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ANANTAPUR | TUESDAY | 26 JANUARY 2021



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WEATHER

Max: 32.0°C
Min: 19°C
RH: 34%
Rainfall: Nil
Forecast: Cloudy sky.
Misty morning. Max/Min
temp. 32/19 °C

COVID-19 COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+8,631)	(+106)
1,06,68,332	1,53,608
STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS	
(+148)	(+1)
TS: 2,93,401	1,590
(+56)	(+2)
AP: 8,87,066	7,149

CASES AROUND THE WORLD	
9,99,60,697	
DEATHS 21,43,258	
COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES 219	
worldometers.info/coronavirus	

COUNTER POINT



**Foolproof security
arrangements, sir... no
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SHORT TAKE

PIO poet wins T.S. Eliot prize

London: Indian-origin author-poet Bhanu Kapil has been named the winner of the prestigious T.S. Eliot Prize, named after the renowned 20th-century American-British poet for her winning title 'How to Wash a Heart'.

Happy Republic Day



Women hold the National Flag as they ride a boat on Upper Lake, ahead of the 72nd Republic Day in Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh on Monday. In his annual address to the nation on the eve of 72nd Republic Day, President Ram Nath Kovind on Monday asserted that the country's armed forces are "adequately mobilised" in a "well-coordinated" move to thwart any attempt to undermine national security.

— PTI

SC allows gram panchayat polls

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 25

The Supreme Court on Monday dismissed the AP government's plea to postpone the gram panchayat polls and cleared the decks for going ahead with the elections as per schedule.

A division bench comprising justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Hrishikesh Roy held a hearing on Monday. Justice Kaul observed, "Ego problems between two authorities are causing all this lawlessness. This cannot be allowed. The court will not be a

AP agrees to move some key officials

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC
HYDERABAD, JAN 25

The AP government on Monday decided to implement the orders of the State Election Commission to change several bureaucrats including collectors of Chittoor and

Guntur and also the Tirupati Urban SP. Sources said Chief Secretary Adityanath Das would send to SEC the names of a panel of officers to be posted on Tuesday.

■ Page 2: We can't meet vaccine timeline, says CS

party to an ego clash. Some decisions are political while some are admin-

istrative. We will not assume everyone's functions. Some decisions

have to be taken by the SEC. We feel that the real issue is actually something else and not what is being argued here."

He pointed out that elections were held in several parts of the country even during the prevalence of Covid-19 pandemic. Kerala conducted elections though it witnessed a major spike in cases.

The court took a serious view of interveners like government employees, doctors and bureaucrats in the matter and opined that it was uncalled for.

■ Page 2: SC finds fault with staff's resolutions

1st phase on Feb. 21, other phases intact

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 25

The State Election Commission (SEC) on Monday rescheduled the conduct of gram panchayat polls in revised phases. The poll for February 4, originally phase one, will be held on February 21 as the last phase, Phase 4, while dates for the remaining three phases remain unchanged.

Phases-2, 3 and 4 scheduled to be held on February 9, 13 and 17 respectively will be held as usual except for altering the numbers of these phases as 1, 2 and 3 respectively. The polling time is fixed from 6.30 am to 3.30 pm.

The district administrations had failed to make necessary arrangements for nominations for polls

scheduled on February 5 under the original phase-I. Following this, the SEC has rescheduled the polling for the first phase for the last part.

When the State Election Commission convened a video conference with collectors, SPs and other officials on January 23, and a communication was sent to Chief Secretary, Director-General of Police, principal secretary and commissioner, panchayat raj and principal finance secretary to join it and review preparedness for conduct of polls, this could not be held as no instructions came from the state government to the officials to take part in the conference.

■ Page 2: Poll notice will be issued on Feb. 10

Jagan asks MPs to demand SCS, funds

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 25

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy instructed his party MPs to raise a series of issues, including Polavaram project, special category status and release of funds for various projects during the ensuing budget session of the Parliament.

He met the MPs at his camp office here on Monday and explained about several State-related issues and underlined the importance of raising them in Parliament. Reddy stated that the

State was yet to get ₹1,569.86 crore from the Centre for execution of Polavaram irrigation project and also approval for revised cost estimate of the project to the tune of ₹55,656.87 crore. He said they had raised the need for accepting the revised cost estimate of Polavaram project at several platforms that has resulted in the Centre taking a positive view on the issue. He said release of funds was key to execute the project as per schedule.

■ Page 2: Demand more medical colleges: Jagan

India, China clash at Sikkim border

Army plays down incident as 'minor face-off'

DC CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, JAN. 25

Amid their tense standoff in eastern Ladakh, Indian and Chinese troops were involved in a physical clash in the high-altitude Naku La region in Sikkim on January 20, an incident the Indian Army described as a "minor face-off" on Monday.

The Indian Army, playing down the incident, said it was resolved by local commanders and there was no use of weapons.

"It is clarified that there was a minor face-off at Nakula area of North Sikkim on 20 January 2021 and the same was resolved by local commanders as per established protocols. Media is requested to refrain from overplaying or exaggerating reports which are factually incorrect," said Indian Army.

"It is learnt that troops from both sides sustained minor injuries in the physical brawl in Naku La," a PTI report said.

People familiar with the developments along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in north Sikkim said the Chinese troops attempted to transgress into the

MAHAVIR CHAKRA, WAR-TIME MEDAL, FOR SANTOSH BABU

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 25

Col. Bikumalla Santosh Babu, Commanding Officer of 16 Bihar who lost his life while fighting Chinese troops in the Galwan Valley on June 15, has been awarded the second-highest wartime gallantry medal Mahavir Chakra posthumously on the Republic Day this year. India had lost 20 troops in the fiercest clash with the Chinese.

■ Full report on Page 4

Indian side of the frontier in Naku La but were stopped by the Indian military personnel. They said both sides brought in additional troops to Naku La following the brawl and the situation was under control so far.

It is also learnt that defence minister Rajnath Singh and the top military brass were apprised about the incident. The incident

at Naku La became public on Monday hours after senior commanders of both the armies concluded a nearly 16-hour-long meeting in an attempt to defuse tension in eastern Ladakh.

Naku La, located at an altitude of 16,000 feet, is the same site where Indian and Chinese troops had engaged in a fierce clash in May last year days after a violent face-off between the two sides in Pangong lake area in eastern Ladakh. Nearly 150 Indian and Chinese military personnel were engaged on May 9. At least 10 soldiers from both sides sustained injuries.

The incident in the Pangong lake area triggered the now nine-month-long military standoff in eastern Ladakh between the two sides.

When asked about the incident in Naku La, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said: "On the specific incident you mentioned, I don't have any information to offer."

Mr Zhao told a media briefing in Beijing that the Chinese border troops are committed to upholding peace and tranquillity along the border with India.

SPB Vibhushan, 3 Padmas for AP

NAGABHUSHAN
HOSKOTE AND PATHRI
RAJASEKHAR | DC
ANANTAPUR, NELLORE, NEW
DELHI, JAN. 25

AP-born singer S.P. Balasubrahmanyam was posthumously conferred the Padma Vibhushan on Monday, marking Republic

Day. The nation's second highest honour was also conferred on former PM of Japan Shinzo Abe.

Three artists from Andhra Pradesh were conferred the Padma Shri: Violinist Ramaswamy Annavarapu, who is 95 years old, Dalit author and poet Prakash Rao Asavadi

and Nidumolu Sumathi, one of the first female mridungam players.

In Telangana state, Kanaka Raju, 80, a veteran trainer of the Gussadi dance form of the Adivasis was conferred Padma Shri.

■ More reports on
Pages 2 and 4

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SHORT TAKES

NO NEED FOR CBI PROBE INTO TEMPLE ATTACKS: HC

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 25

Andhra Pradesh High Court ruled out any need for the CBI probe even as an inquiry was in progress by the Special Investigation Team on a series of attacks on temples in the state.

A division bench comprising Chief Justice Arup Kumar Goswami and Ch. Praveen Kumar heard a petition on Monday, seeking probe either by CBI or National Investigation Agency on attacks on temples. The court observed that as the state government had already constituted an SIT and inquiry was on and ruled out any need for a CBI inquiry on the issue. However, it said that in case the SIT failed to nab the culprits, then the petitioner could approach the court.

The court called for proper inquiry on attacks on temples.

NO STAFF TO TAKE NOMINATION AT MPDO OFFICE

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, JAN. 25

Sheik Shameemthaj, YSRC woman leader from Hindupur Rural mandal, tried to file her nomination for the Tumakunta gram panchayat sarpanch post on Monday morning. But she returned back after no officials and staff were found at the MPDO office in Hindupur.

TD candidates also tried to submit nomination papers at various MPDO offices in Anantapur district. But staff at these places were not available to collect nomination papers.

TD SLAMS MPDO FOR NOT RECEIVING NOMINATION PAPERS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 25

TD leaders pulled up Mandal Parishat Development Officer of Buchireddypalem mandal, Narasimha Rao, when the latter expressed his helplessness in receiving the nomination papers for panchayat elections on Monday.

Narasimha Rao maintained that they have not received any directions or nomination papers from higher authorities.

Taking a serious view of these developments, TDP leaders said they would complain to Governor and State Election Commissioner in this regard.

POLICE FOIL LAND GRAB ATTEMPT IN VIZAG

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 25

Visakhapatnam police on Monday arrested three persons on charges of trying to grab a piece of land belonging to an army man and attempting to sell it to a third party. The arrested have been identified as Kodigudla Venkata Ramana, Pachi Ramesh and Pothina Jaya Balakrishna, all residents of Visakhapatnam.

According to DCP (law and order) Aishwarya Rastogi, the complainant Golagani Kanakaraaju, a serving soldier in the Indian Army, had purchased about 138.88 square yards out of total 279 square yards from one Guttula Gangadhar Srinivas in January 2012 for ₹8.4 lakh at Bottavanipalem in Madhurawada.

The remaining land was bought by one Nelli Ramarao, with both deals being brokered by accused Pachi Ramesh. At that time, survey stones had been laid. But in August 2020, when Kanakaraaju visited the site, he found that the survey stones had been removed and the land levelled.

Fearing that someone was trying to grab their land, both Kanakaraaju and Ramarao built boundary walls. At that time, all three accused visited the site and threatened them.

Later, in absence of Kanakaraaju, who was posted at the Punjab border, the accused damaged the boundary wall and tried to construct a shed.

They also erected a board stating that the site was not for sale and belonged to one Vanapalli Nagamani, said the DCP. Based on a complaint filed by Kanakaraaju and Ramarao, police investigated and arrested the accused under various sections of AP Land Grabbing (Prohibition) Act and sent them to judicial remand on Monday.

All set for Republic Day celebrations



Illuminated secretariat buildings and premises on the occasion of 72nd Republic Day celebrations on Monday.

— DC

TD leaders in a jubilant mood

Supreme Court ruling on panchayat polls is a shot in the arm for TD, says Pasarla

DC CORRESPONDENTS
VISAKHAPATNAM/KADAPA/
NELLORE, JAN. 25

Kinjarapu Atchannaidu

Telugu Desam was in a jubilant mood following the Supreme Court ruling which on Monday cleared the conduct of the panchayats elections in the state.

“Democracy is still alive in Andhra Pradesh. The Supreme Court was firm in its order to maintain the tenets of the Constitution and allow the constitutional functionaries to discharge their duties independently,” said Telugu Desam state president Kinjarapu Atchannaidu.

Taking on the Chief Minister and the YSRC, Atchannaidu said Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had “killed” democracy in the state, weakened constitutional bodies and the legislature.

Kimidi Kala Venkat Rao, senior leader and politburo member, said it was a great victory for democracy and the people. “Elections were held in Kerala, Maharashtra and Bihar and the government plea on public health holds no water,” Venkat Rao said.

TD vice-president Pasarla Parasaid said the ruling was a shot in the arm for the TD, which would win most of the panchayats.

Senior TD leader Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy said the judgment was a slap on the face of those acting as extra-constitutional authorities.

He said that the Supreme Court bench consisting of five judges reiterated a judgment of the apex court in the past, when T.N. Seshan was heading the Central Election Commission, that courts should not intervene after the notification is given for the elections.

WE WERE WORRIED ABOUT PUBLIC HEALTH, SAYS RAMAKRISHNA

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM,
JAN. 25

Welcoming the SC order, the government adviser Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy said the state government was worried about the public health and had no ulterior motive in seeking postponement of the elections.

“We never wanted to show hegemony,” Ramakrishna Reddy said and

ld not intervene after the notification is given for the elections.

Reminding that people with minimum legal knowledge are aware about such issues, he said the constitutional crisis was unwarranted especially when the government had appointed scores of legal advisers.

