

Delhi riots: Narwal's bail pleas dismissed

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

MLA Bharti's 2-year jail term suspended

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

8,200 get Covid-19 vaccine jabs in city

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

HC DECLINES TO INTERFERE WITH ORDER ON MCDs

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

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

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

Police issues notices to 44 farmer leaders

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

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

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

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

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

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

On Wednesday, the police had issued a notice to another farmer leader, Darshan Pal, noting that the vandalism at the Red Fort on Republic Day was "the most deplorable and anti-national act."

The Delhi police will also issue a lookout circular against farmer leaders who have been named in the FIRs registered after the violence on Republic Day.

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

Sidhu, Sidhana booked for violence at Red Fort

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

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

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

The Delhi police has named actor Deep Sidhu and gangster-turned-social activist Lakha Sidhana in an FIR in connection with the Red Fort incidents.

Shah visits hospital, meets injured cops

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

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

connection with the Red Fort incidents.

"The mob tried to snatch the MP-5 gun of constable Bhawani Singh. He managed to save the gun but could not save the magazine, which had 20 live rounds. Similarly, the mob also snatched a magazine with 20 live rounds from constable Naresh's SLR gun," the FIR stated.

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

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

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

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

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



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

Violence unfortunate but will not end stir, says Kejriwal

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

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

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

"The violence on Republic Day was unfortunate and whoever is



responsible for it must be given strictest punishment," he said.

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

He said whoever is responsible for the violence on Tuesday should be acted against. "Whoever is responsible for the turn of events, and I am not referring to the ones against whom police have registered fake cases,

deserve to be punished. Whoever is responsible, whichever party is responsible should be acted against," Mr Kejriwal said.

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

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

— *PTI*

Special Cell will probe 'conspiracy', says police

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

The police claimed that there was a "pre-conceived" and "well coordinated" plan to break the agreement arrived at with farmer leaders to bring international embarrassment for the government on Republic Day.

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

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

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

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

AAP to contest polls in six states: Kejriwal

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

Delhi chief minister and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal, on Thursday, said the party will contest elections in six states — UP, Uttarakhand, Goa, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and Gujarat.

He made the announcement at the 9th National Council meeting of the AAP.

"Other parties have no vision and that is why they are talking about the past. AAP is the only party talking about the future and has the vision of 21st and 22nd century," Mr Kejriwal said.

"In the next two years, AAP will be contesting elections in six states — UP, Uttarakhand, Goa, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and Gujarat," the AAP national convener added.

He urged AAP members to strengthen the party at grassroots level.

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

SC irked over civil services issue

Questions Centre on no extra chance to aspirants during Covid pandemic

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

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

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

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

it by an under-secretary level officer.

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

The top court has posted the matter for further hearing on Friday. The

court is hearing a plea seeking grant of one more chance to appear in the UPSC's civil services examination to those aspirants who could not appear in their last attempt in 2020 due to the pandemic.

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

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

additional attempt or relaxation in age for some candidates would amount to extending differential treatment to similarly placed aspirants at the examination.

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

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

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

▶ **Continued from Page 1** nations are committed to a multipolar world, there should be a recognition that a multipolar Asia is one of its essential constituents. Fifth, obviously each state will have its own interests, concerns and priorities; but sensitivity to them cannot be one-sided. At the end of the day, relationships between major states are reciprocal in nature. Sixth, as rising powers, each will have their own set of aspirations and their pursuit too cannot be ignored. Seventh, there will always be divergences and differences, but their management is essential to our

▶ **THE MINISTER also termed China's decades-old better-developed border infra as 'consequential' in the context of last year's events**

ties. And eighth, civilisational states like India and China must always take the long view."

Mr Jaishankar said: "The events in eastern Ladakh last year have so profoundly disturbed the relationship... They not only signalled a disregard for commitments about minimising troop levels, but also showed a willingness to breach peace and tranquillity. The events of

2020 have actually put our relationship under exceptional stress."

"The development of our ties can only be based on mutuality. Indeed, the three mutuals -- mutual respect, mutual sensitivity and mutual interests -- are its determining factors. Any expectation they can be brushed aside, and that life can carry on undisturbed despite the situation at the border, that is simply not realistic," he added.

The minister also termed China's decades-old better-developed border infrastructure as "consequential" in the context of last year's events.

