


DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | MONDAY | 11 JANUARY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 33.0°C

Min: 17.0°C

RH: 73%

Rainfall: NIL

Forecast: Partly Cloudy.

Max/Min temp.

33/17 °C

COVID-19

COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+14,536)	(+130)
1,04,65,875	1,51,048

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+351)	(+2)
TS: 2,89,784	1,565
(+227)	(+1)
AP: 8,84,916	7,129

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

9,03,64,434
DEATHS
19,39,083
COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
218

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana

Tithi: Margasira Bahula Trayodashi till 2.33 pm

Star: Jyeshtha till 9.09 am

Variyam: 6.07 am to 7.37 am (Tuesday)

Durmuhurtam: 12.46 pm to 1.30 pm; 2.58 pm to 3.42 pm

Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am

HIJRI CALENDAR

Jamadi-ul-Awwal 26, 1442 AH

PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)

Fajar: 5.30 am

Zohar: 1.30 pm

Asar: 4.15 pm

Maghrib: 5.38 pm

Isha: 8.30 pm

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.35 AM

SUNSET TODAY 5.46 PM

MOONRISE TODAY 4.33 AM

MOONSET TOMORROW 4.58 PM

COUNTER POINT



Is there any queue for vaccination for bird flu?

SHORT TAKES

Indonesian flight recorder found

Jakarta: Indonesian rescuers pulled out body parts, pieces of clothing and scraps of metal from the Java Sea early Sunday morning, a day after a Boeing 737-500 with 62 people onboard crashed shortly after takeoff from Jakarta, officials said. Officials were hopeful they were honing in on the wreckage of Sriwijaya Air Flight 182 after sonar equipment detected a signal from the aircraft.

Shoaib Malik safe after car crash

Hyderabad: Pakistan cricketer Shoaib Malik, the husband of Indian tennis star Sania Mirza, was safe after his car crashed into a truck parked outside the Lahore National High Performance Centre in Pakistan on Sunday. His sports car sustained damage to the front side, Pakistan cricketer Wahab Roaz was also in the car. Sania, who is in Hyderabad, spoke with Shoaib over the phone after the crash, family sources said. This is the second accident in the Mirza family: Hyderabad Cricket Association president Mohd Azharuddin, the father-in-law of Sania's sister Anam, escaped without injuries after a mishap in Rajasthan on December 30.

NATION | 4

Didi promises free vaccines in Bengal



WORLD | 5

US ends curbs on its contacts with Taiwan

SPORTS | 8

Injured Jadjeja might bat with injections



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Aadhaar-seeded mobile needed for Covid vaccine

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 10

A week before India begins its vaccination drive against Covid-19, officials of the Central government guided administrators from the states and Union territories on Co-WIN software management. The states have been “advised” to seed the mobile numbers of all vaccine beneficiaries with Aadhaar for registration and communications through SMS and to ensure that there are no “proxies” in this process since the beneficiaries need to be uniquely identified.

“There cannot be any proxies for Aadhaar authentication. It is extremely important to clearly identify person who is getting vaccinated and keep a digital record on who gets vaccinated by whom, when and which vaccine,” said Ram Sewak

THE STATES were ‘advised’ to seed the mobile numbers of all vaccine beneficiaries with Aadhaar for registration and communications through SMS and ensure that there are no “proxies”

Sharma, chairman of the Empowered Group on Technology and Data Management to combat Covid-19, and a member of the National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration of Covid-19. He also advised the states and UTs that the data collection should meet the purpose of facilitating work and that it needs to be validated at field levels.

Meanwhile, the total number of those infected with the new coronavirus

strain from the United Kingdom remains 90, with no addition in the last 24 hours. A sustained decline in the number of daily fatalities too is seen as daily deaths have remained below 300 in the past 16 days. The total Covid-19 cases so far in India are over 1.04 crore, while the deaths are over 1.51 lakh. In the last 24 hours, altogether 18,645 fresh cases and 201 more deaths have been reported.

Union health minister Harsh Vardhan tweeted on Sunday saying that the vaccines against Covid-19 were safe and effective and will be available in a phased manner. He added that the beneficiaries will have to register themselves for vaccination and that people should continue to maintain social distancing and wear masks, and follow all other protocols, even after their immunisation.



Captain Ajinkya Rahane and Mohammed Siraj complain to the umpire along with teammates Wriddhiman Saha and Shubman Gill as the Test match was halted after some spectators made nasty remarks on the fourth day of the third cricket Test match between Australia and India at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Sunday.

Siraj bears brunt of racist attack in Sydney Test again

DC CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
CHENNAI, JAN. 10

The ongoing third Test between India and Australia plunged into controversy after yet another incident of racist abuse rocked the Sydney Cricket Ground on Sunday.

It was pacer Mohammed Siraj who, once again, faced racist slurs from the crowd even as Cricket Australia (CA) and the New South Wales Police are investigating the first

incident reported on Saturday. The game was halted briefly and a bunch of spectators was expelled from the stadium. It's learnt that Siraj was called a “Brown Dog” and “Big Monkey”. The International Cricket Council has strongly condemned the incident and sought an action report from CA.

Apologising to the India team, Cricket Australia promised to take the “strongest measures” against anyone found guilty of vilification. “It is most

regrettable that an otherwise excellent Test match contested in tremendous spirit by two friendly rivals was tarnished by the actions of a small number of spectators,” Head of Integrity and Security Sean Carroll said.

The behaviour of the crowd has received widespread condemnation from cricketers. Virat Kohli who was once fined for showing the middle finger at the SCG crowd called it “the absolute peak of rowdy behaviour”.

After Maha fire, GVMC notice to hosps

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 10

A day after 10 infants were killed in a fire accident at a hospital in Bhandara city of Maharashtra, the fire wing of Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) has issued notices to several hospitals,

including government ones, for not adhering to fire safety norms.

Shockingly, King George Hospital, the premier teaching hospital in north Andhra having 1,100 beds, does not have an NOC (no objection certificate) from GVMC's fire unit. The hospital has a 200-bed paediatric wing that has 40

intensive care units (ICUs). KGH superintendent Dr. P. Mythili, however, said on Sunday that modern fire safety equipment is being installed in all wards, including the paediatric wing. All fire safety norms will be in place within a few days. The work would have been completed much earlier if

Gadkari: Steel, cement firms need regulator

Mumbai, Jan. 10: Big players in the steel and cement industry are indulging in cartelisation to jack-up prices, Union road transport minister Nitin Gadkari has said, pitching to place a regulator for the sectors.

It will be difficult to achieve Prime Minister Narendra Modi's dream of making India a \$5 trillion economy if the steel and cement prices keep going up, Gadkari said, pointing out the target of investing ₹111 lakh crore on infrastructure projects in the next five years to aid the economy. It can be noted that allegations of such

cartelisation have been made in the past as well, especially by the real estate industry, which is impacted through higher input prices because of it. “Regarding steel and cement, this is really a problem for all of us... Actually, I feel this is a cartel by some big people are doing in cement and steel,” Gadkari said while speaking at a virtual event organised by the Builders Association of India on Saturday.

The minister said he has discussed the issue with the Prime Minister and had a lengthy discussion on it with the Principal

Secretary in the PMO as well.

Stating that all the players in the steel industry have their own iron ore mines, and do not have to face any hikes in labour or power rates, he wondered how the steel industry has been hiking prices.

He said the cement industry is exploiting the situation by hiking prices, and underlined that the stance of both the industries is not in the national interest, given the infrastructure spends lined up. “We are in the process of finding out the solution for that,” the Union minister said.