Stressing that Supreme Court has taught a fitting lesson to the state government, he expressed surprise over the stance of the leaders of employees associations against elections even when the employees were ready for election duties. He told them to remember that farmers have not stopped cultivation and feeding people even when Covid was spreading like wildfire.

TD state secretary Kasibhatla Satya Sainath Sarma requested the employees to cooperate for smooth polling.

TD state executive secretary Balishetty Hariprasad said the Supreme Court verdict on the conduct of panchayat elections was laudable. The Governor and the Chief Minister had flouted the Constitution and could not continue in office.

The employees union leaders, who made it clear

added that he suspected some conspiracy in holding back ZTPC and MPTC elections and conducting only panchayats elections.

The government would discuss the vaccination process with the Central government in the light of Supreme Court judgment. The apex court was earlier informed that there would be a confusion if elections and vaccination was held simultaneously.

He asked the MPs to raise the issue of dues

From Page 1

Maintaining that they had written a series of letters to the Centre on the need to accord special tag to the state, he directed the MPs to raise the issue in the Parliament.

Referring to the state's move to develop 16 new medical colleges where three had already got approval, he asked the MPs to take it up with the Centre to get approval for the remaining 13 colleges. He assured the MPs that

worth ₹1,842.45 crore to AP as per recommendations of 14th and 15th Finance Commissions.

He said that AP was to get ₹2,255.7 crore from the Centre for taking up temporary restoration works of the infrastructure damaged during the Nivarcyclonic storm.

The Chief Minister urged to get approval for AP Disha Bill and AP Special Courts Bills.

Reddy called for raising issues like release of financial dues, including

Poll notice will be issued by returning officer on Feb. 10

From Page 1

As the state had moved the apex court seeking deferring of polls as it was preoccupied with the Covid-19 vaccination programme, the government awaited the verdict. However, with the Supreme Court allowing the conduct of Gram Panchayat polls, via its verdict delivered on Monday, the SEC has given the go-ahead for the polls under phases-II, III and IV as per earlier schedule as phases I, II and III on February 9, 13 and 17 respectively.

As per the rescheduled phase-IV of polls, election notice will be issued by the returning officer on February 10, to receive nominations from 10.30 am to 5 pm, and the last day for nominations for this phase will be February 12, up to 5 pm.

Scrutiny of nominations will be held on February



N. Ramesh Kumar

13 from 8 am. Appeal against rejection of nominations can be filed on February 14 up to 5 pm while the appeals will be taken up for consideration on February 15. The last date for withdrawal of candidature will be on February 16 up to 3 pm while publication of the final list of contestants will be done on February 16. Polling, wherever necessary, will be held on February 21 from 6.30 am to 3.30 pm while counting of votes will be taken up on the same day from 4

pm. Election of Upa-Sarpanch will also be held on the same day. In case the election of US is not held on the same day, it will be done the next day.

The SEC has authorised the district collectors and Andhra Pradesh state to indent the services of central government employees and members of central public sector undertakings for election-related work.

State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar has instructed district collectors to undertake election work without disruption by deploying state government employees and members of state public sector, state government organisations, members of state corporations and other entities in the first instance and avail the services of central employees as a last resort.



N. Tulasi Reddy

GOVT AND UNIONS SHOULD COOPERATE WITH SEC: TULASI

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JAN. 25

Pradesh Congress Committee working president Dr N. Tulasi Reddy said the state government and the unions should cooperate with the SEC to enable the elections to be held.

He urged the government, in coordination with the SEC, to conduct the elections in an impartial and free environment.

POLLS SHOULD BE HELD IN TRANSPARENT MANNER: CPM

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM/KADAPA/
NELLORE, JAN. 25

Ch. Narsinga Rao, state committee member of the CPI(M), said his party welcomed the apex court ruling and suggested that the polls be held in a transparent manner.

The state committee member of the CPI(M) wondered why the YSRC government was avoiding the elections when they were going to win them hands down.

Narsinga Rao said SEC Ramesh Kumar was performing his duties as prescribed by the Constitution and not to satisfy somebody's ego. There is no such evidence to pin him down.

The controversy made State Election Commissioner as popular as the Chief Minister.

SC FINDS FAULT WITH STAFF'S RESOLUTIONS

From Page 1

Government senior counsel Mukul Rohatgi argued that holding gram panchayat elections were difficult as the state government was preoccupied with Covid-19 vaccination programme and more than five lakh persons were to be vaccinated.

He asked whether the state government should allow its employees to conduct polls without undergoing vaccination and fall prey.

Rohatgi said Goa had deferred the polls for the same reason. He informed the court that gram panchayat polls could be held from March 1 considering that by the end of January, all healthcare workers could be vaccinated.

However, the court observed, “Whenever there are elections, you come to the court. The point of AP HC order was to have elections held and it is the SEC which has to hold them. Look at the grounds in your petition. How is the State Election Commissioner acting in a mala-fide manner while employees' associations are passing resolutions against him.”

Though Rohatgi tried to convince that the government is not concerned with the dispute with the Election Commissioner, the court remarked, “Your appeal only gives this impression. You are talking about when the Election Commissioner will retire. In the past, elections have been successfully held in even more difficult times.”

It may be mentioned that the State Election Commission issued election proceedings to conduct gram panchayat polls in four phases on January 8.

When the state government challenged it before a single judge in the High Court, the latter issued an interim order setting aside election proceedings. The SEC then moved the regular bench, which set aside the single judge's interim order and allowed conduct of gram panchayat polls.

Land allotted to Class IV staff in Pulivendula mine: Krishna

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JAN. 25

A man named Thandava Krishna has claimed that the land on which house deeds have been given to Class IV employees in Pulivendula town of Kadapa district belongs to him. Speaking to reporters on Monday, Krishna disputed MLC B. Tech Ravi's accusations that

land belonging to Class IV employees had been encroached by YSRC leaders. He maintained that in 1970, the government had leased five acres of land next to the market yard near Pulivendula Ring Road to a man named Dandu Gangaiah as a DKT deed. Shortly afterward the market yard took 2.10 acres of it for its own use, leaving only 2.9 acres.

WE CAN'T MEET VACCINE TIMELINE, SAYS CHIEF SECY

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 25

The decision to send the names of a panel of officials was taken after the state government had decided in principle to cooperate with the State Election Commission in the conduct of gram panchayat polls.

The government is also likely to transfer Panchayat Raj department's senior officials Gopalakrishna Dwivedi and Girija Sankar as sought by the SEC for their alleged failure to update the electoral rolls.

A voter, meanwhile, has approached the High Court on Monday questioning the SEC's decision to go ahead with the 2019 electoral rolls which she said denied her right to vote.

The Chief Secretary has also sought the guidance of the Union health ministry on achieving the twin objectives of holding panchayat polls and implementing the vaccination programme as suggested by the Andhra Pradesh High Court.

Explaining in detail about the difficulties involved in carrying out both the tasks simultaneously, the Chief Secretary in a letter to Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan said the frontline workers and police would have to move from one place to another, which makes it difficult for the government to stick to the vaccination schedule.

“It is an emotional issue also because the government has to force a health worker or police personnel to attend the poll duty first exposing themselves to the virus at a time when they have to be actually vaccinated as a measure of protection from the same virus,” a senior official pointed out.

The state government also received a shock from the Union health ministry which initially had opposed conducting polls and vaccination programme simultaneously, but later it changed its version.

Reminding the Centre about a few fatalities after vaccination, including one in Andhra Pradesh, Mr Das said the recipient of the vaccine should not be put to unnecessary stress and they have to be monitored closely. Almost nine lakh people have to be covered in the first two phases have yet to be vaccinated.

HC DIRECTS DGP, SECY TO APPEAR ON JAN. 27

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 25

The AP High Court directed the director general of police and Home Secretary to appear before it on Jan. 27.

As a contempt of court petition was filed for failing to give promotion to a police officer even after direction from the high court earlier, the court directed both the DGP and the Home Secretary to appear before it.

However, the duo filed an affidavit stating that they could not attend the court as they were preoccupied with attending election duty.

However, during the hearing held on Monday, the court expressed its displeasure and directed both the senior officials to appear before it.

Krishna said the land was later bought from Gangaiah by his father Padda Kullayappa in 1984. He said he was very young at the time. As he could cultivate the land after his father died in 1995, he migrated to another place. On finding the land vacant, Class 4th staff took house deeds on the land from the then village revenue officer.

SHORT TAKES

COVID-19 CASES
SHOW NO SIGNS OF
LET UP IN KERALAGILVESTER ASSARY | DC
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
JAN. 25

With 72,891 total active cases, 6,000 plus cases reported during the last five consecutive days and a test positivity rate of 12.48 per cent, the Covid-19 situation in Kerala continues to be worrying.

The state is recording the highest number of daily cases in the country at the moment. Ernakulam and Kozhikode districts have reported more than 1,000 cases daily over the past few days.

If the situation continues in this manner, various affected districts might face shortage of ventilators and ICU beds. While schools (higher classes), colleges, cinema, theatres, bars have all started functioning, there is laxity in enforcing safety protocols.

The effective break-the-chain campaign that was witnessed in the state for many months, too has slackened now. Though a majority of people are wearing masks in public places, there is crowding in malls, shopping centres, social gatherings including marriages and parks which is a cause of concern.

But the government sources maintain that the situation is under control. Dr Mohammad Asheel who is part of the government's high level Covid management team, said the current cases in the state were on the expected lines. Unlike many other states, Kerala had delayed the peak of Covid-19 pandemic, due to stringent restrictions and effective infection control measures. This is one of the reasons that the state is continuing to report a high number of cases.

STATES TOLD TO
CHECK 'VACCINE
RUMOURS'DC CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, JAN. 25

The Centre has asked state governments to "check vaccine rumours" and take penal actions against those indulging in spreading falsehood over the efficacy and safety of the Covid-19 vaccines.

"Such kind of rumour mongering, particularly by vested interests, can create unwarranted doubts among people at large, and there is, therefore, a need to check all kinds of unfounded scare-mongering relating to the safety and immunogenicity of the vaccines," Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla has told the state governments. He added penal action may be taken against the persons or organisations found to have been indulged in rumour mongering under the relevant provisions of the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and the Indian Penal Code, 1860.

On Monday, the 10th day of the vaccination drive, close to 3.35 lakh healthcare and front-line workers got inoculated. So far more than 19.5 lakh people have got the jab. There were 13,203 fresh cases of Covid-19 detected in the last 24 hours and 131 deaths were reported.

As per Union health ministry, India's active caseload has fallen to 1.84 lakh and the share of active cases in the total positive cases has further shrunk to 1.73%. "A bulk of the active cases are contributed by merely two states. Kerala and Maharashtra alone account for more than 64.71% of the total active cases. Kerala accounts for 39.7% of the active cases whereas Maharashtra contributes 25% of the total active cases," the health ministry said.

HIGHEST | HONOURS

16 get Padma award posthumously this year

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 25

The government on Monday announced the Padma Awards on the eve of the Republic Day. This year, the President has approved 119 Padma Awards. The list comprises 7 Padma Vibhushan, 10 Padma Bhushan and 102 Padma Shri Awards. As many as 29 of these awardees are women and the list also includes 10 persons from the category of Foreigners, NRI, PIO and OCI while were 16 are Posthumous awardees and one transgender awardee.

The prominent awardees this year include former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe and singer S.P.

Balasubramaniam among the Padma Vibhushan recipients.

Noted archaeologist B.B. Lal has also been given the Padma Vibhushan. He had floated the 'pillar base theory' at the disputed Babri Masjid site claiming that these pillars were identi-

fied as those of temples. Padma Bhushan was given posthumously to former Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi, former Union Minister Ram Vilas Paswan, former Gujarat CM Keshubhai Patel. Former Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan, religious

leader Kalbe Sadiq and former Principal Secretary to PM. Nripendra Mishra have also been awarded the Padma Bhushan.

Former Governor of Goa Mridula Sinha has been awarded Padma Shri posthumously. 1971 Bangladesh war vet-

eran Lt Col Quazi Sajjad Ali Zahid and Bangladeshi artist Sanjida Khatun were awarded Padma Shri.

Other Padma Shri awardees include P. Anitha for sports, Rajni Bector for Trade and Industry, Peter Brook from United Kingdom for Art, Nicolas

Kazanas from Greece for Literature and Education.

The list of Padma Shri awardees has a maximum of 102 people both from India and abroad which also includes some posthumously in different fields like medicine, arts, culture.

