates had waylaid constable Yadav in UP's Baghat district while he was travelling to his village on his bike from Delhi. The accused had threat-

ened Yadav and had asked him to hand over his belongings. When Yadav resisted, Hassan and his associates had shot him and robbed him off ₹20,000 and other articles including his identity card," said the DCP.

"Yadav was severely injured and was taken to a nearby hospital where he died during treatment. Hassan is involved in 15 other criminal cases, including robbery, snatching, assault, and criminal intimidation among others in Delhi and UP," said the deputy commissioner of police.

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2 brothers moves HC for direction to Centre, AIIMS to give free treatment

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

Two minor brothers suffering from a rare disease have approached the Delhi high court seeking direction to the Centre and AIIMS to provide them uninterrupted treatment free of cost.

The two children, who are two and three years old respectively, are suffering from mucopolysaccharidosis II or MPS II (Hunter syndrome, attenuated type) which is a rare disease that is passed on in families. It mainly affects boys and their bodies cannot break down a kind of sugar that builds bones, skin, tendons, and other tissues.

Justice Prathiba M. Singh, before whom the matter came up for hearing, directed the ministry of health and family welfare and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) to obtain instructions on how the two children will be provided with the treatment. The court listed the matter for further hearing on February 19 along with various other pleas filed on behalf of several children suffering from other rare diseases.

The plea, filed through advocate Rahul Malhotra, sought direction to the Centre and AIIMS to provide continuous and uninterrupted treatment free of

cost to the petitioner for the rare disorder (MPS II). The two brothers, in their separate petitions filed through their father Ravi Jhavar, said they started facing difficulties and certain changes in their bodies in September and December 2019 respectively, including delayed speech and language problems. The children were examined by doctors at the Sir Ganga Ram Hospital and AIIMS and after examination and tests, they were diagnosed with MPS II, the

plea said, adding that a second opinion also confirmed that the two children are suffering from the ailment.

The treatment of the rare disease is available and administered at the AIIMS.

The petition said both the hospitals informed the father that there is no medicine manufactured in India for their disease and only two companies in the USA and Korea manufacture it.

It said the annual cost of treatment for one patient would be between ₹80 lakh and ₹1 crore. The income of their father is nominal and it would be impossible for him to bear the cost of treatment.

No 'ghar wapsi' till farmers' demands are met: Tikait

Charkhi Dadri, Feb. 7 Asserting that the agitation against the Centre's farm laws is a people's movement that will not fail, Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait on Sunday said there will be no "ghar wapsi" till protesting farmers' demands are met.

Tikait lauded the role of "khap panchayats" (caste councils) and their leaders in supporting the farmers' stir.

Addressing a "Kisan Mahapanchayat" near here, Tikait said the government should roll back the contentious farm laws, frame a new legislation to assure the continuation of the minimum support price (MSP) for crops and release the farmers arrested recently.

"There will be no 'ghar wapsi' till farmers' demands are met," he said. "Yeh jan andolan hai, yeh fail nahi hoga (this is a people's movement, this will not fail)," he added.

Tikait claimed the campaign against the agricultural laws is going strong.

Dadri MLA and chief of the Sangwan Khap, Sombir Sangwan, who in December withdrew support to the BJP-JJP government in Haryana, and another Independent MLA, Balraj Kundu, were also present at the event.

Earlier on February 3, Tikait had addressed his first "Kisan Mahapanchayat" in Jind's Kandela.

The BKU leader from Uttar Pradesh has been camping at Ghaziipur on the Delhi-UP border as part of a campaign by farmer unions against the central laws enacted in September.

Tikait said "khaps" go back to the days of King Harshvardhana and have been playing their role in society ever since.



BKU spokesperson Rakesh Tikait, farmers and supporters attend a Mahapanchayat, organised by Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) in Bhiwani district on Sunday. — PTI

"We need these khap panchayats today. You should not let anything divide you," he said, adding that when the stir started, attempts were made to divide farmers.

Cautioning the protesting farmers against such attempts, Tikait said some people will try to divide them in Sikh or non-Sikh, Jats or non-Jats, but they should remain united.

Tikait said he salutes the 40 farmer leaders spearheading the agitation. There is not a single weak link in the agitation, he claimed. Seeking to project unity among farmer unions, Tikait said the "manch (stage) and panch (leaders leading the stir) will not change".

The BKU leader, whose emotional appeal recently had revived the protest that was losing momentum after the January 26 violence in Delhi, said people from different sections of society are part of the stir.

Tikait praised BKU leader from Punjab, Balbir Singh Rajewal, who was present on the occasion, for providing a sound leadership to the stir. "Rajewal is our elder leader, he is very wise. We will fight this battle strongly," he said.

Hitting out at the Centre, Tikait said, "This government is pro-capitalist."

Tikait also made a mention of the tragedy caused by a glacier burst at Joshimath in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand, leading to a massive flood and causing large-scale devastation in the upper reaches of the ecologically fragile Himalayas.

"A big tragedy has struck Uttarakhand. I appeal to the BKU family and other farmer organisations to lend a helping hand and assist the local administration," he said.

He appealed to all to conserve water and plant trees to protect the environment.

Taking a lesson from the Jind Mahapanchayat where the stage had collapsed, the organisers had brick-lined the stage this time.

Meanwhile, another "Kisan Mahapanchayat" was organised at Sunehda in Nuh district, where Haryana BKU chief Gurnam Singh Chaduni accused the government of being stubborn and not considering farmers' demands. The laws will destroy farmers, Chaduni said at the event, which was attended by Congress leader Aftab Ahmed. — PTI



Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia during a roadshow from Greenland Square to Racecourse Multistory Building Square in Rajkot on Sunday. — PTI

40 shanties gutted in fire in Okhla Phase II, no casualties

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

Forty shanties were gutted and six domesticated animals died after a fire broke out near the Harikesh Nagar Metro Station in Okhla Phase II in the early hours of Sunday, fire service officials said. DFS director Atul Garg said it was medium category fire and information about it was received around 2.23 am.