MINISTER SLAMS NAIDU'S BID TO STOP AMMAVODI

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 10

Minister for water resources Dr P. Anil Kumar lambasted former chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu for creating hurdles for the welfare and development programmes of the YSRC government.

Addressing media persons here on Sunday, the minister compared the Opposition leader with ‘Saindhava’ for stalling progress.

Referring to the ₹15,000 being deposited in the accounts of each woman to educate their children through the Amma Vodi scheme, he rebuked Naidu for attempts to hamper the launch of the scheme.

Stressing that they were going ahead with the programme at any cost, Dr Kumar warned Naidu that the people of the state would teach a strong lesson in the ensuing byelection to the Tirupati Lok Sabha seat for diverting the attention of the public with his political manipulations. He expressed confidence that the YSRC would win a massive victory.

Speaking on the occasion, school education minister Adimulapu Suresh said that they are conducting the public meeting in Nellore on Monday in accordance with guidelines of the Election Commission, as the schedule for the local body polls had been announced. He said the CM also directed them to follow the instructions.

Dr Kumar warned Naidu that the people of the state would teach a strong lesson in the ensuing byelection to the Tirupati Lok Sabha seat for diverting the attention of the public



Police use water cannons to disperse farmers during their Kisan Mahapanchayat rally in Kaimla village, in Karnal on Sunday.

Haryana farmers storm Khattar mahapanchayat

Farmers breach 6 police checkpoints to reach venue

SANJAY KAW | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 10

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar was forced to cancel his kisan mahapanchayat in Karnal on Sunday after the farmers who are protesting against the Centre's three new agricultural reform laws uprooted tents and damaged the stage.

The police resorted to a mild lathicharge and used teargas and water cannons to stop hundreds of farmers from reaching a helipad at Kaimla village where Mr Khattar was scheduled to land.

Lashing out at Mr Khattar for using water cannons and teargas shells against the farmers, Congress leader Randeep Singh Surjewala tweeted: “Respected Manohar Lal ji, please stop this pretence of Kisan Mahapanchayat in Kaimla village. By playing with the sentiments of those who provide us with food, please stop meddling with the law and order situation.” In another tweet, he said: “If you want to have a conversation, have it with those who are protesting for the last 46 days.”

In a sharp change of tack, the Centre had on Friday bluntly told the unions protesting at Delhi's borders that the new farm laws could not be repealed, and as the talks were at a stalemate, it would be best

to leave it to the Supreme Court, which is due to hear the protracted dispute on Monday.

Following huge criticism, the Centre decided to conduct a major outreach programme to dispel “misconceptions” about the laws. But over the past week, Mr Khattar's outreach programme had run into trouble in this area as the farmers hardened their stance in Delhi.

On Sunday, all roads leading to Kaimla village were blocked by the police with the help of trucks laden with construction material, parked on the roads, to foil the entry of

farmers protesting the laws. That, however, did not work. Additional forces had to be called in from nearby districts and duty magistrates were appointed to monitor the law and order in Karnal.

Over 1,500 cops were deployed for the mahapanchayat, and seven checkpoints were set up on the way to the venue. The agitating farmers, however, managed to breach six of the checkpoints and arrived near the helipad, forcing the authorities to move the landing spot for Mr Khattar's helicopter to a different location. The farmers then moved to

occupy the venue of Khattar's mahapanchayat, where about 2,000 farmers, most of them being BJP supporters, were waiting. The protesting farmers flung chairs, tore up banners and vandalised other arrangements made for the meeting.

A clash also broke out between farmers marching towards the helipad and the police, which was trying to stop the protesters.

As the protesters reached the venue, the villagers assembled for the mahapanchayat tried to stop the protesting farmers.

SHORT TAKES

COVID DENIED
EDUCATION TO
2CR GIRLS: APTFDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 10

Andhra Pradesh Teachers' Federation (APTF) underlined that nearly two crore girls in the country could not access education after Covid-19 virus hit India. "All state governments should take immediate steps to bring them into mainstream of education," a federation representative emphasised.

This, apart from other statistics, came up at a seminar on "Covid-19 Impact on Socio-Economic Conditions of People and Education" organised by APTF on Sunday at NGO Home here. Federation district president N. Philip Raju presided over the seminar.

Addressing the seminar, APTF state president K. Bhanu Murthy said nearly two crore girls in the country abandoned education due to closure of schools because of Covid-19. More so, they ended up becoming daily labourers along with their parents to earn meagre wages for their families.

North Andhra Teachers' MLC Pakalapati Raghuram pointed out that the education sector had been the worst hit due to Coronavirus. At the same time, corporate school education got strengthened with its ability to organise online classes, as majority of their students are above the poverty line and could afford expensive gadgets. Education in government schools, however, suffered as kids studying in them mostly belonged to poor and economically backward classes.

The MLC feared Covid-19 has ended up creating socio-economic and education imbalances within the society. Poor have not yet been able to recover due to lack of wages during the period. He pointed out that government teachers too have suffered, as neither their DA amounts have been release, nor Pay Revision Commission constituted for them.

AP REPORTS 227
COVID CASES,
1 DEATH IN 24 HRSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 10

The spree of decrease in Covid-19 positive cases continues in AP as only one new death and 227 infections reported in the past 24 hours ending Sunday morning. The total deaths were 7,129 and total positive cases increased to 8,84,916 in which 8,75,234 were recoveries. As many as 289 patients have recovered in the past day.

The positive rate of the 50,027 samples tested in the past day was 0.45 per cent as only 227 test found Covid-19 positive and the overall positivity rate of the 1.23 crore samples tested was 7.18 per cent. The lone death was reported in Visakhapatnam district last day.

Guntur reported highest single-day tally of 50 infections among the districts and was followed by Krishna with 38, Kurnool 23, Chittoor 22, Visakhapatnam 19, East Godavari 17, Anantapur 14 and West Godavari registered 10 new Covid-19 positive cases. Five districts reported only single-digit cases namely Vizianagaram registered only 8 new positive cases.

APGEA APPEALS
TO CM FOR JOBS
REGULARISATIONDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 10

AP Government Employees Association appealed the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to regularise the jobs of qualified contract workers in the Medical and Health Department while reminding about his promise on the subject during elections.

"Health assistants, pharmacists and lab technicians working on a contract basis in medical and health department was selected by district-level committee after passing the written test and they are fit for regularisation as per Article 16 of the constitution," said the president of APGEA State Association Choppa Ravindrababu.

Speaking to media persons here on Sunday, he said scores of contract workers are working for decades for same salary though they are eligible for regularisation.

He urged the CM to repeal contributory pension system and restore the old pension system.

Temple protection becomes
agenda for local body polls

Protection for the Hindu religion need of hour in Andhra Pradesh

MD ILYAS | DC
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 10

Protection of Hindu religion has become the urgent need of the hour for both Opposition and ruling parties in Andhra Pradesh, obviously as they are trying to draw in more votes from rival sides in the upcoming local body polls.

The Telugu Desam is going all-out to expose the "failures" of the YSR Congress government in relation to the series of attacks on temples in recent times as also other issues of concern to the majority community. The BJP, the main proponent of Hindutva, woke up late and is, along with alliance partner Jana Sena, is trying to put the government on the mat on these issues. The YSRC initially seemed banking on its welfare schemes to woo votes to its side, but changed strategy later and positioned itself in retaliatory track. It highlighted instances of temple demolitions during the term of the Telugu Desam government.

Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy announced his decision to reconstruct such demolished temples and swiftly laid the foundation stones for some such works, thereby trying to avoid ceding ground to the Opposition and emerging as the more credible protector of Hindu shrines in the state. The TD had started its protests against attacks and desecration of temples six months ago and sought to flare up the Hindutva sentiments after the Antaredi temple chariot burning incident. The TD tried to project itself as being one up to the BJP's upholding of the Hindutva cause. The TD did not leave any stone unturned to portray

Desam wants CBI probe
into temple desecrations

‘SIT has lost relevance under YSRC rule’

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 10

Strongly opposing SIT investigation, the Telugu Desam on Sunday demanded a CBI probe into the alleged 140 attacks on temples, idols and priests in the last one year and claimed that party boss N Chandrababu Naidu had not offended Christians in any manner.

TD politburo member Varla Ramaiah said that it was a conspiracy of YSRC to betray Hindu devotees that they had ordered a 'downgraded' investigation by Special Investigation Team (SIT) replacing the ongoing investiga-

tion by AP CID. Stating that the temple attacks were offences of a grave nature, Ramaiah urged the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy not to hoodwink people with eyewash measures as cases related to religious matters were highly-sensitive by nature.

Addressing a press conference, Ramaiah asserted that the state government had ordered countless SITs into different offences in the past 19 months but not a single case has been cracked till date. He recalled that the SIT that was investigating Y. S. Vivekananda Reddy's murder mystery.

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Mekapati says Pawan Kalyan's
remarks against govt 'baseless'DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 10

Industries minister Mekapati Goutham Reddy has criticised Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan for his remarks against the state government that it ignored social and environmental impact studies before granting permission to industries.

He also found fault with the actor-turned-politician's claim that the government allocated 75 per cent of jobs to locals at Divis Pharmaceuticals in view of his visit to the region.

Speaking to media persons here on Sunday, Goutham Reddy reminded the Jana Sena chief that the YSRC government had passed a resolution on July 19, 2019, earmarking 75 per cent jobs to locals in all industries within Andhra Pradesh. Under it, the first preference will be given to those families who part with their land for establishing the industry. Next in order will be for those in the mandal where the industry is being established, while the third preference will for people belonging to the same district.

The minister underlined that the state government



Industries Minister Mekapati Goutham Reddy, Water Resources Minister Dr Anilkumar Yadav, and Education Minister Adimulapu Suresh are seen during a media conference at Nellore on Sunday.

is also providing free training to unemployed in various skills based on requirements of the local industrial units. He accused Pawan Kalyan of guiding youth in the wrong direction with his baseless utterances.

Goutam Reddy also said industrial licenses are being given only after conducting social and environmental impact studies, which are basic requirements for sanctioning an industry at a location. On the actor's charges pertaining to

Divis Pharma, he pointed out that it was the previous TDP government that had given permission for establishment of Divis Laboratories in 2015. Pawan Kalyan was associated with the TD during that period. He wondered why the Jana Sena chief did not go against the TD government then. The minister maintained that the state government had clearly directed the management of Divis not to proceed further without resolving the issues raised by locals.

He expressed interest in holding the Gram Panchayat elections with the coordination of all. He questioned the state government and employees union leaders whether the Covid-19 vaccination, which did not hamper the Tirupati parliamentary elections, hampered the Gram Panchayat elections.

MADDIKERA TEMPLE VANDALS ARRESTED

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, JAN. 10

Maddikera police of Kurnool district arrested eight out of nine people who were involved in vandalism of the oldest temple for treasure hunt at Maddikera agriculture lands on Sunday.

Briefing the incident, the SP said that the police seized one JCB which was used to vandalize the main gate and pillars of the temple arch near Peddamma Ammavari temple of Maddikera village on Pathikonda circle police station limits on December 16.

Beside seizures of JCB vehicle, the police also

seized 8 motorbikes and 8 mobile phones from the accused, he added.

The arrested accused have been identified as Dasari Venkatesh, Mangali Venkateswarlu, Pilleli Mareppa, Ojam Bhaskar Reddy, Golla Peddaiah, Gadda Rajamanjeyulu, Barne Ramjanudun, and Sayad Fakruddin.

The police officer also said that the eight persons by forming a gang are indulged in excavating the hidden treasures on the oldest constructed temple pillars and tried to fail to find hidden treasure under the earth of the temple of land surface.

ELEVEN MEMBER INTER-DISTRICT
GANG OF TREASURE HUNTERS BUSTEDDC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, JAN. 10

Tanakal police of Anantapur district arrested a 11-member inter-district gang involved in vandalising temples and statues, apart from digging up holy places looking for hidden treasure.

Announcing the arrests, Anantapur superintendent of police B. Satya Esubabu said the breakthrough came after all police stations in the district had been alerted over a series of incidents involving destruction of statues at various tem-

match with this, the ruling YSRC is also in high action mode.

Ministers Botsa Satyanarayana and Vellampalli Srinivas Rao said the government has initiated new steps to protect temples. As per primary investigation, the same tool was used in three temple attacks; this strengthening the feeling that there was a conspiracy to defame the government.

They said the culprits will soon be identified and arrested. "The people of AP will not get carried away by baseless allegations," the ministers said, and expressed the hope the YSRC will win the local bodies polls hands down by virtue of the state government's push for welfare schemes.

GOVT STAFF
STATEMENT
ILLEGAL:TDDC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JAN. 10

The Telugu Desam Party state executive secretary Baliseti Hariprasad said it was unconstitutional for union leaders to make it clear that they were not performing election duties.

It was generally believed that employees' union leaders would protect the interests of fellow employees and retired employees. "Looking at the current union leaders, it is doubtful whether they are union leaders or supporters of Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy," he said.

He held a press conference here at his office on Sunday. "If any employees really want to go into politics, you have to go into the party as bravely as Ashok Babu," he said.

He expressed interest in holding the Gram Panchayat elections with the coordination of all. He questioned the state government and employees union leaders whether the Covid-19 vaccination, which did not hamper the Tirupati parliamentary elections, hampered the Gram Panchayat elections.

SEC Ramesh assures safety
for government employeesDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 10

State Election Commission (SEC) is taking all necessary precautions to ensure safety and protection of government employees who will be responsible for conducting the ensuing local body elections in Andhra Pradesh.

The assurance came in the form of a press note issued on Sunday by State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar. The note came promptly after government employees on Saturday expressed reluctance in organising the local body polls due to Corona threat.

The employees also warned that they would be forced to boycott poll duties.

In his note, SEC Ramesh Kumar maintained that the election commission itself is quite concerned about the well being of poll staff. Hence, it has suggested that poll staff be provided with quality PPE suits, face shields, gloves and disinfectants, as per the standard guidelines of dealing with Covid-19.

"Further, the commission will recommend that poll staff be immunised with Covid vaccine on priority basis as a special case. The issue has also been emphasised during discussions with Chief Secretary and Health

AP NGOs retort to
SEC's poll planDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 10

The Visakhapatnam unit of AP Non-Gazetted Officers Association (APN-GOA) has informed the State Election Commission (SEC) that all government employees in Andhra Pradesh will not be in a position to conduct panchayat elections in view of the massive Covid-19 vaccination programme being undertaken by state government.

Addressing a press conference here on Sunday, APNGOA district president K. Eswara Rao said government employees are perplexed with the SEC's notice announcing dates for the panchayat elections. He pointed out that 7,200 people have so

far died in the state due to Covid-19, 520 of them in Vizag district alone. The virus is still prevalent in Andhra Pradesh with the number of daily cases between 200 and 300.