Opp. parties to boycott Prez speech

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

address to both Houses of Parliament on Friday, January 29."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The government's vision was to transform the country through "access, inclusion and empowerment", while always ensuring the privacy of the user.

To Nobuhiro Endo, NEC Corporation chairman, Mr Modi explained the country's approach towards the opportunities created by urbanisation. "India is focusing on sustainable urbanisation, with focus on the ease of living, ease of doing business and climate sensitive development. This commitment has led to investment of \$150 billion in urban India during 2014 to 2020," Prime Minister Modi said. — *PTI*

Farmers dig in as govt moves forces

▶ **Continued from Page 1** the violence. Tension prevailed at Singhu border

after some locals from Bakhtawarpur and Hamidpur protested against the farmers camping there. Carrying banners and placards, locals and BJP supporters con-

demned the violence and urged the police to clear the protest site.

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

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

HC: Opening pant's zip no sexual assault

SHAHAN ANSARI
MUMBAI, JAN. 28

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

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

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

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

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

● JUSTICE PUSHPA

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

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

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

"The minimum sentence for this offence is five years imprisonment. Considering the nature of the offence and the sentence prescribed, the aforesaid acts are not sufficient for fixing the criminal liability on the appellant/accused for the alleged offence of 'aggravated sexual assault'. At the most the minor offence punishable under Section 354-A(1)(i) of the IPC r/w Section 12 of the POCSO Act is proved against the appellant," the court held. With the above observations the court reduced his sentence to one year.

Farmers stir on UP NH ends

Protesters allege cops entered their tents, chased them away

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

The police, however, claimed that the matter was resolved through deliberations and the protesting farmers were sent home on Wednesday night.

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

Thamba Chaudhary, Brijlax Singh, Baljaur Singh Arya, Vikram Singh and other farmers who took part in the protest on Thursday said their agitation against the farm laws was going on on one side of the national highway.

Late Wednesday night, a large number of police personnel entered their tents, resorted to lathicharge on the sleeping farmers and chased them away, they told reporters. Charging the police with adopting repressive measures, they claimed that their tents were uprooted. About 40 farmers were present at the spot at that time.

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

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



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

—PTI

Parl likely to pass resolution against violence on R-Day

YOJNA GUSAI
NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

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

The government, sources said, wants Parliament to pass a resolution condemning the incident after "considering the sense of the House."

For the government, which was otherwise bracing itself to face the Opposition's onslaught over the farmer unions protests against the three laws, among other issues, tables seem to have turned as the incident caused a national uproar, with even the Opposition parties, who were sup-

porting the farmer unions protests, condemning the incident.

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

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

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

rampart of the Red Fort where tricolour was hoisted, which attracted widespread condemnation.

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

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

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

Lens on funds for farmers protest

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

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

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

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E-Tender are invited from firms/ contractors registered with UPLC Lucknow for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on Noida Authority's official website: www.noidaauthorityonline.com & http://etender.up.nic.in . Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/ amendments & corrigendum etc.	
(A) 1.	41/CGM/SM(WC-3)/2020-21 , Name of Work:- M/o Road (P/L Interlocking tiles on patri of 18mtr wide road near Gate No.-2 of Gardenia Glory Group Housing Society of Sector-46), Noida Cost - Rs. 29.68 Lacs
2.	42/CGM/SM(WC-3)/2020-21 , Name of Work:- M/o Road (Repair of footpath & drain Sector-34 side of MP-3 Road), Noida Cost - Rs. 24.27 Lacs
Which can be uploaded by date 11.02.2021 upto 5.00PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date 12.02.2021 at 11.00AM.	
Chief General Manager Noida	
CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA	

APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION	
	General public is hereby informed that an unidentified person (depicted in the photo) Namely Unknown S/o Unknown R/o Unknown Age : about 35 years, Height : 5'2", Complexion : Wheatish, Built : Thin, Face : Long, Hair : Black & black beard, Wearing : Blue colour lower, Black colour sweater with Black colour lining inner & bare feet has been found
dead in the jurisdiction of P.S. Anand Vihar, Delhi on 23.01.2021. In this regard a case vide DD No. 29A dated 23.01.2021 has been lodged at P.S. Anand Vihar, Delhi.	
Any person having any information or clue about this dead found person may kindly inform to the following:-	
SHO P.S. Anand Vihar, Delhi Shahdara Distt. Delhi Tel. No. 011-21210294, 21210296, 8851417104	
DP/344/SHD/2021	

TRAFFIC ADVISORY

DELHI POLICE SHANTI SEWA NYAYA **BEATING RETREAT AND ILLUMINATION ON 29th JANUARY, 2021 (4:00 PM ONWARDS)**

Beating Retreat Ceremony will be held on 29.01.2021 at Vijay Chowk, as part of the Republic Day Celebration, 2021. Delhi Traffic Police has made elaborate arrangement for Beating Retreat Ceremony and Illumination of Rashtrapati Bhawan, North Block, South Block and Parliament House.