Chief minister Arvind

Kejriwal took to Twitter to express his concerns and assured all possible help to those affected.

"Concerned about the news of fire incident at Okhla. I am constantly in touch with the fire department and the district administration, people are being provided with all possible help," he said. A senior police officer said the fire broke out at a waste cloth cutting godown and later spread to the shanties.

Air quality 'poor' in Ghaziabad, Noida, Faridabad

Noida, Feb. 7: The average air quality slipped to "poor" category in Ghaziabad, Noida, Greater Noida, Faridabad and Gurgaon, according to data issued by a government agency on Sunday.

Pollutant PM 2.5 and PM 10 although remained in the air of the five immediate neighbours of Delhi, according to the AQI maintained by the CPCB.

According to the index, an AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good", 51 and 100 "satisfactory", 101 and 200 "moderate", 201 and 300 "poor", 301 and 400 "very poor", and 401 and 500 "severe". — PTI

REGISTRATION OF VENDORS

for Local Purchase of Expendable/Non-Expendable Medical Stores Out of DGLP/ ECHS Funds of 92 Base Hospital for F.Y. 2021-22

Applications are invited from reputed/ Govt. registered firms/ wholesalers for registrations with this hospital as authorized vendors for **local purchase of Medical Stores** for the financial year 2021-22. **Validity of said registration will be from 01 Apr 2021 to 31 Mar 2022.** Completed application form along with all requisite documents be sent by registered post to:

The Commandant
92 Base Hospital
PIN- 901218, C/o 56 APO

OR in person to be delivered to Officer-in-Charge, DGLP Cell, of this hospital.

Last date for submission of completed application form along with attested copies of all requisite documents as per info brochure is **15 March, 2021.**

Application form and info brochure can be requested by e-mail to: 92basehospital@gmail.com.

Contact Details: TeleNo.: 0194-2951412 (Working hours).

NEW OKHLA INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida G.B. Nagar, (U.P.)
Website : www.noidaauthorityonline.com

E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tenders 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 & <https://etender.up.nic.in>. Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/ amendments & corrigendum etc.

S.No	JOB NO	NAME OF WORK	Amount
1	15/Manager System/ Kyocera- Konica/AMC/ 2020-21	A.M.C. of various model of Kyocera Mita and Konica Minolta make photocopier machines	Rs. 58,86,330/-

Which can be uploaded by date **15.02.2021 upto 5.00PM**. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date **16.02.2021 at 11.00AM.**

Manager (System)

CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA

SHORT TAKES

HAVE FULL FAITH IN JUDICIARY, SAYS FARUQUI

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

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

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

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

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

NEARLY 100 PAK RETURNÉES MISSING IN VALLEY

Srinagar, Feb. 7: Nearly 100 Kashmiri youths, who travelled to Pakistan on valid visas for short durations, have either not come back or have disappeared after their return in last three years, raising an alarm within security agencies which fear that they could be possible sleeper cells of terror groups operating from across the border.

Alarm bells rang in April last year when a group of five terrorists were killed in jungles of the border area of Handwara in North Kashmir. One of them was a local who went to Pakistan in 2018 and had not returned since, various officials from security agencies said.

Between April 1-6 of last year, youths hailing from Shopian, Kulgam and Anantnag districts of South Kashmir were seen as part of the infiltrating groups of terrorists and all of them had travelled to Pakistan on valid documents and never returned thereafter, they said.

MOU FOR 1ST-EVER GEOTHERMAL FIELD SIGNED IN LEH

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

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

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



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



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

Tranquil morning turns tragic for villagers

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Rescue operations underway near Dhauliganga hydropower project on Sunday.

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

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

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

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

The forest area of Nanda Devi National Park has

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

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

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

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

— PTI

Himalayan glaciers melting twice as fast, finds 2019 study

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

The analysis, spanning 40 years of satellite observations across India, China, Nepal and Bhutan, indicates that climate change is eating the Himalayan glaciers, researchers said.

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

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

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

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

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

— PTI

NTPC: TAPOVAN HYDRO PROJECT DAMAGED

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

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

ITBP RESCUES WORKERS STUCK IN TUNNEL

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

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

UP MONITORS WATER LEVEL OF RIVER GANGA

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

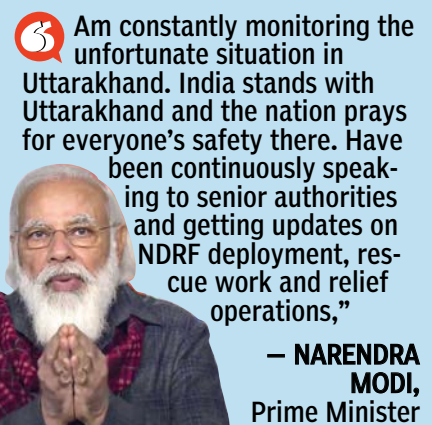
MAJOR NATURAL DISASTERS IN UTTARAKHAND

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

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

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

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



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

Bihar Assembly building completes 100 yrs, kicks off year-long celebrations

Nitish tells MLAs they are 'sevak', not 'maalik'

Patna, Feb. 7: Chief minister Nitish Kumar on Sunday highlighted the glorious past of the Bihar Legislative Assembly on completion of 100 years of its building and told those sitting in the government not to confuse themselves as the "masters" as in the democracy people are the "maalik" and we are their "sevak" (servants).

Inaugurating the year-long centenary celebrations of the sprawling Assembly building, Mr Kumar stressed on healthy debate and discussions in the house to serve the masses together in a more better manner.

Mr Kumar said he was in favour of holding longer session of the state legislature to give ample time to every member to ask questions and raise issues of their areas.

It was on this day when the first session of the Bihar and Odisha provincial legislative council was formally inaugurated by Lord Satyendra Prassana Sinha, Governor of the erstwhile province.



Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar with former RJD state president Ramchandra Purbey during centenary celebrations function of Bihar Vidhan Sabha in Patna on Sunday.

Though the building was ready by the end of 1920, the inaugural session was held on February 7, 1921.