"The State Election Commission should tell us who will shoulder the responsibility if employees contact the virus and lose their lives," Eswara Rao asked. He pointed out that around five lakh government employees and police personnel in the state will be involved in the vaccination programme. As such, they will be unable to take up election duties. The district NGO unit president said if need be, their association will approach the AP High Court if the SEC does not change his mind.

Secretary on January 8 during their visit to the SEC office," Ramesh Kumar disclosed.

The commissioner maintained that political parties, who are important stakeholders, are continuously in touch with the commission and are in favour of gram panchayat elections, which will be held on non-party basis. Holding of elections will

also facilitate release of funds recommended by the Finance Commission constituted by the Government of India.

SEC Ramesh Kumar asserted that AP civil services have an impressive track record in rising up to serious challenges time and again, whether during natural calamities or holding elections in a time-bond manner.

SEC violating tenets
of statute, says BotsaDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN 10

The State Election Commissioner Ramesh Kumar's decision in calling for panchayats elections was against the very tenets and spirit of the Indian Constitution, alleged state municipal administration and urban development minister Botsa Satyanarayana.

Speaking to the media here in Visakhapatnam on Sunday, Satyanarayana questioned the State Elections Commission's alleged unilateral decision of conducting panchayats elections, while the state administration was busy handling the Covid-19 pandemic and preparing for massive exercise of vaccination

beginning next week.

"Former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu is behind the sudden announcement of panchayat election schedule by the SEC. Naidu is trying hard to make sure that the fruits of welfare schemes of the state government should not reach the poor," the minister said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the Covid-19 vaccine rollout from January 16 and Andhra Pradesh is also working in this direction. But within an hour after the Chief Secretary expressed his inability to conduct the elections in this pandemic situation, the SEC sprang a surprise by releasing the schedule,

Satyanarayana told the reporters.

The MA&UD minister added that the same SEC had postponed the elections in March, 2020, citing Covid-19 outbreak as the reason.

"How the same SEC could now go for the elections when the pandemic is not yet over? The SEC is behaving like a political party and ignoring the priorities of the public," said Satyanarayana.

We appealed to the commissioner along with the Minister for Panchayat Raj to hold elections citing the funds would relapse but he did not consider our request then stating that the elections cannot be held under virus conditions," the minister reminded.

Local body polls: Desam
seeks gov's interventionDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 10

The Telugu Desam on Sunday sought intervention of Governor B i s w a b h u s h a n Harichandan to conduct local polls and said the present political situation may attract invocation of Article 356 in Andhra Pradesh – meaning dismissal of the YSRC government and imposition of direct rule by the President.

The party said the YSRC government was bent on using Covid-19 as a pretext to postpone the local polls till after June 2022. Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Council Yanamala Ramakrishnu said the governor must make sure government employees are fielded for election duty irrespective of whether or not the state government agreed for polls. Article 243K(3) provided for allotment of employees for poll

● "The YSRC ministers are stating openly about the government's non-cooperation with the SEC on local body polls. Such statements were never heard of before in the history of the state. Govt employees' association leaders were also threatening non-cooperation with the SEC": Yanamala.

work. The conduct of the elections was the sole responsibility of the state election commission (SEC) as per Articles 243A and 243K (1), he said.

Referring to Article 243K(3), Ramakrishnu said the governor shall, when so requested by the state election commission, make available to the SEC such staff as may be necessary for discharge of the functions conferred on the SEC.

Ramakrishnu said the existing political situation deserved invocation

of Article 356 in AP. "The YSRC ministers are stating openly about the government's non-cooperation with the SEC on local body polls. Such statements were never heard of before in the history of the state. Government employees' association leaders were also threatening non-cooperation with the SEC. This meant the system of governance in the state has broken down, requiring intervention of the governor and imposition of President's Rule."

Ramakrishnu asked how there could be objections about the panchayat polls when the government had allowed a situation of long queues in front of liquor shops. Besides, all-round attacks were being carried out on the Opposition leaders and all sections of the society. Sadly, even temples were coming under attack, Ramakrishnu noted.

YSRC in comfortable position
with local body polls: BalineniDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 10

Maintaining that YSR Congress is in a comfortable position with respect to local body polls, Forests and Energy Minister Balineni Srinivasa Reddy said they are against election at this juncture since

the safety of people is at stake in view of the prevalence of Covid-19.

Speaking to media persons in Ongole on Sunday, Mr Srinivasa Reddy said Prime Minister Narendra Modi had postponed the elections in Gujarat because of Corona. Reminding that state

employees associations also opposing the elections, the minister alleged that State Election Commission is not consulting the state government on holding election but religiously following the directions of opposition leader Chandrababu Naidu.

SHORT TAKES

4 INTER-DISTRICT THIEVES ARRESTED

DC CORRESPONDENT
JANGAREDDYGUDEM, JAN. 10

JangareddyguDEM police of West Godavari District arrested four inter-district thieves and recovered 265 grams of gold and 5.524 kg of silver ornaments and ₹1.47 lakh cash, a total worth ₹18.62 lakh from them.

The JangareddyguDEM DSP B. Ravi Kiran said that the accused, Nudagala Sankar alias Siva Sankar of Madhurawada in Visakhapatnam District, Vuyyala Venkata Ramana of Bhimdoles, Yerramsetty Anantha of Koyyalagudem and Veerapalli Simhadri of Paradesipalem village in Visakhapatnam District, had stolen ornaments in 12 houses under various police stations of Koyyalagudem, Gopalapura, Buttayigudem and Tallapudi limits. He said that when JangareddyguDEM Circle Inspector S. Gowri Sankar and team were checking vehicles, the accused ran away from the spot by leaving the car. The police nabbed and interrogated them. The A1 accused Sankar is having criminal history and he was jailed in Visakhapatnam Central Jail in 70 theft cases that happened in Visakhapatnam, Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, East Godavari and Krishna Districts. He was released in February last year from the jail and started again the thefts. Another Accused Vuyyala Venkata Ramana is working as driver in forest department of JangareddyguDEM on an outsourcing basis and he is operating his own car on hire basis. Veeravalli Simhadri also jailed in three theft cases in Visakhapatnam District.

SPECIAL COURT FOR WOMEN, CHILDREN

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 10

Andhra Pradesh High Court Judge and West Godavari District Administrative Judge Justice Mr Durga Prasada Rao inaugurated a special court for inquiring into sexual abuse and attacks on women and children, at Eluru on Sunday. He said that the child and women abuse cases have increased vastly in recent times and the special court would dispose off the cases speedily.

He said that previously the court used to be run in another building. The West Godavari District Officials provided a separate building to take up women and child abuse cases. He said that such cases would be taken up in the court from Monday.

The West Godavari District Principal Judge Mr E. Bhimavaraao. The West Godavari District Collector Revu Muthyala Raju, Joint Collector K. Venkata Ramana Reddy, Eluru Bar Association President A.Vijaykumar and others were present.

17 GAMBLERS ARRESTED, ₹1.27 LAKH SEIZED

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 10

The Special Enforcement Bureau officials under the directions of the Superintendent of Police Adnan Nayeem Asmi and the SEB SP Mr Sumit Garud conducted raids on a Gambling Den at a Poultry Firm at N.N. Patnam village of Rowthulapudi mandal under the Tuni Rural Police station limits on Sunday and arrested 17 gamblers including the main organiser of playing cards Medapati Banhuchandra Murthy and seized ₹1.27 lakh from them.