TRAFFIC RESTRICTIONS

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

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

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

DIVERSIONS FOR BUSES

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

- Buses bound for Central Secretariat and Connaught Place coming from Shanti Path - Vinay Marg - Sardar Patel Marg will take Panchsheel Marg - Simon Bolivar Marg - Vande Matram Marg - R/A Shankar Road - Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Road.
- Buses bound for Central Secretariat will terminate at Udyan Marg and return via Kali Bari Marg - Mandir Marg - Shankar Road.
- Connaught Place bound buses will take Mandir Marg - Kali Bari Marg - G.P.O. - Baba Khadak Singh Marg and reach Connaught Place & return via Bhagat Singh Marg - Peshwa Road - Mandir Marg - Shankar Road and Vande Matram Marg.
- Buses coming from South Delhi on Tughlak Road and bound for Connaught Place/Central Secretariat will be diverted from Aurobindo Chowk to Safdarjung Road - Kamal Ataturk Marg - Panchsheel Marg - Simon Bolivar Marg and follow the route as mentioned at Serial No. 1.
- Buses coming from Mandi House and Feroz Shah Road and proceeding to Connaught Place via Barakhamba Road will terminate at Shivaji Stadium and return via Kasturba Gandhi Marg/Barakhamba Road.
- Connaught Place bound buses coming from Shahjahan Road will proceed to Shivaji Stadium via Aurobindo Chowk - Safdarjung Road - Kamal Ataturk Marg - Panchsheel Marg and beyond.
- Buses bound for Old Delhi Railway Station, Red Fort and ISBT Kashmiri Gate coming from South side will take Ring Road from AIIMS towards Dhaua Kuan and then Ridge Road, Rani Jhansi Road.
- Buses bound from Old Delhi Railway Station, Red Fort and ISBT Kashmiri Gate coming from Ashram side will take Ashram Chowk - Ring Road towards Sarai Kale Khan and proceed further via Raj Ghat.
- Buses coming from Old Delhi Railway Station, Red Fort, Kashmiri Gate and bound for South and South East will take Delhi Gate - Jawahar Lal Nehru Marg - Rajghat - Ring Road - Sarai Kale Khan - Ashram Chowk.
- Buses coming from Vikas Marg and bound for South will take Ring Road - Sarai Kale Khan - Ashram Chowk.
- Buses coming from Connaught Place via Kasturba Gandhi Marg towards India Gate will take Minto Road - DDU Marg - I.P.Flyover - Ring Road - Sarai Kale Khan.

METRO STATION

Entry/ Exit gates at Rail Bhawan & Udyog Bhawan/ Central Secretariat Metro Station will remain closed from 02:00 PM to 06:30 PM on 29.1.2021.

PARKING

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

INSTRUCTIONS TO GENERAL PUBLIC

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

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SHORT TAKES

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

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, JAN. 28

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

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

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

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

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

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

MAHARASHTRA HOME MINISTER WARNS BJP

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, JAN. 28

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

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

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

ODISHA: BODIES OF MIGRATORY BIRDS TO BE PRESERVED

AGE CORRESPONDENT
BHUBANESWAR, JAN. 28

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cong, Left seal deal for Bengal polls

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

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, JAN. 28

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

— PTI

PARLIAMENT BUDGET SESSION STARTS TODAY

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

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

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

— PTI

More India-made vaccines will be available soon: PM

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

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

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

70-80 crore people expected to get infected in India, while some talked about over 20 lakh possible deaths but India did not let the disappointment get better of it," he said.

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

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

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

saving lives."

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

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

"While two India-made vaccines have already been introduced to the world, many more vaccines will be made available from India," he said.

"India's upcoming vaccines will help other countries at a swifter pace to fight the pandemic," he added.