Mahavir Chakra for
Col. Santosh Babu

Babu led his troops against the Chinese attack in Galwan

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 25

Col Bikumalla Santosh Babu, Commanding Officer of 16 Bihar who lost his life while fighting Chinese troops in the Galwan Valley on June 15, has been awarded the second-highest wartime gallantry medal Mahavir Chakra posthumously on the Republic Day.

India had lost 20 troops in the fiercest clash with the Chinese who also suffered casualties in the Galwan Valley.

Five soldiers have been given third highest war time gallantry award Vir Chakra for their bravery in the Galwan Valley clash, out of which four are posthumously. 14 have been awarded Sena Medal (Gallantry) posthumously for their bravery against Chinese troops.

Those who have been awarded Vir Chakra posthumously are Naib Subedar Nurudam Soren (16 Bihar), Hav K. Palani (81 Field Regiment), N.K. Deepak Singh (16 Bihar) and Sep Gurtej Singh (3 Punjab). Hav Tejinder Singh from three Medium Regiment has also been awarded with Vir Chakra

PREZ APPROVES JEEVAN RAKSHA
PADAK AWARDS FOR 40 RESCUERS

New Delhi, Jan. 25: President Ram Nath Kovind has approved the conferring of Jeevan Raksha Padak awards for meritorious acts of saving lives to 40 people, including a Kerala man who will be honoured with the Sarvottam Jeevan Raksha Padak posthumously.

According to a Home Ministry statement, Uttam Jeevan Raksha Padak will be conferred to eight persons and Jeevan Raksha Padak to 31 others.

for his bravery during Galwan Valley clash with PLA soldiers.

Colonel Babu was deployed in Galwan Valley (Eastern Ladakh) during Operation Snow Leopard on June 15 last year and was tasked to establish an Observation Post in face of the enemy. "Organising and briefing his troops about the situation with a sound plan, he successfully exe-

cuted the task," said the citation. While holding the position his column faced stiff resistance from the adversary who attacked using lethal and sharp weapons along with heavy stone pelting from adjoining heights.

"Undaunted by the violent and aggressive action by overwhelming strength of enemy soldiers, the officer in true spirit of service before self, continued to resist the enemy's attempt to pushback Indian troops," it said. "Despite being grievously injured, Colonel Babu led from the front with absolute command and control despite hostile conditions to deter the vicious enemy attack at his position. In the skirmish that broke out and ensuing hand to hand combat with enemy soldiers, he valiantly resisted the enemy attack till his last breath, inspiring and motivating his troops to hold ground," it said.

Havildar Palani who has been awarded Vir Chakra (posthumous) was also deployed in Galwan Valley. On night of 15 June 2020, he was part of patrol of 16 Bihar tasked to establish an Observation Post. In a close hand to hand fight he fought valiantly and saved his subordinates from the aggressive action of the enemy soldiers. However, suddenly, the adversaries outnumbered and encircled him. With utter disregard to his personal safety, he stood bravely and tried to defend his comrades even when the enemy attacked him with sharp weapon injuring him seriously."

to resist the enemy's attempt to pushback Indian troops," it said.

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India, China to push for
an early disengagementDC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 25

In what seems to be a breakthrough, India and China on Sunday during Corps Commanders level talks "agreed to push for an early disengagement of the frontline troops" in the Eastern Ladakh, according to a joint statement issued by Indian army and PLA.

Both sides agreed to "hold the 10th round of the Corps Commander level meeting at an early date to jointly advance de-escalation."

India and China on Sunday held the 9th round of Corps Commanders level talks to resolve the military stand-off in the Eastern Ladakh. The meeting which started at around 11 am in Moldo on the Chinese side of LAC went for nearly 16 hours till 2:30 am.

"The two sides had a candid and in-depth exchange of views on disengagement along the Line of Actual Control in the Western Sector of China-India border areas," said the joint statement.

It said that the two sides agreed that this round of meeting was positive, practical and constructive, which further enhanced mutual trust and understanding.

"The two sides agreed to push for an early disengagement of the frontline troops. They also agreed to follow the important consensus of their state leaders, maintain the good momentum of dialogue and negotiation, and hold the 10th round of the Corps Commander Level Meeting at an early date to jointly advance de-escalation," it said.

The two sides also agreed to continue their effective efforts in ensuring the restraint of the frontline troops, stabilise and control the situation along the LAC in the Western Sector of the China-India border, and jointly maintain peace and tranquility.

The Indian delegation was led by 14 Corps commander Lt-General PGK Menon and also included a joint secretary from the external affairs ministry.

India and China have been involved in a military stand-off in Eastern Ladakh from last nine months where each side has deployed around 50,000 troops along with tanks, and artillery.

Despite temperatures dipping to minus 30 degrees Celsius in the region, both India and China have maintained troops at forward posts

this winter at LAC in Ladakh.

Earlier in June and then in July, India and China had agreed to mutually move back from Galwan Valley, Gogra Post, Hot Springs and Pangong Tso.

However, it was only in Galwan Valley that both troops had moved back to some extent.

In Pangong Tso, the Chinese army had refused to move back from the ridgelines of Finger 4 and whole of Finger 5 to 8 area which it had illegally occupied in May. In Gogra Post and Hot Springs also there was no clarity on China disengagement. Besides, in Depsang Plains Chinese troops have been preventing Indian army from patrolling.

China had been pushing India to vacate strategic heights which Indian army had occupied on the South bank of Pangong Tso in a surprise action in August.

This gives Indian Army a strategic advantage and chocked Chinese army movement in the sector. China has been mainly interested in getting India vacated these strategic heights.

However, India's stand was that it will discuss disengagement of the whole Eastern Ladakh and not just few points.

DIDI WARNS OF
BEFITTING REPLY
TO HER 'INSULT'RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, JAN. 25

Branding the 'Jai Shree Ram' sloganers as "religious fanatics" for "teasing" her in presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Centre's Parakram Diwas celebration in Victoria Memorial, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday warned the BJP of her retaliation with a "befitting reply" to her "insult" in the Assembly election.

The Trinamul Congress supremo also made it clear that she would prefer to "slit her throat" by herself instead of bowing down to the saffron party. At Purshura in Hooghly she alleged, "Netaji belongs to all. When I attended the event on him, some religious fanatics and illiterate teased me in front of the PM. How dare they? They do not know me."

Warning the BJP of her retaliation, the angry CM said, "I will pay them back with a befitting reply through politics instead of guns. At the event I expressed gratitude on my part. Had they chanted Netaji, I would have given them a salute. Instead, they insulted Bengal and Netaji. Earlier they disrespected Rabindranath Tagore and Ishwarachandra Vidyasagar also."

She claimed, "As long as I live, I will fight keeping my head high. If I have to bow down, I will do it in front of the mass. Rather than bowing down to the BJP, it is better for me to slit my throat."

Describing the TMC turncoats as "thieves", Banerjee argued that they defected to the BJP to stash their ill-gotten wealth because they knew her party would not give them tickets this time to contest the polls.

HC's skin-to-skin
verdict: Maha govt
urged to file appealSHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, JAN. 25

National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) asked the Maharashtra government on Monday to file an urgent appeal against a recent Bombay High Court judgment that said an act cannot be termed as sexual assault if there is no "skin-to-skin" contact.

A single Judge bench of the Bombay High Court in its judgment passed on January 19, ruled that groping without 'skin-to-skin' contact is not sexual assault as defined under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Pocso) Act. According to this judgment an act cannot be termed as sexual assault if there is no "skin-to-skin contact".

The court opined that touching a minor's chest would not amount to sexual assault unless the accused removed the top worn by the child or slid their hand

within the child's garment.

Following this judgment Priyanka Kanoongo, the chairperson of the NCPCR wrote a letter to the state chief secretary. In her letter she has asked the government of Maharashtra to file an urgent appeal against the HC order. She has stated that the words "skin-to-skin touch with sexual intention without penetration" mentioned in the judgement also need to be reviewed and the state should take note of this as it seems to be derogatory to the minor victim in the case.

The judgement has drawn the ire of child rights bodies and activists across the country.

Kanoongo in her letter has also stated that considering the seriousness of the issue, the commission being the monitoring body under section 44 of the POCSO Act, 2012 requests you to take necessary steps in the matter and file an urgent appeal against the aforesaid impugned judgment of the High Court.

India's 1st snow igloo
café comes up in J&KYUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, JAN. 25

India's first snow igloo café has come up at Gulmarg, one of the Asia's premier ski resorts situated in the Pir Panjal Range of the Himalayas at an altitude of 2,650 m (8,694 ft) and about 56 km from capital Srinagar.

Set up by a local group of hotels on the lawns of its property in the cup-shaped valley, the igloo is 22 feet wide and 12.5 feet high from inside and can accommodate 16 people at any given time for lunch or dinner or just to have coffee or tea. The owners claim the café can make to the Limca book of records for it being Asia's biggest igloo.

An igloo, also known as a snow house or snow hut, is a type of shelter built of 'suitable' snow. Gulmarg like many other parts of the Valley received several spells of major snowfall in recent weeks and has recorded below-freezing temperatures constantly since mid-November last.

Waseem Shah, managing director of Kolahoi Green Group of Hotels and Resorts, said that the idea to set up Kashmir's very first igloo café crept into his mind after the family built a small (8x7 feet) igloo at its Srinagar home. "The idea of building an igloo café

emerged after we built one at my home during the snow season in Srinagar. It garnered a lot of attention and we all got excited. Soon thereafter we decided to build one outside our Gulmarg hotel," he said. He added, "Its outside dimensions are 26 feet wide and 15 feet high. And we are already in talks of getting it recorded as Asia's biggest igloo."

Shah said, "The concept of a snow restaurant is very new to India although it has been tested successfully in Finland, Canada, Switzerland and some other countries. We wanted to do something dramatic for our guests and patrons and hence we came up with an idea of a snow restaurant". The task was accomplished with a team of 20 members working in two shifts in 15 days.

Snow igloos are normally built in a catenary curve, a shape more closely resembling a paraboloid and are necessarily not spherical. This is done so that the stresses of snow, as it ages and compresses, do not cause to buckle because in an inverted paraboloid or catenoid the pressures are nearer to being exclusively compressive. "We threw it open for the public today (Monday). The response has been mashaAllah (what God has willed) tremendous," he added.

PADMA VIBHUSHAN



S.P. Balasubramaniam



Shinzo Abe

PADMA BHUSHAN



Sumitra Mahajan



Ram Vilas Paswan



Tarun Gogoi

PADMA SHRI



Sindhutai Sapkal

SHORT TAKES

19 CHARRED BODIES FOUND IN MEXICO

Ciudad Victoria, Mexico, Jan. 25: At least 19 charred corpses have been discovered in Mexico near the US border in an area where drug cartels often clash, the Tamaulipas state prosecutor's office said.

Police on Saturday found two burnt-out vehicles containing human remains on a country road near the town of Camargo. Preliminary investigations suggested the victims had been shot, then their bodies set alight. Because no bullet casings were found at the scene, police said it was possible the victims were killed in a different location.

Autopsies are underway, but identification of the corpses will be complicated due to their condition.

A prosecutor's office official said that an investigation has been launched to determine whether the victims were undocumented migrants.

AID GROUPS WANT YEMEN REBELS' 'TERROR' LIST OUT

Dubai, Jan. 25: Twenty-two aid groups working in Yemen urged US President Joe Biden on Sunday to remove the war-torn country's Huthi rebels from a terror blacklist, saying it could put millions of lives at risk. The Trump administration's move against the insurgents had come into effect the day before Biden took office, to resounding criticism from experts, the United Nations and aid groups.

"This designation comes at a time when famine is a very real threat to a country devastated by six years of conflict, and it must be revoked immediately," said a joint statement Sunday by 22 groups.

"Any disruption to lifesaving aid operations and commercial imports of food, fuel, medicine and other essential goods will put millions of lives at risk."

The Iran-allied Huthis seized the capital Sanaa and much of northern Yemen in 2014, sparking a Saudi-led intervention the following year.

SURROUNDED, U.S. POLICE CAR HITS CROWD

Washington, Jan. 25: A police officer surrounded by a crowd in the US state of Washington struck and injured at least one person with his car as he sought to drive away, authorities said.

About 100 people and several cars were blocking an intersection, reportedly for an illegal car rally, on Saturday night in downtown Tacoma when police were called to the area.

After an officer in his car tried to clear the area, a crowd began hitting the vehicle's body and windows, Tacoma police said in a statement.

"While trying to extricate himself from an unsafe position, the officer drove forward, striking one individual and may have impacted others," the police said, adding that the person was taken to a hospital in unknown condition. Tacoma resident Sarah Jones told CBS she witnessed the scene that included a "mountain of people" being hit.

"I don't know if he panicked or what but his car was surrounded," Jones said.