The police also seized 15 cell-phones and 11 two-wheelers. The SEB inspectors P. Girija, G. Srinivasa Rao, P. Venkataramana and others participated in the raids.

Meanwhile, Mr Asmi said that the police officials of the district destroyed many proposed bouts for cockfights by ploughing them with JCBs and tractors.

The police are campaigning against cockfights and appealed to the people to celebrate the Sankranti festival in their home with their relatives and friends and play several games like kabaddi, football, cricket, volleyball and others, and asked them not to participate in any anti-social activities or gambling games.

Bull race



Rock boulder (1,500 kg) pulling bull race competition organised by KDCC Bank chairman Yarlagadda Venkatrao in Vijayawada on Sunday. — C. NARAYANA RAO

Defying orders, locals conduct Jallikattu race

One seriously injured, scores mildly hurt in Sanambatl

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 10

Despite strict warnings from the police against conducting the traditional bull-taming sport, popularly known as jallikattu, some enthusiastic persons organised the event at Sanambatl village in Chittoor district's Chandragiri mandal on Sunday.

Meanwhile, several persons, including a scribe sustained injuries during the event held in the morning. Many people arrived from nearby villages,

while scores of youngsters from neighbouring districts thronged the village to take part in the sport.

It may be mentioned here that 'Pasuvula Panduga' or 'cattle festival', the milder version of Tamil Nadu's jallikattu, has been in vogue in some villages of Chittoor district for the past 150 years. As part of the fest, cattle farmers offered prayers to their village deities before the commencement of the dangerous sport.

According to information reaching here, many participants suffered

injuries, while a youngster identified as Rakesh from Dornakambala village sustained severe injuries on his neck when a bull charged at him. He was rushed to a hospital in an ambulance, which was kept ready given the nature of the sport.

In the meanwhile, a scribe who was here to cover the event also sustained injuries when a bull attacked him from behind. "We received information from locals about the conduct of jallikattu and the hospital management also informed us about the

severely injured youngster. We will book cases against the organisers against whom stringent action would be taken," Ramakrishna, SI, Chandragiri, told DC.

Meanwhile, many youngsters were seen competing with one other to snatch the trophies tied to the horns of bulls, which ran through narrow passages in the village amidst heavy drum beats.

It is alleged that the bulls were given liquor and other intoxicants before the commencement of the sport.

PEOPLE'S DOCTOR RAGHAVAMURTHY PASSES AWAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM, JAN. 10

Dr Mamillapalli Veera Raghavamurthy, 75, (SR Hospitals) passed away on Sunday afternoon after a long illness. Dr Raghava Murthy was known as the doctor for the poor and was a special doctor for more than 40 years without taking consultation fees and specialist in nerves, eyes, tongue and others without any need for medical exams and diagnosis, nice words and the patient experienced happiness after getting his treatment.

His son Dr Ramakrishna is also a paediatrician in Rajamahendravaram. Many of the people expressed their grief and condolences to the death of Dr Raghavamurthy.



TD CRITICISES ANIL FOR FLEXI BANNERS ALL OVER NELLORE

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 10

TD rebuked water resources minister Dr Anilkumar Yadav for erecting flexi banners to welcome Jagan Mohan Reddy all over Nellore city while reminding that he ordered for the removal of the banners of P.V. Narasimha Rao and Anam Vivekananda Reddy recently under the pretext of a ban on flex banners at Nellore.

SPECIAL | RITUAL

Women pray from outside the enclosure; villagers make pongal in the premises

Only men worship at this temple in Kadapa

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JAN. 10

Hundreds of men gathered at the Sanjeevaraya Swamy inscription under a tree at Tippayapalle on Sunday for the annual pongali prasadam event as part of a custom that has existed for generations. It strictly excludes women from the prayers and other rituals. By tradition, only male inhabitants would worship Sanjeevaraya Swami in the village set in Pullampeta mandal.

According to the villagers, a Brahmin saint came to this village and stayed there for years. He earned the love and respect of all and was

Every year, the Sunday before the Sankranti festival, a large-scale festival is celebrated for Sanjeevaraya Swami.

treated as a family member by the villagers. He left the village after giving the inhabitants an inscription on a rock slate and advised them to worship it.

It was upon a restriction proposed by this saintly figure that only male members of the village did the worship and kept the womenfolk away from the surroundings of the tree. The villagers, as advised by the saint, named this inscription as Sanjeevaraya Swami. For the



Men gathered at the Sanjeevaraya Swamy temple in Tippayapalle on Sunday. — DC

past many years, they worshipped this as per custom. No temple has been built

for the inscription. Every year, the Sunday before the Sankranti festi-

RELIGIOUS PEACE PANEL FORMED

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 10

District collector V. Vinay Chand has warned that severe action would be initiated against individuals and institutions destroying religious harmony in the district.

After chairing the first religious harmony and peace committee meeting here on Sunday, the collector said people belonging to all religions, faith and caste have been coexisting peacefully. In order to prevent any disturbances, they had formed a district-level peace committee, which will be headed by district collector.

The commissioner of police and district superintendent of police will be vice-presidents while the joint collector would be the convener with minority welfare officials and endowment joint commissioner as members. Seven persons each representing their religion would also be members of the committee. The committee will convene meetings in 15 Assembly constituencies to take stock of the present situation and create awareness among the people on the need for maintaining communal harmony.

Fingerprint issues plague certain ration beneficiaries

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JAN. 10

Many elderly, servant maids and daily labourers are finding it difficult to collect their ration through public distribution system (PDS), as E-PoS machines at the outlets are not confirming their fingerprints. The issue has arisen due to erosion of fingerprints belonging to these sections.

As E-PoS is not confirming their fingerprints, PDS dealers are denying rations to such people. A major issue here is that if ration is not collected for three consecutive months, the card gets cancelled. Many beneficiaries are thus on tenterhooks about losing their benefits, particularly in their old age.

V. Suryanarayana of Rajamahendravaram said he and his wife had been collecting ration every month by pressing their fingerprints on the machine at the PDS ration shop. But for the past two months, the machine is not accepting their prints. Not only have they been denied their ration for last two months, the ration shop owner has warned them

that if the machine does not accept their fingerprints this month, their ration card will get cancelled automatically. The dealer has suggested that the couple approach the mandal tahsildar office to sort out the issue.

District civil supplies officer P. Prasada Rao suggested that if fingerprints of beneficiaries are not captured by the E-PoS, such beneficiaries can give alternative fingerprints of their neighbours or relatives to collect ration on their behalf.

However, when similar problems arose in disbursement of old-age pensions, the District Rural Development Agency provided pensions through the Real Time Beneficiary System. It used face recognition technology and matched them with Aadhaar cards of the beneficiaries before giving them the pensions.

PDS beneficiaries are requesting the government that a similar facility could be introduced at the ration shops to get over the issue of fingerprints not getting recorded.

They say nowadays, neighbours or relatives may not be willing to help.

Sankranti special



Youngsters busy in preparing Rangoli during a competition organised at Akkayyapalem 80-foot road in Visakhapatnam on Sunday. — K. MURALIKRISHNA

Inter girl found dead at hostel

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, JAN. 10

An Intermediate first-year girl student of the Gurukula social welfare college was found dead on the steps of the hostel dormitory in Veldurthi mandal headquarters town late on Saturday night.

The deceased was N. Pushpalatha, 16, a native of Dhurgapeta of Bethamcherla mandal. District collector G. Veera Pandian ordered a magisterial inquiry into the death.