Besides Mr Kumar, Assembly Speaker Vijay Kumar Sinha, Legislative Council Acting Chairman Awadhesh Narayan Singh, deputy chief ministers-

Tarkishore Prasad and Renu Devi-former CM Jitan Ram Manjhi, parliamentary affairs minister Vijay Kumar Choudhary and a host of ministers, legislators and other dignitaries attended the inaugural function.

"We should not confuse ourselves as masters as in democracy janata

(people) are the maalik while legislators are their representatives and people sitting in the government are their 'sevak' (servants)," Mr Kumar said in his speech.

"We normally have longer Budget session which runs for a month. But, other sessions (monsoon and winter) run for 7,8 or 10 days.

"If you wish, we will extend it further so that members, who are also considered part of the government, get a fair amount of time to express their views and opinion on various matters besides raising issues of their areas as it is their duty to do so," Mr Kumar said.

Mr Kumar said this while responding to several previous speakers who expressed their grievance on the session being short one which denied them opportunity to put their views or raise issues.

He, however, said that so far as duration of the session is concerned, it has to be collectively decided by the Assembly Speaker and the Council Chairman. — PTI

In Assam, PM alleges plot to defame India's tea industry

MANOJ ANAND GUWAHATI, FEB. 7

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

Addressing a massive public rally in central Assam's Dhekiajuli, a tea growing belt, Modi said, "I want to tell you about a conspiracy hatched to defame the country. The conspirators have not even spared Indian tea. They are trying to defame the image of Indian tea worldwide, systematically."

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

Referring to the quality of Assam tea, Mr Modi said,

BENGAL CM STAY AWAY FROM MODI'S EVENT

AGE CORRESPONDENT KOLKATA, FEB. 7

Stung by "Jai Shree Ram" slogan in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's presence at an official event in Kolkata two weeks ago, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday stayed away from sharing the stage with him at another central government event so that she might not have to face the chant again.

The Trinamul Congress supreme, along with her

three-party MPs, was invited by the Centre to the launch of four big-ticket industrial projects by Mr Modi at Haldia in East Midnapore during his afternoon visit to the poll-bound state.

But she gave it a miss, apparently to lodge a stronger protest this time to her "insult" in front of the PM on January 23 when she was greeted with 'Jai Shree Ram' slogan that prompted her to refuse to address the Parakram Diwas celebration at Victoria Memorial.

That's why I always see the progress of tea workers with the progress of Assam."

The PM also referred to a scheme under which pregnant tea garden women are handed over a financial assistance of ₹12,000.

SHORT TAKES

Addl DCP thrashed
by Raj policemen

Jaipur: A senior police officer was allegedly beaten by policemen on patrol duty in Rajasthan's Bharatpur district, an official said on Sunday. The incident took place on Thursday near Mallah Bridge when additional deputy commissioner of police Rajendra Kumar Koth was on the way to Dholpur district, he said. Mr Koth stepped down from his vehicle to attend a nature's call and there was an altercation between him and policemen on patrol duty, following which he was thrashed, the official said. He said Koth was in civil dress and was roughed up despite showing his identity card. "A day after the incident, the officer concerned gave a seven-page complaint. As the matter is related to Bharatpur, the probe has been handed over to Karauli district SP for investigation," Bharatpur SP Devendra Kumar Bishnoi said. — PTI

Tigress gives birth
to 5 cubs in Pench

Seoni, MP: A 10-year-old tigress has given birth to five cubs in Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR) of Madhya Pradesh, an official said on Sunday. With this, tigress 'T-4', known as Paddev, has so far given birth to 15 cubs in four litters, he said. "The tigress was spotted with five cubs in the PTR on Sunday morning. These new-born cubs are about two-month-old and one of them looks weak," its field director Vikram Singh Parihar said. On Saturday, tourists had spotted the tigress with a cub crossing a road in Baghin Nullah area near Turia Gate in the reserve, he said. Mr Parihar said that the forest department personnel are constantly monitoring the new-born cubs and their mother. "The 10-year-old tigress has so far has given birth to 15 cubs in the four litters," he said. Tigress T-4 was born to 'Collarwali'. — PTI

150 feared dead

■ **Continued from Page 1**
that if required, additional reinforcements will also be sent. The home ministry is coordinating closely with the Indian Air Force so that emergency equipment and personnel can be airlifted, following which helicopters will be used to search for missing persons. "A special control room was set up at the home ministry to coordinate relief and rescue operations with the Uttarakhand government, the Air Force, ITBP and NDRF. So far the relief work is going on smoothly and the exact extent of damage and loss of life and property would be known," a source said. The home minister said the Narendra Modi government was standing shoulder to shoulder with the people of Uttarakhand. Speaking to the media in Maharashtra, Mr Shah said rescue and relief operations by the Centre and the state government were on in full swing. Efforts were being made to restore normal life at the earliest. Mr Shah said Prime Minister Narendra Modi had personally called up the NDRF team and guided them.

Tikait lauds Haryana khaps

■ **Continued from Page 1**
with the farmers, and I hope we will be able to break the deadlock very soon." Railway minister Piyush Goyal said in New Delhi the Centre was ready to resume talks with the farmers' unions if they (farmers) have some new proposals. He said the Narendra Modi government was sensitive towards the farmers' concerns and was ready to resolve the issue via dialogue. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said the government is a phone call away, but someone has to call to talk or move ahead. If the farmers have any objection to the laws, let us know, and the government is willing to address it." As the protests against the new laws entered Day 74, a farmer from Jind who was supporting the agitation allegedly hanged himself from a tree just 2 km from the Tikri border protest site. A handwritten suicide note purportedly left behind by the 52-year-old deceased said: "Dear farmer brethren, Modi government is giving date

Maha MVA govt 3-wheeler pulling in different directions: Home minister
Never promised Sena CM's post: ShahBHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, FEB. 7

Union home minister Amit Shah has finally broken his silence over Shiv Sena's claims that he had promised the chief minister's post to the Uddhav Thackeray-led party after the 2019 Maharashtra Vidhan Sabha polls. "I never gave the word to Shiv Sena on the CM post," he said.