GREECE, TURKEY IN FIRST CRISIS TALK SINCE 2016

Istanbul, Jan. 25: Greece and Turkey bowed to EU and NATO pressure on Monday and opened the first direct talks in nearly five years over their explosive eastern Mediterranean standoff.

The Istanbul meeting is not expected to make major headway after the two NATO neighbours' gunboats collided in August as their dispute over energy and borders threatened to spiral out of control.

But it adds to the positive tone Turkish President Recep Erdogan has been setting as he tries to repair damaged relations with Europe in the face of a potentially more hostile US administration under President Joe Biden.

And it could lay the groundwork for the eventual delineation of one of the world's most recently discovered regions of proven natural gas reserves. Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias said over the weekend that Athens was entering the so-called exploratory talks "in good faith" a comment echoed by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu.

GOP opposes Don impeachment trial

Washington, Jan. 25: As the House prepares to bring the impeachment charge against Donald Trump to the Senate for trial, a growing number of Republican senators say they are opposed to the proceeding, dimming the chances that former president will be convicted on the charge that he incited a siege of the US Capitol. House Democrats will carry the sole impeachment charge of "incitement of insurrection" across the Capitol late Monday evening, a rare and ceremonial walk to the Senate by the prosecutors who will argue their case.

They are hoping that strong Republican denunciations of Trump after the Jan. 6 riot will translate into a conviction and a separate vote to bar Trump from holding office again. But instead, GOP passions appear to have cooled since the insurrection. Now that Trump's presidency is over, Republican senators who will serve as jurors in the trial are rallying to his legal defense, as they did during his first impeachment trial last year. "I think the trial is stupid. I think it's counterproductive," said Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla..

He said that "the first chance I get to vote to end this trial, I'll do it" because he believes it would be bad for the country and further inflame partisan divisions. Trump is the first former president to face impeachment trial, and it will test his grip on the Republican Party as well as the legacy of his tenure, which came to a close as a mob of loyal supporters heeded his rally cry by storming the Capitol and trying to

BIDEN TO DROP TRANSGENDER BAN IN MILITARY

Washington, Jan. 25: President Joe Biden is set to issue an executive order to reverse a Pentagon policy that largely bars transgender individuals from joining the military, dumping a ban ordered by President Donald Trump in a tweet during his first year in office.

Biden has been widely expected to overturn the Trump policy in his early days in office. The White House could announce the move as early as Monday, according to the person briefed on the decision who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the order. The move to reverse the policy has the support of Biden's newly confirmed defence secretary, retired Army Gen. Lloyd Austin, who spoke of the need to overturn it during his Senate confirmation hearing last week. — AP

overturn Joe Biden's election. The proceedings will also force Democrats, who have a full sweep of party control of the White House and Congress, to balance their promise to hold the former president accountable while also rushing to deliver on Biden's priorities.

Arguments in the Senate trial will begin the week of Feb. 8. Leaders in both parties agreed to the short delay to give Trump's team and House prosecutors time to prepare and the Senate to confirm some of Biden's Cabinet nominees. — AP

'Made in America' goods get US nod

Washington, Jan. 25: US President Joe Biden will sign a series of executive orders on Monday to promote "Made in America" products and strengthen supply chains, senior officials said, asserting that the new administration remains committed to working with partners and allies to modernise international trade rules.

Prominent among the executive orders include a strict enforcement of procuring products made inside the country by federal agencies. This is very significant given that contracting alone accounts for nearly \$600 billion in federal spending. Biden is taking action to reset the US government's longstanding approach to domestic preferences to create an approach that will remain durable for years to come and grow quality, union jobs, according to a senior administration official. It is long overdue that the US government utilises the full force of current domestic preferences to support America's workers and businesses, strengthening the economy, workers, and communities across the country, the official said. — PTI

Kamala moves in to Blair House

Washington, Jan. 25: US Vice President Kamala Harris is temporarily staying at the historic Blair House here as her official residence is undergoing repairs, her spokesperson said. Across the White House on Pennsylvania Avenue, Blair House is the official guest house of the US President. The official residence of the vice president is located within the Naval Observatory Complex and is about seven kilometres northwest of the White House.

The vice president's chief spokesperson, Symone Sanders, told reporters here on Saturday that Harris moved in on Thursday. Born to a Jamaican father and an Indian mother, 56-year-old Harris made history on January 20 when she was

sworn in as the first female, first PoC and first Asian-American US vice-president. They (Harris and husband Doug Emhoff) are living there while repairs are done at the vice president's residence at the Naval Observatory," Sanders said.

The Washington Post reported Sunday that crews are working on new liners for the chimneys, among other changes in the 33-room official residence of the vice president, which was built in 1893. Blair House, built as a private house in 1824, is the guest house of the US President since 1942, where visiting foreign dignitaries normally stay. In recent years, PM Narendra Modi and several other Indian leaders have stayed in this historic building. — PTI

US to re-impose travel ban, says White House official

Curbs applicable on non-US citizens who went to UK, Brazil, most of EU

Washington, Jan. 25: US President Joe Biden will re-impose a Covid-19 travel ban on most non-US citizens who have been in Britain, Brazil, Ireland and much of Europe, a White House official said Sunday, as the new administration ramps up its pandemic response.

Biden will also on Monday extend the ban to travelers who have recently been to South Africa amid warnings that new, more transmissible coronavirus variants are already establishing themselves in the United States, the official said, confirming US media reports.

The new president last week tightened mask wearing rules and ordered quarantine for people flying into the United States, as he seeks to tackle the country's worsening coronavirus crisis.

Biden has said that the Covid-19 death toll would likely rise from 420,000 to half a million next month -- and that drastic action was needed.

"We're in a national emergency. It's time we treated it like one," he said on Thursday.

In his last days in office, Donald Trump announced that a Covid-19 ban on travelers arriving from much of Europe and Brazil would be lifted -- but the Biden administration immediately said it would reverse the order due to come into effect on January 26.

Trump had announced an initial ban on January 31, 2020 on non-American travelers entering from China to try to stop the spread of the coronavirus. The ban was extended to European countries on March 14 as the pandemic entered full force.

More than 25 million Covid-19 cases have been recorded in the US since the pandemic began, according to the Johns Hopkins University tally on Sunday.

The milestone was reached only five days after the US, the world's wealthiest and hardest-hit nation, recorded 400,000 deaths from the disease.

Biden has made fighting the coronavirus a priority and is pushing for Congress to approve a \$1.9-trillion relief package that would include billions of dollars to boost vaccination rates. The president, who was inaugurated on January 20, has said he wants 100 million people vaccinated within his first 100 days in office, and he has called for Americans to wear masks for 100 days. — AFP



A burnt out Covid-19 testing centre is seen after being set on fire in Urk, 80 kilometres (50 miles) northeast of Amsterdam. Dutch police have clashed with protesters demonstrating against the country's lockdown in the capital Amsterdam and the southern city of Eindhoven. — AP

Dutch protesters, cops clash

● IN THE Netherlands, a Covid-19 testing centre was burned in one village, while police used tear gas against demonstrators in Eindhoven, where cars were burned and businesses looted, and deployed water cannon and dogs in central Amsterdam.

Paris, Jan. 25: Clashes broke out in the Netherlands on Sunday as anti-few demonstrators protested against coronavirus restrictions, while France imposed new border controls with numerous countries under pressure to slow the spread of new variants.

France introduced a requirement for incoming travellers from EU neighbours to show a recent negative coronavirus test and Israel announced it would "close" its skies to almost all aircrafts.

In the US, Johns Hopkins University said the coun-

try had topped 25 million cases, remaining the hardest-hit after almost 99 million infections and over 2.1 million deaths worldwide.

In the Netherlands, a Covid-19 testing centre

was burned in one village, while police used tear gas against demonstrators in Eindhoven, where cars were burned and businesses looted, and deployed water cannon and dogs in central Amsterdam.

"The fire in a screening centre in Urk goes beyond all limits," Health Minister Hugo de Jonge said.

The clashes came on the first day of a new 9 pm to 4:30 am curfew, the country's first since World War II.

In Denmark, two men were arrested on Saturday

night for burning an effigy of Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen at an anti-restriction protest, while thousands marched against virus measures in Spanish capital Madrid.

France imposed a requirement for a negative PCR test for arrivals by sea and air from European Union neighbours — a measure required for non-EU arrivals since mid-January.

The rule does not apply to those travelling by land, including thousands of cross-border workers.

— AFP

Israel targets flights, religious scofflaws as infections rage

Jerusalem, Jan. 24: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday said Israel will be closing its international airport to nearly all flights, while Israeli police clashed with ultra-Orthodox protesters and the government raced to bring a raging Coronavirus outbreak under control. The entry of highly contagious variants of the virus, coupled with poor enforcement of safety ru-

les in ultra-Orthodox communities, has contributed to one of the world's highest rates of infections.

It also has threatened to undercut Israel's highly successful campaign to vaccinate its population against the virus. In just a month, Israel has vaccinated over a quarter of its 9.2 million people.

At the same time, the virus continues to race through the country, with authorities confirming an

average of over 8,000 new cases a day. Late Sunday, the Israeli Cabinet approved a tight closure on nearly all incoming and outgoing air traffic.

The government said it would make exceptions for a small number of humanitarian cases — such as funerals and medical patients — and cargo flights. "We are closing the skies hermetically, except for really rare exception," Netanyahu said. — AP

MEXICO'S PREZ SAYS HE'S TESTED +VE FOR COVID-19

Mexico City, Jan. 25: Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has said that he has tested positive for Covid-19 and that the symptoms are mild. Mexico's president, who has been criticised for his handling of his country's pandemic and for not setting an example of prevention in public, said on his official Twitter account that he is under medical treatment.

"I regret to inform you that I am infected with Covid-19," he tweeted. "The symptoms are mild but I am already under medical treatment. As always, I am optimistic. We will all move forward." José Luis Alomía Zegarra, Mexico's director of epidemiology, said López Obrador had a "light" case of Covid-19 and was "isolating at home."

Mexico's president wrote that while he recovered Interior Secretary Olga Sánchez Cordero would be taking over for him in his daily news conferences, at which he usually speaks for two hours without breaks each weekday.

López Obrador, 67, has rarely been seen wearing a mask and continued to keep up a busy travel schedule taking commercial flights.

— AP

B'desh gets vaccines from India

Dhaka, Jan. 25: Bangladesh on Monday received the first consignment of the 5 million doses of Covishield vaccines from India under a procurement agreement, four days after New Delhi gifted 2 million doses of the vaccine to Dhaka.

A special Air India flight carrying the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine co-manufactured by Serum Institute of India reached the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport earlier in the day to be initially stored at a warehouse of private Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd ahead of their planned coun-

trywide distribution.

Bangladesh has so far purchased 30 million doses from the Serum Institute of India through private Beximco pharmaceuticals under a tripartite agreement. The vaccines are being transported to Beximco warehouses in Tongi on the outskirts of the capital Dhaka in special freezer vans, Beximco Pharma's managing director Nazmul Hassan told reporters after receiving the consignment at the airport.

Health officials said the government experts would check the vaccine samples to see if any temperature fluctuation affected

their efficacy and the expiry dates.

"Beximco Pharma will send the vaccines to civil surgeons at all of the 64 (administrative) districts after obtaining certificates from the Drug Administration," a health ministry statement said.

Bangladesh is expected to get 50 lakh of vaccines every month from India in the coming months, Health minister Zahid Maleque said earlier.

Bangladesh will start the nationwide Covid-19 vaccine distribution from early February. Officials say they have formed 7,344 distribution teams com-

prising six health workers while about 42,000 health workers are being trained. Bangladesh has reported more than 532,000 Coronavirus cases so far with over 8,000 deaths.

India is one of the world's biggest drugmakers and an increasing number of countries have already approached it for procuring the Coronavirus vaccines. In the last few days, India has sent consignments of domestically produced Coronavirus vaccines under grant assistance to Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Mauritius and Seychelles. — PTI

RELIGIOUS | CORRIDOR

Majestic architecture will have a distinct Arabian look

Dubai Hindu temple to open Diwali '22

Dubai, Jan. 25: A majestic new Hindu temple with a distinct Arabian look is expected to open its doors for worshippers in Dubai by October next year during Diwali, according to media reports here.

The new temple is being constructed adjacent to the Guru Nanak Darbar in Jebel Ali, making the locality a multi-religious corridor in the city. The temple is an extension of the Sindhi Guru Darbar Temple in Souq Baniyas, Bur Dubai, one of the oldest Hindu temples in the

United Arab Emirates, open since the 1950s.