According to police, she reached the hostel from her native village on Monday when the college hostel reopened. She was found in a lifeless state by students who immediately informed the hostel authority and the police.

The collector ordered a magisterial inquiry into death

She was rushed to Kurnool Government General Hospital at night and the doctors confirmed her death.

On Sunday, the collector along with district SP K. Fakeerappa visited the hospital and also the college hostel and made preliminary enquiries. The collector later ordered a magisterial inquiry. A special committee with Atmakur DSP V. Shruthi has been formed to probe the matter.

The collector and the SP met parents of the girl and consoled them. The collector said arrests will be made once the culprits are identified.

SPECIAL ATTENTION ON RELIGIOUS HARMONY: HARI

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JAN. 10

District collector Chevuri Harikiran directed the religious leaders of all religions and other representatives to pay special attention to reflect on religious harmony in the district and take steps in that direction. He chaired a meeting of the district-level Religious Harmony Committee in his chamber at the Collectorate on Sunday. The collector said that Kadapa district is a symbol of religious harmony. The people of this district have a tradition of respecting each other's religions. That is why the collector reminded that nowhere in the district is there any place for religious hatred. In the wake of the recent destruction of several idols in the state, the government has implemented a special order to restore religious harmony everywhere. Its main purpose is to promote religious harmony in the state and districts. As part of this, religious harmony committees should be set up at the state and district levels and action plans should be drawn up to foster a sense of camaraderie among people of all faiths. For this purpose, the District Level Committee is chaired by the District Collector, the Vice-Chairman is the District SP, the JC (Revenue) is the Member Convener, the members are the Minority Welfare AD, the Endowment Department AD and the Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Jain, Sikh, Buddhist and religious elders will be members, he said.

IN BRIEFS

Pregnant rape survivor dies in UP

Bareilly (UP): A 15-year-old rape survivor who was seven months pregnant died of pregnancy-related complications at the district hospital here, police said on Sunday. She was admitted to the hospital on Saturday night and passed away on Thursday night, they said. Additional director and superintendent in-charge of the hospital Dr Subodh Sharma said the girl was brought to the hospital in serious condition and her health deteriorated further. Despite best efforts by the doctors, she could not be saved, he added. Senior superintendent of police, Bareilly, Rohit Singh Sajwan said, "The post-mortem report says that the death took place due to infection." "The viscera of the victim has been preserved," he added.

Sri Lankan Navy nabs 9 fishermen

Rameswaram (TN): The Sri Lankan Navy has arrested nine Indian fishermen and seized one mechanised boat for allegedly fishing in that country's waters, besides damaging fishing nets in a separate incident, officials said here on Sunday. The fishermen were arrested near Neduntheevu on Saturday. Fisheries department officials said, adding that one boat was also seized by the Lankan navy. In a separate incident, the Lankan navy personnel allegedly damaged fishing nets in 20 mechanised boats near Katchatheevu on Saturday, the officials added. They also allegedly hurled stones and bottles on the Indian fishermen, they said. Fishermen's association representative Sesuraja rued the acts of the Sri Lankan Navy, saying damage to equipment caused distress to the fishermen. Meanwhile, the fishermen operating mechanised boats decided to strike work indefinitely from Monday, urging the Centre to expedite steps for the release of about 52 fishermen from Lankan custody at the earliest.

KANPUR ZOO SHUT AFTER BIRD FLU CASES

Kanpur, Jan. 10: The Kanpur Zoological Park has been closed for visitors till further orders after samples taken from two dead birds found there tested positive for the avian influenza virus, an official said on Sunday.

The area up to one kilometre of the zoo has been declared an infected zone and the culling of birds has begun there, said Additional District Magistrate (City) Atul Kumar.

"Four fowls and two parrots were found dead in the zoo in the last five days. Of these, two birds tested positive," Kumar said. According to the official, the samples of dead birds were sent to the animal disease laboratory in Bhopal which confirmed the presence of H-5 strain of bird flu in them.

"The zoo has been closed for visitors and morning walkers. The hospital enclosure where the infected birds had been placed has also been shut down," Kumar said. An area of 10 kilometres around the zoo has been cordoned off and declared containment zone for an indefinite period by the authorities and shops selling chicken and eggs there have been asked to down shutters for an indefinite period, an official said.

"We have imposed an indefinite ban on the transportation and entry of poultry products including live birds, unprocessed poultry meat in the district as a precautionary measure," District Magistrate Alok Tiwari said.

"We have taken the decisions after marathon discussion with the officials of Kanpur zoo, health department, animal husbandry and veterinary doctors," he said.

Meanwhile, section 144 of CrPC has been imposed to curb the spread of bird flu in the district, Kumar said.

The process of disinfecting all poultry farms in the radius of one kilometre of the zoo has started and teams have been formed to inspect shops selling raw chicken and mutton, he said. Strict instructions have also been issued to make adequate arrangements for the disposal of dead birds, he added.

"We have also issued an advisory to keep a strict watch on unusual sickness or mortality in poultry birds and wild or migratory birds," ADM said.

Pak violates ceasefire

A Bomb Disposal Squad member of the Indian Army destroys a 2.4kg Improvised Explosive Device (IED) along the Gohlad Mendhar road near LoC, in Mendhar area of Poonch district on Sunday. Pakistani troops violated ceasefire by resorting to unprovoked mortar shelling and firing on forward posts and villages in Rajouri, Poonch and Kathua districts of J&K. — PTI

Stop Covaxin trial in Bhopal, demand NGOs

Allege that gas tragedy survivors forced to volunteer

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, JAN. 10

Bhopal gas tragedy survivors on Sunday demanded Prime Minister Narendra Modi to halt the ongoing trial of Covaxin, the indigenously developed Covid-19 vaccine, in view of 'violation of laws and guidelines'.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, four NGOs, comprising Bhopal gas tragedy survivors, said, "We are writing to you to apprise you of the ground situation with regard to conduct of the trial. Evidence has emerged that the trial in Bhopal is being conducted in gross violation of laws and guidelines governing clinical trials in India."

"This is leading to exploitation and harm to a community of people that are not just economically and socially deprived, but whose health is compromised owing to the destructive impact and its consequences", they said.

The NGOs alleged that vulnerable people were being misgued and herded to participate in the trials and the consent procedure and other protocol of testing was being thrown to winds.

"The clinical trial (of the vaccine) should be stopped forthwith and an impartial probe be conducted", they said.

According to Rasheeda Bee, a gas tragedy survivor and social activist, at least 700 out of the 1,700 people on whom this vaccine was being tested,

Didi promises free Covid vaccine to all

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, JAN. 10

With barely three months left for the West Bengal elections, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has announced that the government would provide Covid-19 vaccine "free of cost" to all but the promise only earned her sharp attack from the BJP and the Congress.

"You are aware Covid-19 vaccine is coming. With profound joy I inform that our government is making arrangements to reach out to all the people of the state with this vaccine free of cost. In the first phase we will provide this vaccine to all health workers," Mamata Banerjee said in an open letter to all the frontline Covid warriors while saluting their service during the pandemic.

were those poisoned by the Union Carbide gas leak in 1984.

"One gas victim died within 10 days of getting the trial shot and many continue to have health complaints of a serious nature", she alleged. A Covaxin volunteer died nine days after he took the shot, she said.

Meanwhile, Bharat Biotech, a partner in the development of the

Accusing her of trying to claim credit for something that the Centre has already announced for the entire country, BJP national IT cell in-charge Amit Malviya on Sunday Tweeted, "Pishi was a disaster when it came to managing Covid. From doctors to policemen, everyone protested against Chief Minister's apathy. But now that the Centre has announced free priority vaccination for 3 crore frontline workers across the country, Pishi is rushing to take credit."