— PTI

BOEING GETS NOD TO OFFER ITS FIGHTER JET TO IAF

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

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

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

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

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

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

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

India on Thursday termed the freeing of dreaded terrorist Omar Saeed Sheikh by the Pakistani Supreme Court as a "travesty of justice", adding that "this case truly demonstrates Pakistan's intent on taking action on the terror front".

Sheikh was earlier convicted in Pakistan for the beheading of Wall Street Journal correspondent Daniel Pearl in 2002.

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

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

Sleeping Buddha



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

COMMUNAL | HARMONY

HC says there is prima facie evidence against accused

MP HC rejects Faruqui's bail petition

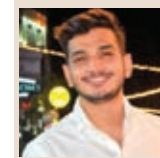
RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, JAN. 28

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

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

"The evidence/material collected so far suggest that in an organised public show under the garb of standup comedy at a public place, on communal lines, prima facie; scurrilous, disparaging utterances, outraging religious feelings of a class of citizens of India with deliberate intent; were made by the applicant," the court said.

"It is not a case of no evidence", the order said. The court added that the investigation was still in progress and the possibility that more incriminating material may be collected regarding involvement of



Munawar Faruqui

THE COURT rejected Faruqui's contention that he had not made any statement alleged in the criminal complaint, saying that the witnesses in the case coupled with the video footage of the show were in contravention of his submission.

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

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

The court observed that there was a constitutional

duty on every citizen and state to promote harmony and the spirit of brotherhood irrespective of religious, linguistic, sectional and regional diversities.

The state must endeavour to ensure that "this ecosystem and sustenance of coexistence in our welfare society is not polluted by negative forces". Faruqui was arrested on January 1 following the complaint by Eklavya Singh Gaur, chief of Hindu Rakshak Sanghathan, that the former had made derogatory remarks against Hindu deities in a recent standup show.

THE ASIAN AGE

29 JANUARY 2021

Budget: A challenge and an opportunity

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

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

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

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

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

Inconsequential homecoming?

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

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

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

THE ASIAN AGE

T. VENKATRAM REDDY
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Anand K. Sahay
Far & Near



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This was a gross underestimation

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

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

The Congress comprehensively failed to meet the challenge of majoritarian right-wing elements because it had frittered away the thought-and-action system nurtured by Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Subhash Chandra Bose, Maulana

Azad and countless fearless men and women who gave their lives for an ideal that would necessarily unify India, rather than divide it, or cater only to particular sections of it.

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

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

Ideology and organisation are indeed inextricably bound. There is some irony in the fact that prominent Congress dissidents — who go under the rubric of G-23 — rightly underline a democratically elected organisation but do not even mention ideology. That is a fool's errand.

Once the Congress' demise is guaranteed, how long many of the so-

called secular regional parties, or those on the Left, survive is also a matter of conjecture. Historically, these are — in the main — a derivative of the wider "Congress system" that Rajni Kothari spoke of, although each emphasised specific concerns (some caste, some class) and arose in opposition to the Congress.

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

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

Subhani



Vaccine diplomacy is India's finest hour



Sreeram Chaulia

Foreign Pulse

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

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

A friend acting speedily in a time of need is the best. Bhutan's Prime Minister Lotay Tshering articulated how important India's support at the present critical juncture was by saying: "It is of unimaginable value when precious commodities are shared even before meeting your own needs."

Unlike some countries that imposed export bans on essential medicines, protective equipment and vaccines in order to attend solely to their own citizens' pressing needs, India has threaded the needle right since the coronavirus pan-

demic broke out to share whatever it could with less endowed nations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS

GOVT SCORES A WIN

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

N.J. Ravi Chandler
Bengaluru

DON'T SHAME FARMERS

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

Priyanka Mathur
Kolkata

THE IRAN CONUNDRUM

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

Tushar Anand
Patna

SHORT TAKES

CANNES FEST POSTPONED TO JULY 2021

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

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

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

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

2 INDONESIANS CANED 77 TIMES FOR GAY SEX

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

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

CONTINUE WITH AFGHAN TALKS, KHALILZAD TOLD

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

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

SCHOOL NAMES: WASHINGTON, LINCOLN TO GO

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

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

Russia detains allies of jailed leader Navalny

Moscow, Jan. 28: Several allies and supporters of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny were detained in Moscow early Thursday after mass protests last Saturday demanding his release from prison drew tens of thousands to the streets in over 100 Russian cities.