According to a report in *Khaleej Times*, the 25,000 sq ft temple will be built at an estimated cost of Dirham 75 million (Rs 1,48,86,24,396). Raju Shroff, an Indian businessman and one of the trustees of the Sindhi Guru Darbar Temple, announced on Sunday that the construction of the temple is underway, and the basement of the structure is complete.

"Piling, shoring and casting of basements one and two are complete as of

now. We are on track to open during Diwali 2022," *Khaleej Times* quoted Shroff as saying. The temple's foundation-stone-laying ceremony took place in February last year.

"Once complete, there will be several churches, the Sikh Guru Nanak Darbar, and a Hindu temple in the same location," Shroff said. The temple will be home to 11 Hindu deities, he added. The temple's architecture will have a distinct Arabian look.

"We want to give back to the local economy and this

our way to repay the gratitude we have for the UAE leadership for celebrating religious tolerance," Shroff said. He added that worshippers could use the spacious 4,000 sq ft banquet hall for cultural events, religious gatherings and community get-togethers.

The temple intends to display a subtle blend of contemporary Hindu and Arabic elements, *Gulf News* said. The temple is an east-facing structure, designed as per norms of Indian Temple Archite-

cture and Hindu Vastu Shastra.

The temple structure includes two basements, a ground floor and first floor. The total height of the temple is 24 metres, it said. The columns on the façade and interior take inspiration from the traditional columns of the Somnath Temple in Gujarat. The main dome is inspired by the Nagara style of Hindu temple architecture found predominantly in north India.

— PTI

DECCAN Chronicle

26 JANUARY 2021

A time to introspect, and tackle crises with vision

This Republic Day, which comes at the end of our *annus horribilis*, the miserable year of 2020 during which the world was devastated due to the novel Coronavirus pandemic, has to be one in which we must summon fortitude and determination in the face of great adversity, rather than prepare for the celebration of any achievement, for there are none.

The aftershocks of China's continuing invasion of Indian territory in Ladakh have still to be dealt with. This invasion has shown that our guard was down — diplomatically and militarily. The great farmers' uprising — the biggest since Independence — to protest against three agricultural laws is still ongoing.

If steps are not taken on an emergency basis, this can spin out of control. We urge the government to be practical for the sake of the country and show flexibility and compassion, rather than rigidity or exhibit the coercive powers of the State.

The world has fast-tracked the established procedures of science to deal with Covid-19 on an emergency basis and vaccines have at last become available. In India, we are manufacturing an international brand as well as a home-made one.

These bring hope, but also uncertainties. It is too early to judge the outcomes of vaccination being administered under emergency protocols.

The best hope is that the available vaccines will at least not cause damage to the human body even if they don't prove wholly efficacious or effective against the virus. After millions of deaths the world over and in India more than one lakh, we also don't know whether or not to expect a second wave.

The role of the government in India has raised many questions. Proactively, the government imposed the world's most severe lockdown to contain the virus' transmission and prayed for the rest. Not placing faith in science at the start, it condoned the transfer of blame for the virus on a communal basis to the country's largest minority. An already fragile

social life was rendered more vulnerable. Due to some wholly irrational steps that were taken, the already battered economy now stands devastated. The rate of growth is at minus seven per cent, according to official data.

The hard to digest aspect of the government's response has been its stubborn refusal to release funds, except on the most perfunctory basis, to the vulnerable sections of the people and the economy in order to kickstart economic activity. This was the opposite of what other major nations did.

Ironically, in the pandemic period, the assets of billionaires in India have gone up 35 per cent, according to a recent Oxfam report, which refers to Covid-19 as the "inequality virus". At the same time, roughly 100 million Indians found themselves out of work. These were the seasonal workforce or workers in the informal sector, which is the biggest generator of employment outside agriculture.

The Budget is around the corner and the finance minister is on test. Will she take effective steps to ameliorate the conditions of the majority of the population or pay lip service to them while working principally for those who were the beneficiaries of the pandemic economy. The government must act as the first responder in any crisis. This Republic Day it must resolve to respond with vision and energy.

Symbol of a noisy republic

The might of the Indian Republic and national pride will be reflected in the military precision of the traditional parade on New Delhi's Rajpath on Tuesday. Joining on this special day, as a democratic counterpoint to the State's pomp and pageantry, will be the solidarity of a collection of farmers fighting a battle against three contentious farm laws. A republic is defined as a system of governance that allows a country to be democratic. No great clash of principles, therefore, stands in the way of allowing this demonstration of the will of a section of the people. To keep the peace during the rally is, of course, the farmers' responsibility, while it's the State's duty to provide security.

There are multiple voices to be heard in a democracy and minor irritants like inspired campaigns, like the one the Delhi police is complaining of, said to be emanating from 300-plus Pakistani Twitter handles, shouldn't be allowed to disrupt the process of peaceful life. A nation that knows how to switch off the Internet for over a year in the Kashmir Valley due to fears of disruptive voices from across the border should be capable of taking on mischievous elements sprouting propaganda through social media disinformation. How long does it take to respond tactically to those who are inimical to the idea of a diverse and pluralist democracy that is India?

The threat from the stoking of divisive tendencies by reviving the idea of "Khalistan" may be real enough, but history tells us that India has come through such threats without being too badly burnt. It should be no different this time, when it is important for rulers to be able to lend an ear to various voices and address problems that are real. As 20,000-plus tractors roll on New Delhi's Outer Ring Road on Tuesday, they may be symbolic of a noisy republic that we may have become in 70-plus years since January 26, 1950. That is no reason to be distracted from the task of listening to our own people.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

K. SUDHAKAR
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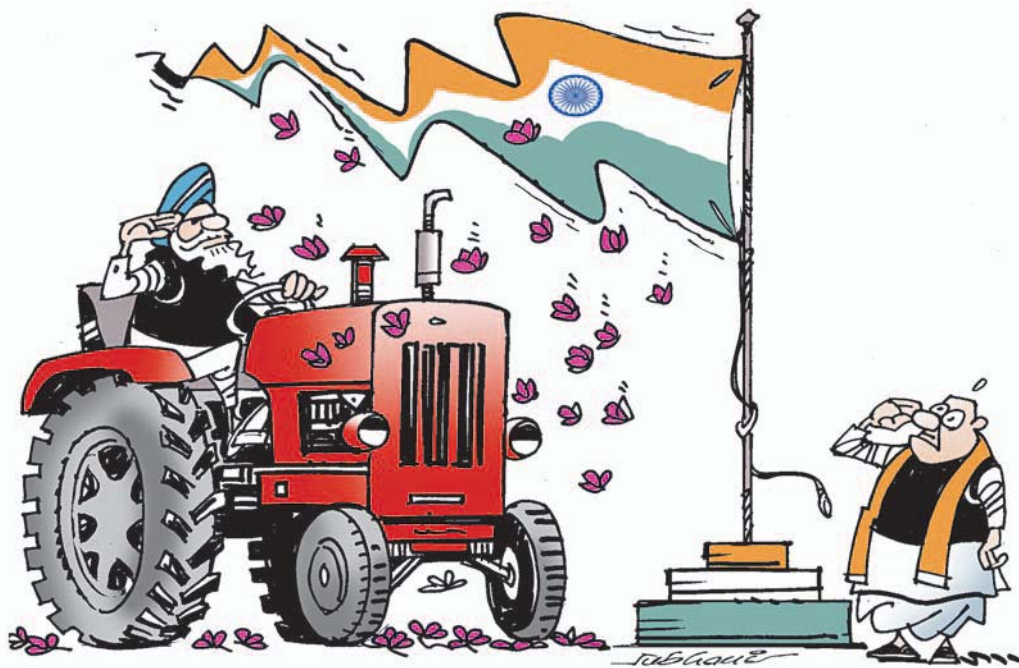
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Subhani



Battle for Bengal: BJP to face hidden pitfalls



Shikha Mukerjee

Before it can defeat Mamata Banerjee, the BJP has to find a way of disarming the Bengali. As a target, Mamata Banerjee could be vulnerable if the grievances of the discontented were the only issue. But the Trinamul Congress and its leader are embedded in the tricky topography of West Bengal, which is peppered with hidden pitfalls.

Armed with its brand and its scorecard in elections across India, the BJP is anticipating a tough fight to attain its goal of fusing the state with the main body of a saffronised Bharat, of reaching the point where it can claim that the nation is governed by one party. Yet, the seemingly closer it gets to pulling off an election victory in West Bengal, the more elusive its target appears.

The Bengali spirit has insinuated itself between the BJP's hopes and Mamata Banerjee's fightback. It was this that was out in the open when Ms Banerjee launched the year-long celebrations of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's 125th birth anniversary on January 23, with a rally and a spontaneous burst of song, a surging crowd of people and finally a ringing assertion that Bengal was the crucible that crafted a new vision of a modern India, gave birth to the national movement and defined patriotism by the struggles and sacrifices of its mesmerising leaders. In contrast, the curated, organised and hygienically wrapped celebrations for an audience of essentially one, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and television viewers was a sanitised, lifeless, joyless programme, minus the exuberance and pride that is quintessentially Bengali.

Voters and their contradictory allegiances and

primordial attachments are whimsical and wayward; none more so than the Bengalis. Impressions matter; though not necessarily the first ones.

When Ms Banerjee declined to speak at Victoria Memorial at the spectacle organised by the Union government because she felt insulted by her hosts, she upstaged the Prime Minister, the hecklers and the BJP, by shrewdly turning it into a desecration of the spirit by bully boys primed to create trouble. Television and Twitter went into a frenzy of reactions. The BJP's army of defenders went on the offensive, asserting that Mamata Banerjee had insulted Shri Ram and Netaji. The Trinamul Congress went into overdrive, accusing the BJP and its leadership of intimidation, harassment and disrespect.

Having already paid her homage to Netaji by hitting the streets in a 6 km walk and a rally where she demanded a list of changes in his name, Ms Banerjee was ready to checkmate the BJP and Modi. In doing so she heavily underlined the difference between celebrating Netaji and his vision and rigid ceremonies. Her celebrations were a bigger, noisier version of the usual para (local) events; Mr Modi's was entirely alien to the Bengali tradition. While the jury is inclined to believe that the homage to Netaji was debased by petty politics, the verdict will be delivered sometime in May, when the ballots are counted for the state Assembly elections.

If the BJP had studied the traditions of the celebration of Netaji Jayanti in West Bengal over the decades, it would have discovered the facts and stopped itself from inventing a fiction. In the scramble to and cover up the mistimed and misdirect-

ed attack on Mamata, the BJP's IT cell boss Amit Malviya was so rattled that he declared she had walked out of the event in a huff. To cover that up, the BJP's army of defenders declared that Netaji's birthday had never been celebrated in style in West Bengal. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The fact that the All India Forward Bloc's headquarters are in Kolkata is incontrovertible evidence that Netaji's birth anniversary was dutifully and faithfully observed every year. As the party set up by the leader in 1939, when he asked members to swear a blood oath to devote themselves to the cause of a militant freedom struggle, the Forward Bloc's small presence in West Bengal politics is nevertheless a meaningful one.

For decades, rickety scaffolding was annually erected at the Netaji statue in Esplanade and at the Shyambazar five-point crossing, where generations of Forward Bloc leaders have ascended the steps to garland the icon, as have leaders from the Congress and the CPM and the CPI, as homage to a Bengali and a national hero, cruelly snatched by a mysterious death from becoming Independent India's tallest leader, be it as Prime Minister or as President.

The memory of Netaji lives on in humble homes as a framed portrait. It lives in the conspiracy theories written and reworked by generations of authors and amateur and professional researchers. In every Kolkata para (locality) Netaji Jayanti is a local affair; children practise marching to the drums weeks in advance and then the procession through the streets mimicking the Azad Hind Fauj progressing to free the nation from

Voters and their contradictory allegiances and primordial attachments are whimsical and wayward; none more so than the Bengalis.

imperial bondage. In consonance with this spirit, Ms Banerjee's celebration was inclusive and participatory.

Netaji's grand-nephew Sugata Bose, the eminent historian, led the concluding event.

It was the right occasion for Mamata Banerjee to invoke the injured aspirations of the Bengali people. She demanded that Kolkata should be returned to its former status as a national capital; the Planning Commission should be revived, because it was conceived by Netaji; a monument to the Azad Hind Fauj should be erected in New Delhi. These were sentiments that are the dull nagging ache in every Bengali heart, where the idea that Bengal was the birthplace of India's nationalism, its radical social reforms and its ideology of secularism, unity, communal harmony and diversity.

The distance between Bengali pride and the BJP's blunders can be measured in the last-moment inclusion of the visit to Netaji Bhavan in the Prime Minister's itinerary. To close the gaps in its knowledge of and familiarity with the Bengali mind, spirit, traditions and contradictions the BJP has a mere three months before the elections.