Congress leader in Lok Sabha Adhir Chowdhury said, "Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal has already announced to give Covid-19 vaccine free of cost to all. Now the Bengal CM has done the same but to get votes in exchange of what I say: poll bribe."

Covaxin, has issued a statement saying that the volunteer's death was not related to the vaccine.

In a statement issued here, People's College of Medical Science and Research Centre, said the post-mortem report conducted on the deceased by Medico Legal Institute cited that the cause of death was cardio-respiratory failure because of suspected poisoning.

INDIA GENERATED 33K TONNES OF COVID-19 WASTE

New Delhi, Jan. 10: India generated around 33,000 tonnes of Covid-19 biomedical waste in the last seven months, with Maharashtra contributing the maximum (3,587 tonnes) to it, according to Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data.

Over 5,500 tonnes of Covid-19 waste was generated across the country in October — the maximum for a month so far. According to the data received from state pollution control boards, since June 2020, all states and Union Territories have generated 32,994 tonnes of Covid-19-related biomedical waste which is being collected, treated and disposed of by 198 common biomedical waste treatment facilities (CBWTFs).

Covid-19 biomedical waste could include PPE kits, masks, shoe covers, gloves, human tissues, items contaminated with blood, body fluids like dressings, etc.

According to the data, Maharashtra generated 5,367 tonnes of Covid-19 waste in seven months since June, followed by Kerala (3,300 tonnes), Gujarat (3,086 tonnes), Tamil Nadu (2,806 tonnes), Uttar Pradesh (2,502 tonnes), Delhi (2,471 tonnes), West Bengal (2,095 tonnes) and Karnataka (2,026 tonnes). — PTI

States to hold door-to-door survey to enrol students

New Delhi, Jan. 10: The education ministry has asked the states to conduct a door-to-door survey to identify out-of-school children and prepare an action plan for their enrolment as part of efforts to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, especially on migrants, according to officials.

The ministry has also recommended relaxing detention norms to prevent drop-outs this year as well as a slew of measures to address learning loss due to the Coronavirus-induced shutdown of schools.

The move is particularly aimed at identification, admission and continued education of migrant children who have been affected during the pandemic, they said.

"In order to mitigate the impact of challenges thrown by the Covid-19 pandemic for out of school children, it was felt necessary for every state and UT to devise a proper strategy for preventing increased dropouts, lower enrolments, loss of learning and deterioration in the gains made in providing universal access, quality and equity in the recent years," a senior ministry official said. "The states and UTs have been advised to carry out

proper identification of Out-of-School Children (OoSC) for 6 to 18 years age group through a comprehensive door-to-door survey and prepare an action plan for their enrolment," the official added.

The ministry has also issued guidelines for offering support to students during the closure of schools and when they reopen.

"To ensure that school-going children have access to education with quality and equity and to minimise the impact of the pandemic on school education across the country, the ministry of education has prepared and issued detailed guidelines on steps to be taken by the states and UTs during school closure and when the schools reopen," the official said.

Exploring the option of classroom-on-wheels and classes in small groups at the village level, increasing the access of children to online and digital

resources, use of TV and radio to reduce learning losses and ensuring easy and timely access to the provisions of uniforms, textbooks and mid-day meals are among the recommendations made by the ministry for student support during the closure of schools.

Similarly, the guidelines for student support when schools reopen after prolonged closure include preparation and running of school readiness modules and bridge course for the initial period so that they can adjust to the school environment and do not feel stressed or left out.

Identifying students across different grades based on their learning levels and relaxing detention norms to prevent drop out this year have also been recommended.

The ministry has also suggested encouraging children to read books beyond the syllabus and indulge in creative writing and problem solving for ensuring reading with comprehension and numeracy skills.

Large-scale remedial programmes and learning enhancement programmes should be held to mitigate learning loss and inequality, it recommended. — PTI

Spl panel to probe Maha fire mishap

DC CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI, JAN. 10

A day after 10 newborn babies died in fire at a Bhandara hospital in Maharashtra, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray visited the hospital and met the family members of the deceased. He said that Divisional Commissioner of Nagpur, Dr. Sanjeev Kumar and former chief fire officer of Mumbai, P.S. Rahangdale will also be a part of the committee, which is investigating the fire incident.

Thackeray said that he has ordered fire safety audit of all government hospitals across the state. Meanwhile, the BJP alleged that the police are pressuring victims' parents not to speak to the media. Many parents of deceased babies have blamed the hospital staff there for dereliction of duty. "The help of experts will be sought to find out the exact cause of this incident. I have directed to conduct a comprehensive inquiry into the incident," Thackeray said.

He also said that necessary arrangements will be made in all government hospitals in the state after finding out the cause of the incident.

Thackeray said that the recommendations of the inquiry committee would be implemented in other

hospitals in the state as well.

Meanwhile, BJP spokesperson Ram Kadam alleged that the government is muzzling the voices of the victim's families in order to put the fire incident issue in cold storage. "The parents of the deceased were not allowed to speak to media. They are being threatened," Kadam alleged.

Kin of Geeta and Vishwanath Behere, whose two month-old daughter was among the 10 newborn babies who perished in the blaze, blamed the hospital authorities for dereliction of duty. They claimed that no doctor or nurse was present in the unit when fire broke out. They blamed the hospital administration for the tragedy and sought action against those responsible.

Vandana Sidam from Ravanwadi in Bhandara district gave birth to a girl at Pahela primary health centre on January 3. The baby was shifted to the district hospital unit as its weight was below normal. Family members of Vandana, whose husband was working in Pune when the tragedy happened, have blamed the hospital authorities for the fire and sought action against officials who they claim ignored safety norms.

K'taka Cabinet rejig soon: BSY

New Delhi/Bengaluru, Jan. 10: Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa on Sunday expressed confidence of soon getting a final clearance from the central BJP leadership for the much-awaited cabinet rejig in the state after he met senior party leaders including its chief J.P. Nadda and Union home minister Amit Shah.

State party in-charge Arun Singh was also present in an hour-long meeting held at Shah's residence in Delhi. "On cabinet expansion, there was a detailed discussion. You will get good news soon," Yediyurappa told reporters after the meeting.

He said the final names will be cleared as early as possible because there was "positive, fruitful and satisfactory discussion".

"I am happy with the discussion. ... we will wait for their instructions," he said, adding the central leadership has assured its support. When asked if this was the last meeting on cabinet expansion with the senior party leaders,

the CM said, "101 per cent this is the last meeting. They are going to clear the names as soon as possible."

The cabinet expansion in the state has been on the cards for over a year now, but it could not take place, giving some anxious moments to ministerial aspirants and also leading to dissatisfaction.

Further, the CM said he suggested some names and also expressed confidence that the central BJP leadership will respond to that in a positive way. Asked if it would be a cabinet expansion or a reshuffle, the CM said "you will get to know when they inform". Apart from the cabinet rejig, the CM said there were discussions also on the upcoming bypolls in the state for two Assembly and one parliamentary seats.

"They asked me to send the names of the candidates at the earliest for clearance," he said, adding the leadership also told him to ensure the party's victory on all three seats. — PTI

Rumour triggers 'gold rush' in MP

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, JAN. 10

Rumours that hidden wealth was buried in a river has triggered a treasure hunt by locals in some riparian villages in Madhya Pradesh, leading to deployment of police forces in the area. Thousands of people from around a dozen villages under Narasinghgarh sub-

division under Rajgarh district have been thronging the nearby Parvati river for five days in search of the 'treasure' buried under its bed, a senior district officer said on Sunday.