Till now, Mr Shah had maintained stoic silence over Sena's claims over the CM post, saying "details of talks held close doors should not be disclosed." However, he on Sunday said that he always believes in doing things in the open and not secretly.

Mr Thackeray had claimed that Mr Shah, who was the BJP president, assured in a meeting held at Thackeray's residence that the CM's post would be shared by the two parties, but the BJP



Union home minister Amit Shah, BJP leader Narayan Rane, former Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnis during the inauguration of the SSPM Lifetime Medical College at Sindhudurg district on Sunday.

— PTI

later went back on the promise.

However, Mr Shah on Sunday claimed that no promise was made to the Shiv Sena on sharing of the chief minister's post.

Mr Shah was at Malvan in Sindhudurg district, where he inaugurated the Lifetime Hospital and

Medical College built by BJP Rajya Sabha MP Narayan Rane. Speaking on the occasion, he said no promise was given in a meeting between him and Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray held before the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

"In the assembly polls campaign, we always pro-

jected Devendra Fadnis as the chief ministerial candidate of the BJP-Shiv Sena combine. But Sena that time never opposed it. But after the polls, it did away with its principles and defied the people's mandate to form the MVA government" said Mr Shah.

Citing the Bihar polls results, the Union Minister said that we are people which never lie. In the Bihar assembly polls, we had promised Nitish Kumar would become the CM. Despite the BJP getting more seats, we kept our word and made Nitish Kumar the CM, he added.

Mr Shah added that the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in Maharashtra comprising Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress is like an autrickshaw whose three wheels were pulling in different directions.

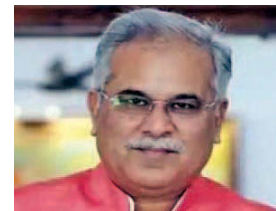
"This (MVA) is an unholy alliance and an outcome of betraying the people's mandate which was for a BJP-Shiv Sena government led by (BJP's) Devendra Fadnis."

The MVA alliance is a result of the lust for power, Shah said. The BJP and Shiv Sena had contested the Maharashtra Vidhan Sabha polls in 2019 as an alliance.

C'garh CM Baghel roots for
Rahul as Cong presidentBARUN JHA
and ASIM KAMAL
NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

Rahul Gandhi is the only leader who can take on the mantle of the Congress presidency as he is the one who has been taking a strong stand on important issues without bowing to government's pressure. Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel has said, amid a growing chorus within the party seeking Mr Gandhi's return to the helm.

Within a span of one week, two state units of the Congress have passed resolutions backing Gandhi's return as party chief. While Delhi Congress had passed a resolution requesting Gandhi to take over as chief last Sunday, the Chhattisgarh Pradesh Congress Committee (CPCC) on Saturday unan-



Bhupesh Baghel

imously passed a resolution moved by Baghel to re-appoint the Wayanad MP as the party president.

"All Congress persons are standing resolutely with Rahul Gandhi and believe that under his leadership, the Congress organisation will be constantly strengthened. Under Rahul Gandhi's leadership, a confidence has been kindled among Congress workers that under his leadership and guidance, they will strengthen the party's foundation," the resolution passed by the CPCC said.

In an interview with

PTI, Mr Baghel said Mr Gandhi enjoys the confidence of one and all in the party and holds the party together.

Asked if Rahul Gandhi was best suited to take on party presidency, he said, "Who else is there. Apart from Rahul Gandhi, is there any leader who is touring the country, who is recognised by the Congress workers across the country?"

Mr Gandhi is speaking out on all issues, be it demonetisation, GST, or Covid-19, he made his stand clear, the Chhattisgarh chief minister said. "He also took a clear cut stand in favour of farmers. So, he is the only leader who is taking a clear cut stand (on important issues), is putting forth his views forcefully, not bowing before the government's pressure," Mr Baghel said.

— PTI

Photos of him disguised as Md Ziauddin also fakes: Expert
'Some Netaji relics at Victoria fake'

Kolkata, Feb. 7: Netaji Research Bureau chairperson Sugata Bose has shot off a letter to the Victoria Memorial authorities, claiming that one of the relics at an ongoing exhibition at the museum, commemorating the 125th birth anniversary of the legendary freedom fighter, is fake.

In the letter to Victoria Memorial Curator Jayanta Sengupta, the leader's grand nephew said the museum authorities had never asked for a copy of Netaji's resignation letter from the Indian Civil Service and what has been put on display there is a fake exhibit.

The Harvard University professor and son of Dr Sisir Bose said the authentic photocopy of Netaji's

resignation letter from the ICS has been with the bureau for about 50 years.

He urged the museum authorities to "immediately take down the fake copy" and said "more shockingly Netaji Research Bureau is mentioned as the source below this fake" item.

"You never asked us for Netaji's resignation letter or anything else and we supplied nothing to you directly. Sisir Kumar Bose and Krishna Bose had found Netaji's original letter of resignation in his own handwriting and signed by him to the Secretary of State for India in the India Office of Records of London in September 1971.

"They obtained an authentic photocopy

which was published in facsimile for the first time in Krishna Bose's book Itihaser Sandhane and has been displayed in the Netaji Bhawan for nearly 50 years," Bose said in the letter.

"You should also investigate who produced the fake item as it is extremely embarrassing that the Prime Minister of India inaugurated the exhibition with the fake item on display," he said.

Mr Bose also asserted that the photographs "apparently displaying Netaji disguised as Md Ziauddin are also fakes".

No photographs of Netaji in disguise were taken or allowed to be taken during his "mahanishkraman" or great

escape, the research bureau chief claimed.

"While it appears that the originals of many photographs and facsimiles of letters and documents exhibited by you are indeed from the archives of Netaji Research Bureau collected with the dedicated effort of more than six decades, Victoria Memorial never contacted NRB to seek help with your exhibition.

"I am puzzled therefore about the basis on which you have given acknowledgements," Bose mentioned in the letter.