For the BJP to become local, it is neither necessary nor sufficient to poach "local" leaders from the Trinamul Congress and destabilise the party. It has to organically integrate. As is evident, this is an endeavour that would be difficult because of the contest between Bengali narratives of nationalism and its development over time and the BJP's hybrid version, enshrined in books — Hindutva, Hindu Rashtra Darshan — and now being translated into practice.

Steering between the simplistic and the messy complexities of identity politics in West Bengal, the BJP is travelling over a minefield.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist based in Kolkata

LETTERS

EDUCATION FAILURE

The ghastly crime by the teaching faculty duo is difficult to stomach (*Parents kill 2 daughters as human sacrifice, DC, Jan. 25*).

With this grisly incident, I doubt if we are living in the 21st century or in stone age. It surely puts our education system under the scanner. I wonder what type of education the duo had and imparted to students all these years? Superstitions and belief in magical powers were the hallmark of downtrodden people who were poor and illiterate.

Udatha Rama Chandra Rao
Yeleswaram, East Godavari

The alleged human sacrifice is one of the most dastardly acts in recent times and that too on the Girl Child Day. While the world is progressing to newer heights of learning the universe, it is astonishing that an educated family believed in occult practices. This calls for a stringent punishment (death penalty).

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

FISCAL INDEX

The author's view of fiscal performance index with the components of quality in revenue and capital expenditure is much appreciable (*Reviving growth: Govt needs to do a fine balance in Budget on Feb. 1, DC, Jan. 25*). The seven-point agenda (the author mentioned) for macroeconomic stability is the need of the hour during the Budget. His views of raising revenues through non tax sources and rationalising the power and urea subsidies will definitely help the Indian manufacturing become more competitive.

S.S.N. Sarma
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Giri's call to eschew violence

NEW DELHI, January. 25 President V.V. Giri today appealed to the country's voters and political parties to eschew bitterness, violence or abuse of the human person in their election campaign.

Broadcasting to the nation on the eve of the Republic Day, Mr. Giri at the outset of his speech made a reference to the Lok Sabha elections and said that "our democracy is on the eve of yet another milestone in its progress".

Aakar Patel



Growth is just not picking up, but no end to triumphalism

We have entered the 13th consecutive quarter of economic slowdown in India. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP), meaning the total value of services and goods produced in this country in the last 12 months, has shrunk in 2020-2021, compared to 2019-2020. We made less than we did in the previous year. To return to where we were in January 2020, it will take perhaps another year. Perhaps longer, we do not know.

The problem did not begin with the Covid-19 pandemic; it existed much before that. Growth began declining from January 2018 and has declined sequentially, meaning every quarter since then. The government has tried to tweak some of the numbers, something that Americans refer to as "putting lipstick on a pig", but to no avail. It is a sequential decline over three years. The India growth story is over and has been over for a few years now. You can make all the speeches that you want, you cannot argue against 39 straight months of slowing down.

Speaking loudly of competing with China and America but then

falling behind even Bangladesh's per capita GDP does not inspire confidence. The fact is that even without the lockdown we were in a crisis, a word that is used loosely but can be said to be accurate here. The government has no idea why the economy began to stall from January 2018. There are theories from the outside, but they are not discussed or debated in the government — who will tell the king that his rule is incompetent? Nobody, unless they want to lose their head (or at least their job), and so we continue to bumble on, along the same path that has brought us to this disaster.

The signs of our decay are all around us. Work that has left China because of Donald Trump's trade war and Covid-19 has not come to India but to Vietnam and Bangladesh.

Our neighbour has crept ahead of us in per capita GDP because its exports (powered by high-labour garments manufacturing) are growing, while ours have not grown since 2014. We have six years of zero growth in exports. It is also ahead because it has a much higher participation of women in

the labour force. In India, the patriarchy is more concerned about who Indians marry rather than why they are not working. India is the most dangerous place for women in the world. According to the Thomson Reuters Foundation's World's Most Dangerous Countries for Women, we were at fourth place in 2011 and then fell to last place in 2018, where presumably we still remain.

The low participation of women in the workforce has many complex reasons, but the failure of the State and indeed the inability of this current government to stop the slide further, is also responsible.

We have more of the same to look forward to in 2021. We will not see the economy pick up, but we will see more bombast from the government about how well we are doing. The enormous hole in the economy that was created in the first quarter of last year (April-June) because of the lockdown will have been filled over the last few months. When results for the same quarter year on year appear sometime in the middle of 2021, Prime Minister Modi will exclaim that we are the world's fastest growing economy

and pretend that the 25 per cent increase is not just the filling up of a hole he had himself created but some miracle he has delivered to the Indian economy. *The Economist* has reported that Mukesh Ambani's wealth rose 350 per cent in 2020 and Gautam Adani's rose over 700 per cent, but we are at record unemployment, which is hovering around the nine per cent mark. And it is not higher still only because many crore Indians have removed themselves from the job market. Those who are not employed and are not actively looking for work are not considered unemployed. The real figure could be approaching 15 per cent, and perhaps even higher than that. On every conceivable metric that you can think of, from bank credit growth to automobile sales, the revelation is not only that there is no India growth story but there is a decline that has set us back years, perhaps a decade.

And yet the triumphalism carries on. The BJP won almost half the seats in West Bengal in the 2019 Lok Sabha election, and one will be very surprised if they do not win the Assembly election there later

this year. The amount of resources they have because of the electoral bonds and because of the broad support that Narendra Modi gets from Corporate India can't be matched by any other party and in fact can't be matched by all the other parties put together.

Another state will fall to the BJP, and if it doesn't this time then certainly it will the next.

Elsewhere, society has been torn apart, most likely in a way that cannot ever be repaired. I am not saying this out of despair, but one has to be realistic. This amount of poison being injected from the top cannot be detoxified without resistance and one sees no resistance to it.

On every parameter, from economic decline to national security failures to unemployment to social tensions, India will continue on the path that it has chosen for itself since 2014. But at least Narendra Modi will continue to be popular, making his daily sermons about how much better things are under him and how bad it was in the past.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48347.59	-1.09
Nifty 50	14238.90	-0.93
S&P 500*	3,836.51	-0.13
Dollar (₹)	72.94	0.05
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.70	0.03
Euro (₹)	88.62	0.24
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,509▼141	0.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	55.51	0.18
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.954	0.25
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.060	-0.031

* As of 8:30 PM IST

RBI: No plan to pull out old ₹100, ₹10, ₹5 notes

The RBI refuted reports of withdrawal of old series of Rs 100, Rs 10 and Rs 5 currency notes. "With regard to reports in certain sections of media on withdrawal of old series of Rs 100, Rs 10 & Rs 5 banknotes from circulation in near future, it is clarified that such reports are incorrect," the RBI said in a tweet. While issuing new Rs 100 notes with base lavender colour in July 2018, RBI had said old notes would stay valid.

Janakiram takes over as director of IDRBT



Prof. Dr. Janakiram has taken charge as the director of the Institute for Development and Research in Banking Technology. A Ph.D. from IIT Delhi, Prof. Janakiram has authored over 150 research papers and is the editor of six books. He was awarded the Boycsast Fellowship in 1997, the IBM Faculty Award in 2007 and Yahoo Faculty Grant in 2009. He is a board member of IIIT Kurnool and senate member of IIIT Trichy.

UBI completes IT integration of all Andhra Bank units

Union Bank of India said it has completed IT integration of all branches of erstwhile Andhra Bank with itself. In November, UBI had completed its IT integration with erstwhile Corporation Bank. The amalgamation of Andhra and Corporation banks with UBI came into effect from April 1. With this, the entire IT integration of erstwhile Andhra and Corporation Bank branches with UBI has been completed, it said.

Larsen & Toubro Q3 net profit up 3% to ₹2,648 cr

Larsen & Toubro (L&T) posted a 3 per cent increase in consolidated net profit to Rs 2,648.33 crore for the December quarter. The increase in profit is largely attributed to higher profit from IT & ITES segment and sale of commercial property in realty. PAT also includes gain on divestment of Rs 209 crore from discontinued operations for the December quarter, the company said in a regulatory filing.



Budget may boost tap water for all plan ₹3-L cr piped water scheme in works

SIDDHARTHA SINGH
JAN. 25

India plans to spend Rs 3 lakh crore (\$41 billion) to ensure tap water is delivered to every household in the next five years, people with knowledge of the matter said.

The plan is still under discussion and is likely to be unveiled on February 1 as part of the government's budget for the year starting April 1, the people said, asking not to be identified as the proposal is not public.

The government plans to improve availability of water, modernise sewage treatment plants and better utilise the country's water resources, the people said.

The project will be part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Jal Jeevan mission.

A finance ministry spokesman was not immediately available for a comment.

Agencies add: In the run-up to the 2019 general elections, Modi promised that piped water will reach all Indian households by 2024.

According to latest Jal Jeevan Mission estimates, 66.16 per cent of the country's 19.17 crore households in villages is yet to be provided with piped water.

Providing drinking water to the country's 1.3 billion people is a pressing issue, as about 200,000 Indians die every year



UK-based charity WaterAid estimates that about 163 million people in India, or roughly 12 per cent of the population, do not have access to clean water close to home

due to inadequate access to safe water and 600 million face high to extreme water stress, according to the Niti Aayog.

UK-based charity WaterAid estimates that about 163 million people in India, or roughly 12 per cent of the population, do not have access to clean water close to home.

Every summer water shortages tend to be more acute in large cities such

as New Delhi, Chennai and Bengaluru.

The country has access to only about 4 per cent of the world's water resources, and farmers consume almost 90 per cent of the groundwater water available. Nearly 60 per cent of the irrigation for agriculture comes from ground water, mainly through electric water pumps.

Supplying clean drinking water to millions of poor people and reviving moribund irrigation projects were a key part of the Modi government's policies, since the country remains at the mercy of rain gods for drinking water and farming. The monsoon accounts for nearly 70 per cent of the annual rains needed to water farms and recharge aquifers and reservoirs.

—Bloomberg/Reuters

PROFIT TAKING, BORDER CLASHES BRING SENSEX DOWN BY 530 PTS

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JAN. 25

The Sensex fell 531 points, or 1.09 per cent, in a volatile session on news of clashes on the India-China border in the North Sikkim's Naku La area and profit taking in index heavy-weight Reliance Industries. RIL shares fell over 5 per cent after its third quarter results. The Sensex closed at 48,347.59 points.

The clashes in Sikkim took place last week and have been resolved, reports added.

The market saw profit taking by institutional investors for the third consecutive session after the Sensex hit the 50000-mark last week, ahead of the Union Budget on February 1.

The Nifty-50 fell 133 points or 0.93 per cent closing at 14,238.90. The broader market also fell with the BSE Mid-cap Index down by 1.14 per cent and the Small-cap, -1.15 per cent.

Foreign portfolio investors were net sellers of equities worth Rs 765.3 crore while the domestic institutions were net sellers by Rs 387.76 crore.

"The short term trend of the Nifty continues to be weak. The consistent decline of the last three sessions could be hinting at the possibility of a reversal in the market," said Nagaraj Shetti, technical research analyst, HDFC Securities.

Profit taking was seen in all sectoral indices barring Healthcare and Metals. Major sectoral losers included BSE IT Index (-1.31 per cent), Power (1.41 per cent) and Oil & Gas (2.16 per cent).

Amazon seeks arrest of Biyani, halting of RIL deal

New Delhi, Jan. 25: US online retailer Amazon has filed a petition in the Delhi High Court seeking detention of Future Group founders, including CEO Kishore Biyani, and seizure of their assets as it sought to block Future Group from selling retail assets to Reliance Industries.

In the petition, Amazon sought enforcement of the Singapore arbitrator's ruling in October against its partner Future's Rs 24,713 crore deal with Reliance.

Amazon sought the Biyani family to be directed to "disclose their assets, including movable and immovable property" and the same be attached.

Also, it sought "detention" of Biyani, his daughter Ashni and seven other members of the founder family as well as three other officials, including a company secretary.

Amazon, which wants

the deal to sell retail assets to Reliance to be stopped, also asked the court for a direction for "detention of the directors (of Future Group entities) in civil prison".

Biyani had previously stated that he was forced to strike a deal with Reliance after help that the group sought from Amazon to wriggle out of piling debt burden wasn't forthcoming.

The petition by Amazon just days after the Future-RIL deal received the nod from market regulator Sebi and bourses.

In the petition, Amazon has said the interim injunctions granted by the Emergency Arbitrator (EA) are enforceable under the Indian laws under the Arbitration and Conciliation Act as the order is deemed to be an order of the court and is enforceable under the Code of Civil Procedure.