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

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

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

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

HR SITUATION IN RUSSIA CONCERNS U.S.: BLINKEN

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

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

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

— PTI

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

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

— AP

MEXICO'S NEW CASE RECORD OF ALMOST 28,000

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

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

A group of over a dozen of the country's top universities and medical institutes also reported Wednesday that the use of face masks be made mandatory in Mexico, a move that President Andrés Manuel López Obrador and his advisers have long opposed.

The president himself seldom wears a mask, and over the weekend tested positive for Coronavirus.

— AP

LOCAL | SIGN

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

Pakistan gets GI tag for its Basmati rice

Islamabad, Jan. 28: Pakistan has received the Geographical Indicator (GI) tag for its Basmati, paving the way for creating a local registry for the particular strain of rice and making a case in the international market, as the country fights a case in the EU against India's move to get Basmati rice registered as its product.

A GI tag is a sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess origin-based qualities and reputation in the region. Pakistan is

fighting a case in the 27-member European Union against India's move to get Basmati rice registered as its product.

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

Ukrainians' 'taxing' stir



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

— AFP

Release Pearl murder prime suspect: Pak SC

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

Islamabad, Jan. 28: Pakistan's Supreme Court on Thursday dismissed appeals against the acquittal of British-born al-Qaeda terrorist Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh in the kidnapping and murder of American journalist Daniel Pearl in 2002 and ordered his release in the sensational case.

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

● A THREE-JUDGE bench of the apex court led by Justice Mushir Alam on Thursday dismissed the Sindh government's appeal against the Sindh High Court's decision to overturn the conviction of Sheikh in the Pearl murder case.

case of Pearl in Karachi in 2002. Pearl's murder took place three years after Sheikh, along with Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar and Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar, was released by India in 1999 and given safe pas-

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

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

According to the short verdict, the bench also directed to release the suspect. One member of the

bench opposed the decision. The bench upheld the SHC order by rejecting the appeals and ordered Sheikh should be set free, his lawyer Mahmood Sheikh told the media.

In April 2020, a two-judge Sindh High Court bench commuted the death sentence of 46-year-old Sheikh to seven years imprisonment. The court also acquitted his three aides

Fahad Naseem, Sheikh Adil and Salman Saqib — who were serving life terms in the case, almost two decades after they were found guilty and jailed. The Sindh government and family of Pearl filed petitions in the apex court, challenging the high court verdict.

— PTI

BIDEN WARNS BEIJING OVER EXPANSIONISM

Washington, Jan. 28: One week into the job, US President Joe Biden has sent a clear warning to Beijing against any expansionist intentions in East and Southeast Asia. In multiple calls and statements, he and his top security officials have underscored support for allies Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines, signalling Washington's rejection of China's disputed territorial claims in those areas.

On Wednesday, Biden told Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga that his administration is committed to defending Japan, including the Senkaku Islands, which are claimed both by Japan and China, which calls them the Diaoyu Islands.

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

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

— AFP

US PUTS HOLD ON FOREIGN ARMS SALES

Washington, Jan. 28: The Biden administration has put a temporary hold on several major foreign arms sales initiated by former President Donald Trump.

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

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

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

— AP



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46874.36	-1.13
Nifty 50	13817.50	-1.07
S&P 500*	3,817.04	1.77
Dollar (₹)	73.04	-0.16
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.82	0.32
Euro (₹)	88.42	-0.03
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,183.109	0.22
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	55.70	-0.20
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.933	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.048	0.034

* As of 8:30 PM IST

US economy shrinks 3.5% in 2020

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

Swaminathan, Tewari take over as SBI MDs



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

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

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

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

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

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■ Demand contracts 35 per cent in 2020 Gold demand dips to lowest in 25 yrs

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JAN. 28

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

The gold demand for the full-year 2020 was 446.4 tonnes compared to 690.4 tonnes in 2019—a decline of 35 per cent, according to data from the World Gold Council. This was the lowest demand since 1995.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Import of official gold was down 46 per cent in 2020 and the restrictions on international travel due to the pandemic also saw the grey market sup-

ply shrinking by one-fourth of last year's 115 tonnes.

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

Globally, annual demand was 14 per cent down to 3,759.6 tonnes and 2020 saw the demand falling below 4000 tonnes for the first time since 2009.

The largest gold consumer, China, saw the demand shrinking by 28 per cent. However, Germany's investment demand grew in 2020, replacing India from the second slot.