Expressing his disappointment over Victoria Memorial's conduct in mounting the exhibition, Bose said, "This is no way to honour our great leader." — PTI

BSP leader ends life after
UP officials 'harassment'

Budaun (UP), Feb. 7: A 40-year-old Bahujan Samaj Party leader killed himself by consuming a poisonous substance at a tehsil office in Uttar Pradesh's Budaun district after he was allegedly harassed by the SDM and a revenue official over a land allotment issue, police said on Sunday.

Harveer Singh (40) had consumed cephos tablets on Saturday at the Sahaswan tehsil office. He died at a hospital, they said.

According to the family members of Harveer Singh, he was the tehsil head of the BSP and a resident of Rasoolpur Dhaka village.

In a two-page suicide

note, the BSP leader held the sub-divisional magistrate (SDM) of Sahaswan tehsil and a kanungo responsible for the extreme step.

Taking serious cognizance of the incident, the administration has suspended the kanungo, Onkar Singh, and the matter is being probed by the additional district magistrate, police said.

Senior superintendent of police Sankalp Sharma said Harveer Singh died by suicide after consuming a poisonous substance.

The district magistrate has suspended the kanungo, and the matter is being probed by additional district magistrate (finance and revenue) Narendra

Bahadur Singh, the SSP said. District magistrate Kumar Prashant said prime facie the kanungo was found guilty and has been suspended.

Jaiveer Singh, the brother of the deceased, said in a complaint, "A strip of land was allotted to Harveer (for agriculture purpose) in 2006. The allotment was to be renewed after every four years. Harveer had to make rounds of the tehsil office for renewal, and the SDM and kanungo had demanded ₹50,000 as a bribe for it."

Jaiveer Singh alleged that Sahaswan SDM Kishor Gupta misbehaved with his brother on Saturday and threatened to send him to jail. — PTI

Sasikala to return to Chennai today

■ **Continued from Page 1**
Sasikala on her journey home.

The symbolism of the car and flag was high on her agenda when she came out of hospital. That pushed Tamil Nadu minister D. Jayakumar to threaten action against Sasikala if she continues to use the party flag. The chances are that she will enter Tamil Nadu with the flag as this is the challenge she can throw at her former party now. When she departed for Bengaluru, she was general secretary of the party, and was subsequently removed by the EPS-OPS combine, but without any notice being served on her. Legal challenges may be planned on these aspects in the future.

Sources say trouble is anticipated if she travels with the party flag on the car when she enters Hosur in Tamil Nadu from Attibelle in Karnataka. Mr Dhinakaran's AMMK party has prepared a big reception there. In Chennai, Sasikala may skip the AIADMK head-

quarters and the (closed) Jaya Memorial on Marina Beach and head straight to Ramavaram Gardens to pay homage to AIADMK founder MGR at his old home to convey a political message and try to pin relevance to her coming back to Chennai.

Mr Jayakumar has threatened action if Sasikala tries to enter the party HQ on Lloyds Road, where security has been beefed up, so too at the old Jaya residence in Poes Garden, which is now a museum and memorial. What the AIADAK fears is unknown. Their biggest threat would not be lengthy legal challenges in court but a rebellion from within the ranks with Jaya-Sasi loyalists walking off on being tempted by the old Poes Garden' path of allegiance.

Sources say a challenge could be mounted for the party headquarters on Lloyds Road that could be in the names of old trustees and complications could arise if legal questions are raised now.

Right now, Sasikala is not a legal entity in the party and her fight would have to begin from zero in terms of occupation. An AIADMK minister was quoted as saying that the AMMK and Sasikala are the "DMK's B Team" in the current political scene as her role could be disruptive of the parent party AIADMK now fighting for re-election after two terms.

Sasikala's controversial role in party affairs was well established as she was the puppet master who pulled strings to the extent of making her Thevar caste mate O. Panneerselvam chief minister and then minister in Edappadi Palaniswami when OPS rebelled. Her control of party figures made her a parallel source of power that often exceeded that of Jaya and even in interceding in the state administration through the bureaucracy.

The obsequious manner in which the state's male politicians kowtowed to the woman on the throne and her aide behind it came to an end only on

the day Sasikala motored to Parpanna Agrahara in February 2017. The two -- CM and deputy CM -- would often rush to New Delhi and complain to the Prime Minister, who once rebuked one of them, and reminded him he was in fact the CM of a state and he had the home department and the police with him. Their past behaviour was in keeping with how beholden they were to the all-powerful regent who changed things only when she tried to ascend the throne herself.

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

PM: Show Didi
'Ram card'

■ **Continued from Page 1**
they have come here to chant 'Jai Shri Ram' after bidding adieu to the TMC with 'Ram Ram'. Those who want real development for the poor and are seasoned with culture and norms are joining us. The Tolabaj (extortionist) and syndicate of the TMC will remain guests only for a few more days. I hope that the state administration will work with respect to the Constitution. No one needs to be scared of Tolabaj of TMC. The sacrifice of the BJP rank and file will ensure parivartan here." He also attacked the CM for blocking Central schemes like the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi and Aayushman Bharat while patronising corruption. Mr Modi described the TMC supremo's rule for the last 10 years in the state as the "rebirth" of the misrule of the erstwhile CPI(M)-led Left regime in the state. Lashing out at Ms Banerjee, he argued that the people of the state have been the victim of "Nirmamata" though the TMC supremo has "Mamata" in her name. He also questioned Ms Banerjee's silence on the "international conspiracy" to tarnish the country's image, in a veiled reference to some global celebrities' criticism of his government's role on the nationwide farmers' protests. Emphasising "Atma Nirbhar Bharat", the PM later flagged off four big-ticket Central industrial projects at another event for the eastern and northeastern parts of the country. Mr Modi pledged to ensure the industrialisation of the state.

THE ASIAN AGE

8 FEBRUARY 2021

Delay in Faruqui release exposes rot in executive

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

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

The Supreme Court order was not enough for the jail authorities to release him; they cited the production warrant, feigning ignorance about the order. Reports say it took a call by a Supreme Court judge to the local magistrate to get its order enforced and the Uttar Pradesh police in a similar case.