Amazon has prayed that

the court issue an injunction against the respondents (Future Group), in light of the directions passed by the EA, from relying upon any approval granted by any regulatory body or agency in India arising out of any application initiated or pursued by the respondents, contrary to the directions in the order, including without limitation, the no objection granted by the Sebi and as also approvals granted by the BSE, NSE and CCI.

The interim ruling by the Singapore International Arbitration Centre, which was valid till January 23, now stands extended till further modification.

"In view of the constitution of the Arbitral Tribunal, the Order stands automatically extended for the duration of the Arbitration Proceedings," the petition said.

—PTI

RBI says open to digital currency

Mumbai, Jan. 25: Amid increasing popularity of virtual currencies in various parts of the world, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday said it is open to exploring the possibility of a digital version of currency notes.

A host of private digital currencies, virtual currencies and cryptocurrencies has gained popularity in recent years, though Indian authorities remain sceptical about them.

"In India, the regulators

and governments have been sceptical about these currencies and are apprehensive about the associated risks.

"Nevertheless, the RBI is exploring the possibility as to whether there is a need for a digital version of fiat currency and in case there is, then how to operationalise it," the RBI said in its booklet on 'Payment Systems in India — Journey in the Second Decade of the Millennium'. Central bank digital cur-

rencies (CBDC) is a legal tender..It is in the form of electronic currency, which can be converted or exchanged at par with similarly denominated cash and traditional central bank deposits. Innovations are changing the payments space rapidly.

"This has made central banks around the world to examine whether they could leverage on technology and issue fiat money in digital form," the RBI's booklet said.

—PTI

Merck junks Covid vaccine programme

RILEY GRIFFIN
JAN. 25

Merck & Co is discontinuing development of its two experimental Covid-19 vaccines after early trial data showed they failed to generate immune responses comparable to a natural infection or existing vaccines.

The US drug giant, which has a long history of successfully developing vaccines, had adopted a different strategy from rivals Pfizer Inc, Moderna Inc and Johnson & Johnson, using a more traditional approach of focusing on shots based on weakened viruses. One, called V590, borrowed technology from Merck's Ebola inoculation, while the other, V591, is based on a measles vaccine used in Europe.

Both V590 and V591 were laggards in the vaccine-development race. Merck

finished recruiting the first participants for early-stage safety studies near the end of 2020, when front-runners Pfizer and Moderna were preparing to report late-stage data on their shots' effectiveness. Merck received interim results from its trials this month.

The results were "disappointing, and a bit of a surprise," said Nick Kartsonis, senior vice president of clinical research for infectious diseases and vaccines at Merck Research Laboratories. Both shots generated fewer neutralising antibodies to halt infection than other Covid-19 vaccines, and produced inferior immune responses compared with people who had naturally contracted the coronavirus.

"We didn't have what we needed to be able to move forward," Kartsonis said

in an interview on Sunday. After evaluating the data, Merck's senior leadership decided to discontinue the programmes and divert resources to the company's efforts to develop Covid-19 treatments.

Kenilworth, New Jersey-based Merck will record a pretax charge for the fourth quarter of 2020 for costs related to halting the programmes. It didn't disclose the amount of the charge on Monday. The early-stage trial results will be submitted to a peer-reviewed medical journal.

Two coronavirus vaccines have been cleared for use in the US, but a continuing surge in infections has highlighted the need for more treatment options. Merck will steer resources toward two drugs it has in late-stage development to combat the disease, according to Kartsonis.

—Bloomberg

AADHAAR HOUSING FILES FOR ₹7,300-CRORE IPO

New Delhi, Jan. 25: Blackstone-backed Aadhaar Housing Finance has filed preliminary papers with markets regulator Sebi to raise Rs 7,300 crore through an initial public offering.

The IPO comprises fresh issuance of shares worth Rs 1,500 crore and an offer

of sale of up to 5,800 crore by the promoter BCP Topco VII Pte Ltd, draft red herring prospectus filed with the Sebi showed.

The company proposes to utilise the money raised through fresh issue towards augmenting its capital base to meet future capital requirements.

Besides, the company expects to receive the benefits of listing the equity shares on the stock exchanges.

The firm, which caters to the low-income segment's home financing needs, is backed by a private equity fund managed by Blackstone.

—PTI

LENDING | A HAND

Robot takes care of the sick and elderly, provides social simulation

Mass rollout of Sophia the robot on cards

MICHELLE HENNESSY
HONG KONG, JAN. 25

"Social robots like me can take care of the sick or elderly," Sophia says as she conducts a tour of her lab in Hong Kong. "I can help communicate, give therapy and provide social stimulation, even in difficult situations."

Since being unveiled in 2016, Sophia—a humanoid robot—has gone viral. Now the company behind her has a new vision: to mass-produce robots by the end of the year.

Hanson Robotics, based in Hong Kong, said four



models, including Sophia, would start rolling out of factories in the first half of 2021, just as researchers predict the pandemic will open new opportunities for the

robotics industry.

"The world of Covid-19 is going to need more and more automation to keep people safe," founder and chief executive David Hanson said, standing

surrounded by robot heads in his lab.

Hanson believes robotic solutions to the pandemic are not limited to health-care, but could assist customers in industries such as retail and airlines too.

"Sophia and Hanson robots are unique by being so human-like," he added. "That can be so useful during these times where people are terribly lonely and socially isolated."

Hanson said he aims to sell "thousands" of robots in 2021, both large and small, without providing a specific number.

Social robotics professor

Johan Hoorn, whose research has included work with Sophia, said that although the technology is still in relative infancy, the pandemic could accelerate a relationship between humans and robots.

"I can infer the pandemic will actually help us get robots earlier in the market because people start to realise that there is no other way," said Hoorn, of Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

Hanson Robotics is launching a robot this year called Grace, developed for the healthcare sector.

—Reuters

BANK OF AMERICA GIVES PANDEMIC BONUS TO 97% OF ITS 1.7 LAKH STAFF



Mumbai, Jan. 25: Bank of America is rewarding its over 1.7 lakh staff worldwide, including over 24,000 in India, with a cash award of \$750 each to those earning under \$100,000 in annual compensation for the appreciation of their work through the pandemic.

Called 'delivering together' compensation awards, the bank expects over 97 per cent of its employees to get the special one-time cash bonus.

In an internal memo sent to the employees worldwide, which has been accessed by PTI, Bank of America chief executive Brian Moynihan said in appreciation for the outstanding efforts, the management team and board have decided to recognise employees with 'delivering together' compensation awards.

During the first quarter of 2021, all eligible employees with \$100,000 or less in annual total compensation will be paid a cash bonus of \$750 each. Those in the US will receive this award in late February and those outside the US will receive the payment in March, Moynihan said.

He pointed out that these awards build on the shared success cash awards of \$1,000 and related stock awards announced to employees in the fourth quarter of 2017, 2018 and 2019.

Moynihan also expects almost 97 per cent of employees who he calls as teammates will receive the delivering together award.

In addition, all eligible teammates with greater than \$100,000 to \$500,000 in annual total compensation will receive a grant of 150-750 restricted stock units.

—PTI

SHORT TAKES

Mouma among 6 to get Padma Shri

New Delhi: Veteran table tennis player Mouma Das was among six sportspersons who were awarded the prestigious Padma Shri by the Government of India on the eve of the country's 72nd Republic Day.

Besides Mouma, basketball player P. Anitha, athletics coach Madhavan Nambiar, athlete Sudha Hari Narayan Singh, Deaf Olympics gold medalist wrestler Virender Singh, and a legendary dwarf athlete KY Venkatesh have also been awarded the prestigious award in the sports category for the year. Every year, the award winners are announced on the eve of Republic Day. The Padma awardees are felicitated by the President of India. — *PTI*

Football matches on Republic Day

Hyderabad: The Telangana Football Association is holding a veterans exhibition football match involving former international and national players at Delhi Public School at 7.30 am on Republic Day.

Some of the players in action are Venkateshwar Reddy, G. P. Palguna, Yedukondalu, Syed Arif, Raj Kumar, Ch Srinivas Rao (Samuel), Eugene James, Prakash, Vincent Paul, P. Vijay Kumar, Zakir Hussain, K. E. Selucos, and I. Roshan.

The Bolarum Sporting Club too is organising exhibition matches — Late Peter Thangaraj XI vs Late Bhaskar Reddy XI for Seniors footballers and Late Amar Chand XI vs Late George XI for Juniors Under 15 years — at Bolarum High School grounds, at which it will honour club stalwarts.

Tarun, Chevika into 2nd round

Hyderabad: Top seeds Tarun Korar and Sama Chevika Reddy sailed into the second round of the AITA C7 Under-16 tennis tournament being held at Sania Mirza Tennis Academy in Murtuzaguda on Monday.

Tarun beat Harsha Perla 6-2, 6-2 while Chevika tamed Tribhuvani 6-2, 6-3.

THE RESULTS

Boys singles: Tarun Korar bt Harsha Perla 6-2, 6-2; Arnab Bishoyi bt Chris Hamilton Ross 3-6, 6-3, 6-3; Thakur Arman Singh bt M. Hanock 6-0, 6-0; Mihir Parcha bt V. Dhiraj Reddy 6-1, 6-1; P. Sandilya bt Vivek Sriakshit Reddy 6-2, 6-1; Nikhil D'souza bt Farhaan Akhtar 6-3, 6-0; Dandu Trishant Reddy bt Saddam Husain 7-6 (7-2), 6-0.

Girls singles: Sama Chevika Reddy bt Tribhuvani 6-2, 6-3; S. Kaavya bt Charithakshaya 6-2, 6-0; Dandu Laxmi Siri bt Sai Sahasra 6-3, 6-1; Pushti Ladda bt Aparna Kandhare 6-2, 6-1; Rishitha Basi Reddy bt Malvika Reddy 6-2, 6-0.

Big fight ends in a stalemate

Hyderabad: The much-anticipated super bantamweight bout between Savio Michael and Vinod Vanttedu ended in a draw in the Club Fights Pro Boxing event at the Lal Bahadur Stadium on Sunday night. Savio had to settle for a stalemate as the judges scored 39-36, 38-38, 37-39.

THE RESULTS

Featherweight: Singh bt Madunala Jayanth by unanimous decision — 40-36, 40-36, 40-36.

Super flyweight: Banagaram Sai Kumar bt Mohd Zahed by TKO.

Super bantamweight: Savio Michael drew with Vinod Vanttedu — 39-36, 38-38, 37-39.

Super lightweight: Clinton David drew with Gudimalle Niraj — 38-38, 39-37, 37-39.

Super lightweight: Nithin Raj bt Abhinay Kumar by unanimous decision — 40-36, 40-36, 40-36.

Live on TV

CRICKET

Pakistan vs South Africa: First Test, Day 1 from 10.30 am on Sony Ten 2 HD

Big Bash League: Melbourne Renegades vs Hobart Hurricanes from 10.40 am; Melbourne Stars vs Sydney Sixers from 2.20 pm on Sony Six, HD