Sundaram AMC buys Principal AMC

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JAN. 28

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

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

"The transaction is subject to the receipt of necessary regulatory approvals and Sebi prescribed processes, and Principal will continue to operate the businesses until the deal is closed," the release added.

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

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

Commenting on the acquisition, Sunil Subramaniam, managing director, Sundaram AMC said, "This transaction will strengthen our presence in the market-place with the addition of a range of schemes with a good long-term performance track record."

Maruti Suzuki net rises 24% on higher sales

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JAN. 28

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

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

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

The revenue numbers



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

The company's earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation, or Ebitda, grew 5.9 per cent YoY to Rs 2,226 crore against Rs 2,102 crore in the correspon-

ding quarter last year.

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

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

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

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

Airtel says it has 5G ready network

FC BUREAU HYDERABAD, JAN. 28

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

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

He said the company had seamlessly operated 5G and 4G concurrently within 1800 MHz spectrum



using dynamic spectrum sharing in Hyderabad.

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

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

Hyderabad to download a movie in a few seconds.

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

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

Indias small investors rush to join GameStop frenzy

ABHIRUP ROY MUMBAI, JAN. 28

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

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

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

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

"This shows a marked shift in investor behaviour from just using U.S.



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

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

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

TIM COOK: INDIA BIZ DOUBLED, FEEL GOOD ABOUT TRAJECTORY

YOSHITA SINGH NEW YORK/NEW DELHI, JAN. 28

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

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

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

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

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

Realtors seek tax sops, industry & infra status

New Delhi, Jan. 28: Real estate developers expect the government to provide industry as well as infrastructure status for the sector, increase the corpus of Rs 25,000-crore stress fund, and more tax sops for both homebuyers and builders in the upcoming Budget to boost property demand.

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

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

As the sector's growth relies heavily on the upcoming financial amendments, he said the government should grant industry status to the real estate sector and a single-window clearance mechanism for faster completion of projects.

"One GST, one or no



and rationalising the GST for under-construction properties."

The government could also consider increasing the corpus of Rs 25,000-crore Swahim fund, Magazine said.

M u m b a i - b a s e d Kalpataru Ltd MD Parag Munot said the measures such as raising the income tax deduction ceiling on home loan interest, input tax credit on GST, and expanding the ambit of affordable housing to properties up to Rs 1 crore in Super Tier 1 cities such as Mumbai and Delhi, will significantly incentivise buying. "It would give the sector a much-needed boost and accelerate the mission to provide housing for all by 2022."

Salarpuria Sattva MD Bijay Agarwal demanded the industry status to the real estate sector and a single-window clearance system.

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

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

THOMAS BUCKLEY JAN. 28

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

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



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

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

wherever—and however—a customer chooses to shop. "We've built a substantial business that can serve clients in a way no one else can," chief customer officer Janey Whiteside said in the statement.

Walmart Connect is

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

Walmart shares rose less than 1 per cent in pre-market trading in New York. —Bloomberg



RENAULT UNVEILS KIGER SUV, LAUNCH IN Q1

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JAN. 28

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

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

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

The car maker, which sells Duster and Kwid models, revealed its SUV's specifications, the features available in top-spec form, the design, its interiors and the engine and gearbox options on offer.

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

—Reuters

SHORT TAKES

Ronaldo breaks Covid rules?

Rome: Cristiano Ronaldo broke coronavirus travel restrictions with a trip to a mountain resort, according to media reports Thursday. Juventus striker Ronaldo allegedly travelled to Courmayeur, 150 kilometres north-west of the Serie A club's Turin headquarters, for his girlfriend Georgina Rodriguez' birthday. Rodriguez, who turned 27 on Wednesday, apparently posted a video of the couple on a snowmobile on Instagram. She later removed it, but it was picked up by several Italian news sites. The *Gazzetta dello Sport* newspaper said Ronaldo and Rodriguez spent Tuesday night in a hotel and took a ride in the snow the next morning, before returning to Turin. Under current Italian coronavirus rules, the couple should not have left the town of Turin. They each risk a fine of \$485. — *AFP*

Virus hits Olympic test competition

Tokyo: The first Tokyo Olympics test event of 2021 has been postponed because of travel restrictions under Japan's coronavirus state of emergency, organisers confirmed on Thursday. The artistic swimming event will double as the sport's final qualifier for the virus-postponed Games. It was due to be held on March 4-7 in Tokyo but will now take place two months later. Tokyo 2020 organisers said a decision to delay it had been taken for reasons including "ensuring the fairest possible conditions for athletes to participate" and ongoing entry restrictions in Japan. The qualifier has now been rescheduled for May 1-4 at the Tokyo Aquatics Centre. — *AFP*