The picture is clear: the government machinery and even the judiciary in Madhya Pradesh are on a mission to hound an individual; they have no qualms citing “technical issues” to stop justice in its course.

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

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

4G in J&K: Long overdue

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

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

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

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

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

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

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T. VENKATRAM REDDY
Editor in Chief

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Leher Sethi



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

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

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

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

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

sympathy shifted from the protesters to the police.

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

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

But no one could have predicted what happened next.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Subhani



Nirmala’s Budget made a virtue out of necessity



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

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

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

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

This was the one real departure from past practice, apart from the decision to recreate a new development financial institution and an asset reconstruction company

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

So, was the generally positive response of the markets, investors and households a consequence of a “no tax-more spending” Budget? Some of it, yes. But a large part of the positive response had to do with the feeling that finally the Narendra Modi government is coming to grips with the economic reality. The bottom line is that this government’s management of economic policy has been below par. If Prime Minister Modi had not whipped up nationalist and communal sentiment in the run-up to the 2019 general election and if the Opposition parties had a better strategy for keeping the government’s shortcomings in focus, the Bharatiya Janata Party would not have got the numbers it did purely on the basis of its economic performance during its first term.

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS

HUNGER TAINT

A staggering 47 per cent of India’s children below the age of three years are malnourished which then impedes their physical, social and cognitive development. We are the world’s largest producer of milk and pulses, the second largest producer of rice, wheat, sugarcane, groundnut, vegetables, fruit and plantation crops, yet rank 94 in the World Hunger Index. In the Raj, between 1903 and 1908, our net per capita availability of foodgrains was 177.3 kg and in 2016 it was 177.7 kg. This means we are no better fed after a century. Under the FAO classification of self-sufficiency, we score below 80 per cent, indicating a food deficit. A vision for universal nutrition and healthcare must seed our political ethos.

R. Narayanan
Mumbai

PROTEST OVER?

THE FACE-OFF between the government and farmers is getting murkier day by day as neither side is willing to budge. This is causing collateral damage, such as the government claiming revival of the so-called Khalistan movement and the US offering its own sanctimonious opinion. A moribund Opposition is gleefully fishing in troubled waters. Now, Rakesh Tikait wants to take up the cause of banning diesel vehicles that are over 10 years old. In all likelihood, the agitation will be hijacked by these other issues.

Deepak Singhal
Noida

BURST OF SORROW

IT IS AS IF a mountain of sorrows has broken on the bereaved families of those who died in the glacier burst and floods at Tapovan, Chamoli. The Uttarakhand and Central governments should leave no stone unturned to compensate them. They must also do their best to save the lives they still can. Is there a way to predict such disasters in advance?

Yugul Kishore Sharma
Faridabad

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Deepak Singhal (Feb. 5). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

SHORT TAKES

2ND SNOWSTORM
BLANKETS
NORTHEAST

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

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

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

FOUR SKIERS
KILLED IN U.S.
AVALANCHE

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

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

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

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

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

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

6.0-MAGNITUDE
QUAKE HITS
PHILIPPINES

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

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

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

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

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

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

INTERCEPTED
HUTHI-LAUNCHED
DRONE: S ARABIA

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

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

"It was launched systematically and deliberately by the terrorist Huthi militia to target civilians and civilian objects in the south of the region." The incident was not immediately claimed by the Iran-backed Huthis. The US State Department on Friday said it had formally notified Congress of its intention to revoke a terrorist designation against the rebels, which had been announced at the end of the administration of former president Donald Trump.

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

Humanitarian groups were deeply opposed to the designation.

Biden: Won't lift
Tehran sanctions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"If they want Iran to return to its commitments

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

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

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

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Tehran a year later suspended its compliance with most key nuclear commitments to the deal.

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— *AFP*

PLA gives Covid
vax to Pak Army

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

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

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

The Cambodian Army was among the first batch of the foreign military to receive Covid-19 vaccine aid from the Chinese military, the state-run *Xinhua* news agency reported. The vaccines delivered to the Pakistan Army are reportedly in addition to the five lakh doses provided by China to Pakistan. Pakistan on Monday received the first batch of 500,000 doses of the Coronavirus vaccine from China, as the country was gearing up to kick start its immunisation drive.

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

UN's YEMEN
ENVOY MAKES
1ST VISIT TO IRAN

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

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

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

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

— *AP*

PROTEST IN
DENMARK OVER
COVID CURBS

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

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

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

— *AFP*

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

— *PTI*



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

— *AFP*

Thousands protest Myanmar
coup on the streets of Yangon

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

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

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

Internet access
partially restored

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

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

ut," the internet monitoring service said on Twitter.

Myanmar was plunged into cyber darkness on Saturday at the military's orders. Netblocks said social media platforms remained off limits on Sunday afternoon.

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

— *AFP*

Move Pearl killer to
rest house: Sindh govt

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

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

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

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

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

The families of the suspects will also be offered space in Qasr-e-Naz, a fed-

eral government owned building in the city along with transport to and from the place of detention, the notification said.

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

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

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

— *PTI*

POPE APPOINTS
1ST WOMAN TO
SR. SYNOD POST

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

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

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

— *AFP*

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

In winter's quiet, Belarus Oppn prepares new protests

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

automatic rifle.