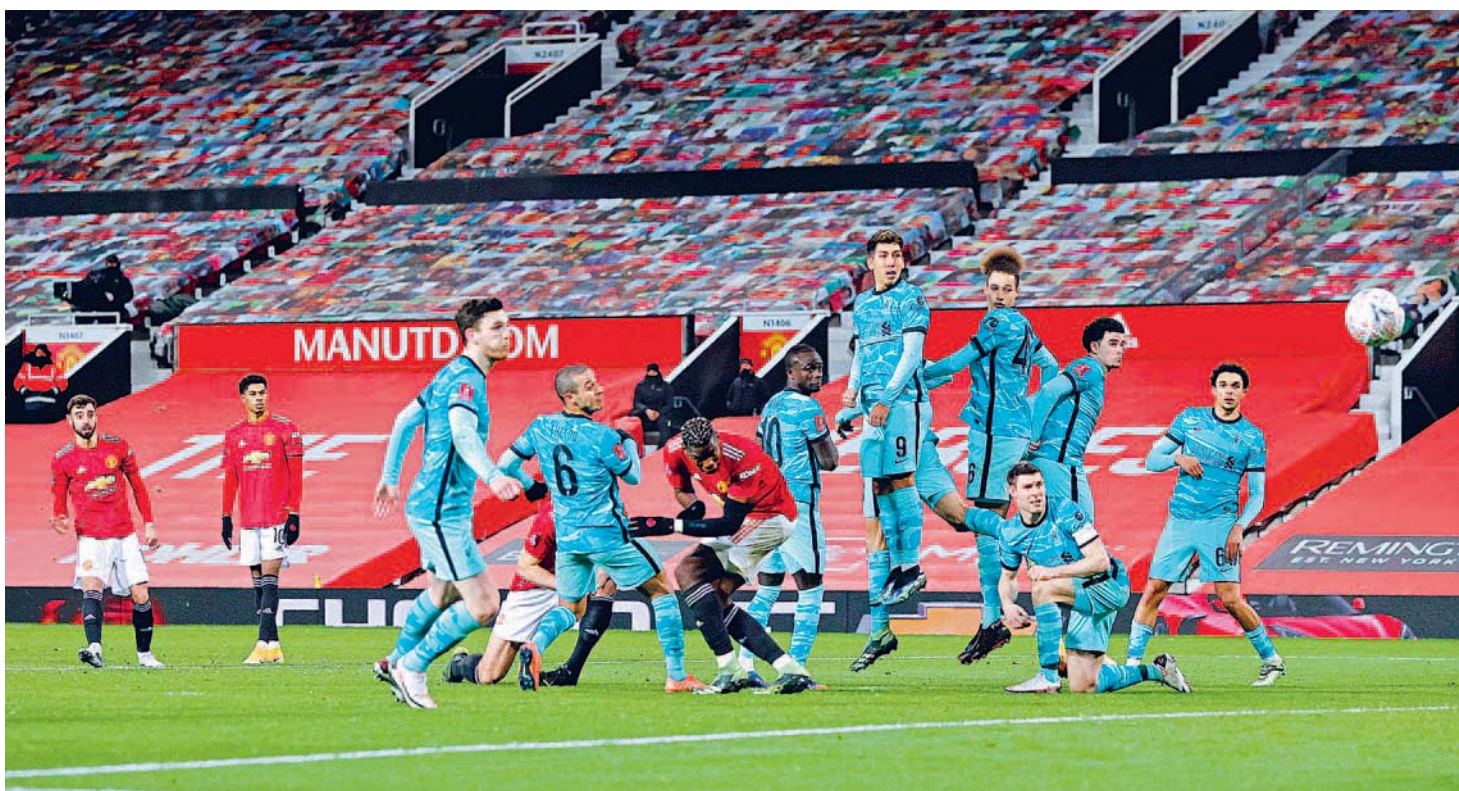
Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20 Tournament: Quarterfinals — Punjab vs Karnataka from 11.55 am; Tamil Nadu vs Himachal Pradesh from 6.55 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Newcastle United vs Leeds United from 11.30 pm on Star Sports Select 1; West Brom vs Manchester City from 1.45 am (Wednesday) on Star Sports Select 1; Southampton vs Arsenal from 1.45 am (Wednesday) on Star Sports Select HD

WWE

Superstar Spectacle: Bouts from 8 pm on Sony Ten 1, HD



Manchester United's Bruno Fernandes (left) shoots over the wall to score from a free kick in their English FA Cup fourth round match against Liverpool at Old Trafford in Manchester on Sunday.

— AFP

BRUNO BLASTS REDS

Fernandes gem knocks Liverpool out of FA Cup

Manchester, Jan. 25: Bruno Fernandes's stunning free-kick inflicted more misery on Liverpool as Manchester United progressed to the fifth round of the FA Cup with a thrilling 3-2 win at Old Trafford on Sunday.

Firmino and Salah combined perfectly for the opener on 18 minutes as the Brazilian's pass opened up the United defence and the Egyptian provided a dinked finish over Dean Henderson.

Rashford's raking cross-field pass just evaded James Milner and Greenwood did not look like a striker lacking confidence as he fired past Alisson Becker for his first goal in 11 games.

Klopp has been forced to

field two midfielders in Jordan Henderson and Fabinho together at the heart of the defence in recent weeks and the performance of Rhys Williams showed why the German has been reluctant to rely on his young centre-backs.

Williams failed to cut out Greenwood's through ball for Rashford three minutes into the second half and the England international composed himself before slotting past the advancing Alisson.

This time, United's momentum was short-lived as Milner should have levelled for Liverpool when he spooned a glorious chance over from close range, but quickly made amends by teeing up

THE RESULTS

Manchester United 3
(Greenwood 26, Rashford 48, Fernandes 78)
Liverpool 2
(Salah 18, 59)

Everton 3
(Calvert-Lewin 29, Richarlison 59, Mina 62)
Sheffield Wednesday 0

Brentford 1
(Sorensen 7)
Leicester 3
(Under 46, Tielemans 51-pen, Maddison 71)

Fulham 0
Burnley 3
(Rodriguez 31, 71-pen, Long 81)

Salah to smash home his second just before the hour mark.

Both managers turned to their match winners off the bench for the final half-hour as Klopp first turned to Sadio Mane before Fernandes made his entrance.

Trent Alexander-Arnold stung the palms of Henderson, who then saved twice from Salah as Liverpool's attack began to click back into gear.

But it was Fernandes who won the game with a brilliant free-kick 12 minutes from time. His strike was a worthy winner of a thrilling tie as he used Pogba to unsight Alisson and fired the ball low into the Brazilian's left-hand corner.

— AFP

SUAREZ BANG ON TARGET FOR ATLETICO

Madrid, Jan. 25: Luis Suarez scored a brilliant team goal as Atletico Madrid came from behind to beat Valencia 3-1 on Sunday and move seven points clear at the top of La Liga.

After Real Madrid thrashed Alaves on Saturday, Barca had earlier followed suit with a scrappy win over Elche.

But Atletico were under-tenured in the capital, as their considerable advantage was restored again, with a game in hand.

Suarez finished off a flowing move that had started almost on Atletico's goal-line before substitute Angel Correa capped another slick string of passes to end Valencia's resistance.

BARCA WIN WITHOUT MESSI

Barcelona won again without the suspended Lionel Messi as goals from Frenkie de Jong and Riqui Puig were enough to secure a scruffy 2-0 win over Elche.

De Jong poked the ball over the line just before half-time at the Martinez Valero, which would have proved a suitably scrappy winner before Puig came off the bench to head in a second late on.

Despite an uninspiring performance, Ronald Koeman will be relieved to see Barca make it two consecutive victories without Messi.

— AFP

Footballers die in plane crash

Rio de Janeiro, Jan. 25: Four football players from Brazilian club Palmas died in a plane crash while traveling separately from the team after testing positive for the coronavirus, the club said.

The club's president also died in the crash after the plane suddenly plunged to the ground at the end of the runway while on take-off in the northern state of Tocantins, the team reported. The pilot also died.

The players were on their way to Goiania, in the central region of the country, to play a match against Vila Nova.

"The players were traveling in a private plane because they had tested positive for Covid-19," club spokesperson Izabela Martins informed.

Martins said that Sunday would have been their last day of isolation and that the rest of the team would travel on a commercial flight.

"The victims were identified as president Lucas Meira and players Lucas Praxedes, Guilherme Noé, Ranule and Marcus Molinari," the club said. The pilot was not identified. There were no survivors.

Palmas Futebol e Regatas was founded in 1997 and plays in Brazil's fourth division. The cause of the accident was not immediately known.

Tocantins fire officials reported that the twin-engine Baron model had a capacity of six occupants. When firefighters arrived at the crash site, 500 meters from the runway, the aircraft was being consumed by fire. At least two explosions were registered, according to the official report.

The Brazilian Football Confederation expressed its solidarity with Palmas' family members and the club's fans in an official note, and it ordered a minute of silence in all matches played Sunday as a sign of mourning.

In 2016, a plane crash killed 19 players of the Chapecoense soccer club. Chapecoense's plane went down en route to the club's first-ever South American tournament final in Colombia after it ran out of fuel near Medellin.

"Unfortunately, we know what this moment of pain is like and we wish that no other group had to feel the same," Chapecoense said in a statement.

— AP



Four Palmas players and the club president have been killed after their plane crashed on take-off.

— TWITTER/BASIL FOOTBALL

Jaweed, Shreyas & Vinmukh best

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, JAN. 25

M. A. Jaweed, C. Shreyas Reddy and Vinmukh emerged top performers in the Hyderabad Cricket Association's A-2 Division two-day league matches played on Monday.

Jaweed ran through the RJCC line-up to bowl them out for a mere 130. The right-arm medium-pacer returned with fabulous figures of 7 for 47. In reply, Canara Bank made 131 for no loss for an emphatic win.

In another match, Eklavya CC beat Rushiraj by six wickets riding on two good performances. First, off-spinner Shreyas got six wickets while con-

ceding 35 runs as Rushiraj were bowled out for 163. Then, Vinmukh slammed an unbeaten 110 that came off 123 balls and included 20 boundaries as his side overhauled the target losing four wickets.

Brief scores:
A-2 DIVISION (TWO-DAY)
■ RJCC 130 in 42.2 overs (Anshul 47, Shrunjith 47, M. A. Jaweed 7/47 — 14-4-47-7) lost to Canara Bank 131 for no loss in 23.4 overs (Arvind Shetty 78 n.o., Nikhil 41 n.o.). **Points:** Canara Bank 5, RJCC 0.

■ Rushiraj 163 in 57.4 overs (B. Sai Chandra 65, C. Shreyas Reddy 6/35 — 14-4-6-35-6) lost to Eklavya 165/4 in 39 overs (Vinmukh 110 n.o. — 123b, 20x4). **Points:** Eklavya 5, Rushiraj 0.

Lampard axed, Tuchel may be in

London, Jan. 25: Chelsea sacked manager Frank Lampard on Monday after 18 months in charge, with former Paris Saint-Germain boss Thomas Tuchel reportedly set to replace him at Stamford Bridge.

Sunday's 3-1 FA Cup fourth-round win against Championship side Luton was not enough to save Lampard, whose team have slumped to ninth place in the Premier League.

Chelsea said it had been a "very difficult decision" to part ways with the 42-year-old, who replaced Maurizio Sarri in July 2019.

"We are grateful to Frank for what he has achieved in his time as



Frank Lampard

head coach of the club," Chelsea said in a statement.

"However, recent results and performances have not met the club's expectations, leaving the club mid-table without any

clear path to sustained improvement."

The club's Russian owner Roman Abramovich said: "This was a very difficult decision for the club, not least because I have an excel-

lent personal relationship with Frank and I have the utmost respect for him.

"He is a man of great integrity and has the highest of work ethics. However, under current circumstances we believe it is best to change managers."

Former PSG boss Tuchel, who was abruptly sacked by the French champions in December, is in line to take over, reports said.

Chelsea are struggling in ninth place in the Premier League table, 11 points behind leaders Manchester United.

They have lost five of their past eight Premier League matches after a good start to the season.

— AFP

Chiran digs deep to win on debut

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, JAN. 25

The wind conditions at the Republic Day Regatta at Hussain Sagar continued to be poor but Race Officer Gautham Kankatla managed to squeeze in one race for the Sub Junior Green Fleet in which Chiran Deep Perelli of St Patrick's led from start to finish to clinch a win on his debut. He was closely followed by Daniel Israel of Valerian Grammar High School and Jampanna Arapu of Balamrai Government School.

Moutameen Mohammad of Udbhav School Rasoolpura who was the winner at all the races at the recently concluded training had a bad last leg and finished fourth overall after trailing Chiran in second position for most of the race and then was pipped at the finish by Daniel and Jampanna who managed to catch a gust of wind he had missed.

A colourful fleet of 42 sailors had to paddle back to the Yacht Club of Hyderabad under dead wind conditions.



Riders pose with their mementos at the Telangana State Equestrian Association AGM at the Hyderabad Polo and Riding Club (HPRC) in Aziz Nagar, Hyderabad, on Sunday.

Young riders honoured

Hyderabad, Jan. 25: The Telangana State Equestrian Association (TSEA) felicitated promising young riders at their 5th Annual General Body Meeting held at the Hyderabad Polo and Riding Club (HPRC) in Aziz Nagar, Hyderabad, on Sunday.

Shashank Varma Kanumuri, who is ranked fourth in the world in his category for Dressage in 2021, represented India at the Asian Youth Championships and winner of Asian

Equestrian Federation Under 21 Dressage competition was honoured.

Also on the recognition list were Ananya Settipalli, Dhruv Kammili, Jaiveer Varma Kakarlapudi, Krishna Karthikeya Reddy Male, Krishna Sahithi Male, Maansi Reddy Singireddy, Mohammed Ayaan, Sri Vatsankith Rama Varma Datla and Venkata Srisanth Kalavacharla, who won several national level medals over the last two years in

Dressage and Show Jumping events in respective categories. They received mementos from Chevella MP Dr Gaddam Ranjith Reddy, a horse rider and Equestrian during his college days.

TSEA president Col S. L. Reddy, secretary Maj. T. Swamy and technical vice-president Dr Kallam Chandra Sekhar Reddy addressed the members and updated them about the activities, plans and achievements.

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