Oly uncertainty hurting athletes

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

76ers hand Lakers first road defeat

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

Live on TV

BADMINTON

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

CRICKET

Pakistan vs South Africa: First Test, Day 4 from 10.30 am on Sony Ten 2

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

Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20 Tournament: Semifinal — Tamil Nadu vs Rajasthan from 11.55 am; Punjab vs Baroda from 6.55 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

FOOTBALL

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

WWE

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

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Burns eyes Rory return

England opener joins team after paternity break

C. SANTOSH KUMAR
CHENNAI, JAN. 28

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

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

The 30-year-old Epsom-born is also taking a short course in Psychology to fill the long hours in the bio-bubble.

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

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

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

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



Rory Burns. — *Instagram*

work and try to get used to the conditions here. Then it's a mental switch. I guess that's the challenge and I have been around for a while now so I have some experience to draw from," said Burns. The Surrey cricketer, however, doesn't expect the wickets in India to turn straight away. "I think we will get good cricket wickets that will spin as the game goes on. I have drawn on various people's experience who I have worked with, they tend to suggest about India as opposed to Sri

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

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

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

line, it is just going to be a big challenge in their own conditions, looking forward to it," added Burns.

India would be fielding their full-strength side with Virat Kohli back to bolster the batting lineup. Burns knows India are in pretty handy form. "India could not necessarily play their first eleven, but they still managed to get past Australia, which is testament to the side. They will be a big challenge in their conditions and they are No. 1 in the world," added the 30-years-old.

Ganguly undergoes a second angioplasty

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, JAN. 28

BCCI president Sourav Ganguly, admitted at Apollo Gleneagles Hospital, underwent another angioplasty, on Thursday afternoon, in which two more stents were implanted for the removal of blockages in the two other arteries of his heart.

The 48-year-old former Indian cricket team captain had received the first one in one of his three affected arteries at Woodlands Hospital after suffering a 'mild' heart attack on January 2.

The second angioplasty, which was then deferred by the doctors by two-three weeks, was planned after Sourav was examined by eminent cardiac surgeons — Dr Devi Shetty and Dr Ashwin Mehta — during

the 48-year-old former Indian cricket team captain and BCCI president had received the first one in one of his three affected arteries after suffering a 'mild' heart attack early this year.

the day.

The private hospital stated, "Dr Aftab Khan and the team comprising Dr Ashwin Mehta, Dr Devi Shetty, Dr Ajit Desai, Dr Saroj Mondal and Dr Saptarshi Basu successfully performed angioplasty on Mr Sourav Ganguly."

It added, "Two stents were placed. The procedure was uneventful. Mr Ganguly is stable and

under close observation."

One of the doctors said the angioplasty took an hour. West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee visited Sourav in the evening.

"Sourav received two stent implantation. The operation was successful. He is stable and doing well. He also spoke to me. I wish him all the best and congratulate the doctors also," she said later.

Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar tweeted, "Got an update on health of @SGanguly99 Sourav Ganguly, President Board of Control for Cricket in India @BCCI under treatment in Kolkata. As per doctors and family members his condition is fine."

Sourav is likely to be released from the hospital after some days.

WORLD TOUR | FINALS

Sindhu, Srikanth out of reckoning

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

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

"It wasn't my day. Losing the first game made the difference. My timing was a bit off, so a bit disappointed," Sindhu said.

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

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

"I think it's about match

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

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

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

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

Srikanth continued to dominate the rallies with his angled returns to reach 17-12.

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



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

Man United's title hopes suffer blow

London, Jan. 28: Manchester United's Premier League title hopes suffered a huge blow on Wednesday with a 2-1 defeat by bottom side Sheffield United as Chelsea started the Thomas Tuchel era with a goalless draw against Wolves.

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

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

TUCHEL ERA

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

Chelsea struggled to

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

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

MESSI BANG ON TARGET FOR BARCA

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

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

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

Allrounder Kapil now drives on golf courses

MOSES KONDETY
HYDERABAD, JAN. 28

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

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

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

"So many of them have come

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

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

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

"After such a high in Australia, I hope and pray that they maintain the momentum in the upcoming home series



against England," Kapil added.

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

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

— KAPIL DEV

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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