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

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

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

— *AP*

quick BITES

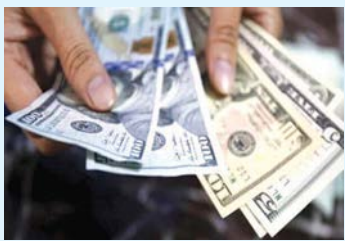
INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,731.63	0.23
Nifty 50	14,924.30	0.19
S&P 500*	3,886.83	0.39
Dollar (₹)	72.92	0.06
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.84	0.72
Euro (₹)	87.35	0.14
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,738▼163	0.34
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	59.57	1.24
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.071	-0.05
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.153	0.014

* As of Friday/Saturday

Defence, railways among largest buyers on GeM

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

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



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

Sun recalls over 36K cartons of injection in US

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

BHEL reports ₹217-crore loss in Dec. quarter

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

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■ Sharp asset quality slide now less likely Banks' earnings on recovery path

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, FEB. 7

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

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

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

Anil Gupta, vice-president financial sector rat-



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

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

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

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

BIZ CONFIDENCE IMPROVES WITH ROLLOUT OF VACCINES: NCAER

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

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

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

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

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

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

—PTI

Effective tax devolution to states could be 32%

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 7

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

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

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



Thomas Issac

ble pool and those revenues directly go to the Centre.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

book profits.

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

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

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

—PTI

FM for scaling up well-run PSUs

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

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

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

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

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



Nirmala Sitharaman

MAJOR PORT TRUSTS, AAI NOT PART OF STRATEGIC SALES PLAN

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

CPSEs, public sector banks and public sector insurance companies.

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

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

—PTI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—PTI

Kerala asked to start getting land for ₹64K-cr speed rail project

KJ BENNYCHAN THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB. 7

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

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

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

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

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

—PTI

MALAYSIA TO HOUSE MIGRANT WORKERS IN HOTELS



CHAN TIEN HIN FEB. 7

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

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

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

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

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

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

—Bloomberg

GROWING | SCALE More than \$60 bn invested in India's internet start-ups in 5 years

Internet start-ups on cusp of listing: HSBC

New Delhi, Feb. 7: India's internet start-ups leaders that operate business ranging from food delivery, e-commerce to online insurance are now on the cusp of listing, a report said, putting their combined value at \$180 billion by 2025.

"The growing scale and maturity of India's internet economy is starting to create more value and investment opportunities. More than \$60 billion has been invested in India's internet start-ups in the past five years, with around \$12 billion in 2020 alone," HSBC Global Research said in a report of India's internet.

It put the total sector value (ex-Fintech) to reach \$180 billion by 2025.



"Many of these leaders, which operate businesses ranging from food delivery, e-commerce to online insurance, are now on the cusp of listing," the report said.

India has 42 Unicorns and over 45 sonicorns, HSBC said.

E-commerce is the largest opportunity, worth

an estimated \$67 billion by 2025, it said adding this was worth \$31 billion 2019 after expanding at an impressive five-year CAGR of 39 per cent.

Amazon and Flipkart control over 80 per cent of the industry today but the contours of the competitive landscape are still evolving.

"For example, Reliance Jio is set to emerge as a significant competitive threat, along with multiple vertical e-commerce players and hundreds of brands that are now delivering direct to consumers," it said. "We see e-commerce logistics companies such as Delhivery as a lucrative opportunity."

In India, 48 per cent of retail spending is on grocery, compared to 15 per cent in China and 10 per cent in the US.

Ed-tech is the second-largest opportunity with a market size of \$48 billion by 2025. Although still quite fragmented, it is one of the most profitable segments and has one of the largest total

addressable markets.

Food delivery is getting back on track, with gross merchandise value almost back to pre-pandemic levels.

"We expect 6 million online food orders a day by 2025. This is well behind China where 40 million orders are delivered every day," the report said.

The online insurance market remains lucrative, with PolicyBazaar likely to maintain its lead for the foreseeable future.

But ride-sharing faces significant challenges, travel is the most penetrated market and hotels are an untapped opportunity, the report said adding ride sharing has fallen 40 per cent from pre-pandemic levels.

—PTI

SHORT TAKES

Boxing champ
Leon Spinks dead

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

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

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

Moseley killed
in road accident

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

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

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

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

EB survive late
scare for a win

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

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

Maiden ATP Cup
win for Russia

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

Italy were flattened by the same Russian juggernaut on Rod Laver Arena, with Rublev destroying Fabio Fognini 6-1, 6-2 in just 61 minutes before Medvedev overpowered Matteo Berrettini 6-4, 6-2 in 79 minutes. — *AFP*

Live on TV

TENNIS

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

CRICKET

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

FOOTBALL

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

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

WWE

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

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Eng bring out Bess

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

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR
CHENNAI, FEB. 7

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

It was a calculated assault from Pant.

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

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

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

Dismissing Kohli
was special for Bess

AGE CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 7

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

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

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

SCORECARD

England 1st Innings (overnight 555/8): Rory Burns c Pant b Ashwin 33, Dominic Sibley lbw Bumrah 87, Daniel Lawrence lbw Bumrah 0, Joe Root lbw Nadeem 218, Ben Stokes c Pujara b Nadeem 82, Ollie Pope lbw Ashwin 34, Jos Buttler b Ishant 30, Dominic Bess lbw Bumrah 34, Jofra Archer b Ishant 0, Jack Leach not out 14, James Anderson b Ashwin1. Extras (b-7, lb-17, w-1, nb-20) 45. **Total (all out in 190.1 over) 578.**

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

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

Few: 19-1, 44-2, 71-3, 73-4, 192-5, 225-6. James Anderson 11-3-34-0, Jofra Archer 16-3-52-2, Ben Stokes 6-1-16-0, Jack Leach 17-2-94-0, Dominic Bess 23-5-55-4, Joe Root 1-0-1-0.

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

Djokovic targets
ninth Oz crown

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OSAKA, BARTY STAND IN SERENA'S SLAM PATH

Serena Williams continues her long quest for a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam when the coronavirus-

ANKITA FIFTH
INDIAN GIRL TO
PLAY IN SLAM

Melbourne, Feb. 7: Ankita Raina on Sunday became only the fifth Indian woman tennis player in Open era to secure a place in the main draw of a Grand Slam as she made the cut for the women's doubles event of the Australian Open.

After missing out on the women's singles main draw, she still had a chance to qualify as a 'lucky loser' till the completion of the first round, but the 28-year-old realised her long-time dream when she signed up with Romania's Mihaela Buzarnescu and earned a direct entry.

Nirupama Mankad (1971), Nirupama Vaidyanathan (1998), Sania Mirza and Indian-American Shikha Uberoi (2004) have competed in the Grand Slam main draws for the country.

Ankita is only the second Indian after Sania, a six-time Grand Slam champion, to compete in the women's doubles of a tennis major. — *PTI*

delayed 2021 Australian Open begins on Monday, four years since her last major triumph in Melbourne.

It may be this season or never for Serena, who turns 40 in September and will have to conquer a field bursting with young talent headed by US Open champion Naomi Osaka, home favourite and world number one Ashleigh Barty and defending champion Sofia Kenin.

— *AFP*

MAJESTIC MAYERS
LEADS WINDIES
TO SHOCK WIN

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

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

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

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

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

Pujara confident of India
putting up a decent total

AGE CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 7

Cheteshwar Pujara couldn't believe how he got out. He scored his fourth half-century in five innings on Sunday, but rued the missed opportunity to convert it into a big knock. It was an unfortunate dismissal.

The Saurashtra batsman looked on course for a well-deserved century, but his pull shot clipped the shoulder of the short-leg fielder before being caught at mid-wicket. Pujara said he was batting really well. “I was seeing the ball really well and thought I was scoring fluently. I was really disappointed with the dismissal. But as a batsman, I can't do much about it. It was the most unfortunate way to get out,” said the 33-year-old.

In the recent past,

NUMBERS GAME

ENGLAND'S SECOND HIGHEST TOTAL ON INDIAN SOIL

- England recorded their second highest total against India on Indian soil by making 578 in 190.1 overs on the third day of the first Test.
- Overall, it was England's ninth highest total against India in Tests. England's highest against Indian on Indian soil is 652/7 declared in 175 overs at Chennai in 1984-85.
- Rishabh Pant became the first Indian batsman to hit five sixes in an innings against England in Tests. It was the first time when this Indian wicket-keeper smashed five sixes in an innings.
- Pant and Cheteshwar Pujara put on 119 runs for the fifth wicket in the first innings. It was India's 13th century stand for this position against England at home and 19th overall.

— S. PERVEZ KAISER

Pujara and left-handed batsman Rishabh Pant have put on quite a few impressive partnerships in Test matches. Pujara said he loves batting with Pant. “I am happy with the way he is playing. However, he has to learn a few things. He still has to put the team into a commanding position because he is capa-

ble of that.” Washington Sundar and R. Ashwin in the middle, Pujara believes India can still make a decent total. “We are still confident. Both Sundar and Ashwin are batting well, so we will just have to move on from here. Tomorrow will be a most crucial day for us,” he said.

Early intro of spinners shows English did homework



Hemant Kenkre
Silly Point

A Test series in home conditions is always a welcome event for hardcore cricket fans. Especially after having been deprived of any sort of cricket, domestic or international. The last international match that was played in home conditions, was the pink ball Test at Kolkata in November 2019 against Bangladesh, the two-Test series resulting in a facile win for India. With England coming to the sub-continent to face off with

India is a contest that is much looked forward to by Indian cricket fans.

The first Test at Chennai, ongoing as one pens this article, is an opener of a series that has a lot at stake for both the teams. Apart from the usual ambition of ‘winning the series,’ both teams are in the fray of qualifying for the final of the World Test Championship (WTC) against New Zealand who have qualified by default as Australia cancelled its Test tour of South Africa. Currently standing at

number 1 and three, India and England are the only two teams that can make the slot to take on the Kiwis at Lord's in June later this year.

Both teams have come into this series on a high. The hosts came back from Australia beating the championship leaders (at that point in time) 2-1 in difficult conditions and with a team with very little experience but high in confidence. The visitors boosted their morale with a clean sweep in Sri Lanka having batted out the Lankan's with skipper Joe Root in the form of his life scoring 426 runs in four innings. At the start of the series, the India vs England contest could never have been better placed considering the confidence of both teams,

that too at full strength.

Both teams came in with a certain intent. England knew they had to grind their way to find success in the contest assuming that they would be facing top Indian spinners on pitches that have traditionally supported tweakers. The hosts had the confidence of being favourites on surfaces that they have been weaned on, the morale of both their batsmen and bowlers being elevated after the remarkable series win down under. England knew they were rated as underdogs, a factor that always puts the upper rated team under pressure.

The scenario that Root and team faced was very similar to that faced by Virat Kohli went out for the toss with Tim Paine at Adelaide a few months

ago. Punters would have given both the visiting teams (India and now, England) a 30 per cent chance of beating the opposition which has a fierce win record in home conditions. Adapting to conditions early and approaching the game differently from what the opposition expects is the key India did exactly that after their debacle at Adelaide and England have (after two and a quarter days of cricket) shown that their intent.”

Experts had opined that barring Root, the England top order was weak and took it for granted that it was only the skipper, as his name suggests, the Indian bowlers needed to prise out. With a magnificent 218 runs the Yorkshireman showed his steel and has

inspired the rest of his batting peers to put their noses on the ball (as in cricket-speak) and grind the Indians out of the game. And what an innings it was, his second double century of the new year (2021) was scored at a strike rate of 57.82. His earlier double, 228 runs against Sri Lanka at Galle came at an astounding rate of 71.02.

England's first innings essay 578, led by Root saw most batsmen chipping in with Dom Sibley and Ben Stokes getting into the 80s. Their batsmen have taken their skipper's example and (for now) have ticked all the boxes needed on flat, slow-turning Indian pitches. The early introduction of left-arm spinner Jack Leach and Dom Bess, his right arm coun-

terpart has shown that the team management have done their homework and are determined to out play the Indians at their own game.

That India have a mountain to climb in the first Test at Chepauk is a given. Their batsmen will have to put in all their best and play the waiting game a necessary prerequisite on Indian surfaces. Unless the Chennai pitch gives a bit more purchase for the bowlers or the hosts succumb to overblown temptations, the first Test seems to be heading for a deadlock. Dull draws laced with high scores aren't exactly the best illustrations if the fans interest in Test cricket needs to be kept alive. The sooner the home team and curators realise this, the better.