Young and old were seen busy digging the river bed round the clock in a stretch of around 500 metres to try out their luck.

The 'treasure hunters'

were even seen setting up tents on the river bank to spend the night.

"I have ordered the police to initiate action to maintain law and order after I received reports that people from some villages under Narasinghgarh subdivision have started digging the river in search of hidden treasure. Rumours that gold coins were buried in the river bed have trig-

gered the treasure hunt by the villagers," local tahsildar Rajendra Sharma said.

According to the police, some people in the villages of Shivpura and Gudupara, located on the river bank recovered a few old coins from the river five days ago and the news spread like wildfire in the surrounding villages leading to the 'gold rush'.

UN | RECOGNITION

Authorisation to be done by Switzerland-based INSARAG

NDRF to get global rescue force tag

New Delhi, Jan. 10: India could soon be a part of the United Nations (UN) mandated international disaster rescue operations as the country's federal contingency force, NDRF, is expected to obtain a globally recognised standardisation later this year, a top ranking official has said.

The authorisation will be done by the Switzerland-headquartered INSARAG (or the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group) which is a network of

more than 90 countries and organisations under the UN umbrella to deal with urban search and rescue related issues.

"Just like we have the Bureau of Indian Standards in the country, the UN agency INSARAG standardises disaster response teams across the world. It is an international gold standard," NDRF director general S.N. Pradhan said. "We are very much in thick of it and hopefully we will get the standardisation in

2021." He further explained the purpose of this categorisation that is possessed by some of India's neighbours like China and Pakistan.

"If there is a call from the UN to respond to some disaster you will be called upon...you will be an international response force," Pradhan said. "It is not that we have not been doing that (going for international rescue operations) but when NDRF went to Japan and Nepal in the past it was a bilateral deci-

sion between two countries but with this standardisation it will be a UN mandated task," he said.

It will be a matter of great prestige for India that its force is known as an international response force, the DG said. He said an INSARAG committee, comprising Australian and Singaporean experts, has conducted preliminary review of NDRF teams in September, 2019, but the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic put the process on a back burner

for a while. "Hopefully, in 2021 you will see at least two heavy teams of the NDRF notified as INSARAG teams," he said.

The NDRF was raised in 2006 to undertake specific tasks of relief and rescue during natural and man-made disasters or life threatening situations. It has 12 operational battalions comprising more than 15,000 personnel based across the country at present while four more battalions are taking shape. — PTI



SHORT TAKES

LANDSLIDES
IN INDONESIA
LEAVE 11 DEAD

Jakarta, Jan. 10: Two landslides triggered by heavy rain in Indonesia left at least 11 dead and 18 injured, officials said on Sunday.

The second landslide in Cihanjuang village in the Sumedang district of West Java province occurred as rescuers were still evacuating people following the first disaster on Saturday, said National Disaster Mitigation Agency spokesman Raditya Jati. Rescuers were among the victims, he said.

The rain stopped on Saturday night. A bridge and roads were blocked by the landslides as authorities struggled to bring in heavy equipment to clear the debris. Seasonal rains and high tide in recent days have caused dozens of landslides and widespread flooding across much of Indonesia, a chain of 17,000 islands where millions of people live in mountainous areas or near fertile flood plains close to rivers.

QATAR-SAUDI
REOPEN
LAND BORDERS

Abu Samrah, Jan. 10: Qatar and Saudi Arabia reopened their land border on Saturday as they restored ties following a landmark deal to end a three and a half year rift.

Saudi shut its side of Qatar's only land border in June 2017 as part of a package of sanctions it said was a response to Doha's backing radical Islamist groups and closeness to Iran.

Qatar always denied the charges. *AFP* correspondents saw cars making the crossing on Saturday. A Qatari source said traffic at the Abu Samrah crossing, 120 kilometres (75 miles) south of Doha, had resumed around 0700 GMT.

ROADSIDE BOMB
KILLS THREE IN
AFGHAN CAPITAL

Kabul, Jan. 10: A roadside bomb exploded in Afghanistan's capital on Sunday, killing at least three people in a vehicle, the latest attack to take place even as government negotiators are in Qatar to resume peace talks with the Taliban.

Tariq Arian, spokesman for the interior minister, said a spokesman for the ministry's public protection forces — a security force — was one of the three killed in the attack. One other person was wounded, he said.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. The Islamic State group has claimed responsibility for multiple attacks in the capital in recent months, including on educational institutions that killed 50 people, most of them students. IS has claimed responsibility for rocket attacks in December targeting the major U.S. base in Afghanistan. There were no casualties.

BREXIT 'RULES
OF ORIGIN'
SPARK DOUBTS

London, Jan. 10: Many British businesses are swiftly discovering that they must now pay duties on exports bound for the European Union, despite the breakthrough Brexit free trade deal clinched over Christmas. The development, which has already helped spark sliding freight traffic to Ireland, is part of trade disruption that has become increasingly evident this year after Britain's Brexit divorce was finalised on December 31.

Trade has also been badly hampered by new Covid-19 border restrictions, with the roll-out of testing for lorry drivers as Britain races to curb a rampant variant of the deadly virus. At the heart of the Brexit deal, which came into force on January 1, is the so-called "rules of origin" condition applied to all goods crossing the border.

The rules of origin, a key aspect of all major trade deals, can rapidly turn into a costly headache for businesses. Under the Brexit provision, any good will be subject to a customs levy if it arrives in Britain from abroad and is then exported back into the European Union.

Democrats ready for Trump's
second impeachment today

Move to impeach comes amid continued fury over the storming of US Capitol

Washington, Jan. 10: US Democrats on Saturday were readying for an unprecedented second impeachment of Donald Trump as the defiant president showed no signs of stepping down after the deadly violence at the Capitol.

Democrats said impeachment proceedings could begin as early as Monday — an extraordinary acceleration of a process that historically has taken weeks, but one that might not be completed before President-elect Joe Biden is sworn into office on January 20.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi warned that Democrats will launch the process unless Trump resigns or Vice President Mike Pence invokes the 25th Amendment, where the cabinet removes the president.

"He's deranged, unhinged and dangerous. He must go," Pelosi, referring to Trump, tweeted on Friday.

The move to impeach came amid continued fury over the storming of the Capitol on Wednesday by angry Trump supporters, which left five people dead, including a Capitol policeman.

Authorities announced new arrests and charges Saturday over the incursion, including a tattooed man in a horned headdress whose image was beamed around the world.

That man, Jacob Anthony Chansley, also known as Jake Angeli, and two others — one of them a newly elected state official from West Virginia — were charged in federal court in connection with the violence, according to the US attorney's office for the District of Columbia.

The impeachment text — signed by at least 180 members of Congress so far, according to Democratic congressman Ted Lieu — laid blame squarely at the president's feet.

"In all of this, President Trump gravely endangered the security of the United States and its institutions of government. He threatened the integrity of the democratic system, interfered with the peaceful transition of power, and imperiled a coordinate branch of government," it reads.

Trump, who had urged his supporters to come to Washington on Wednesday for a rally opposing his November election loss, has remained defiant, even after finally posting a video Thursday in which he belatedly promised an



Counter-protesters spray pepper spray as they clash with people during a 'Patriot March' demonstration in support of President Trump, in the Pacific Beach neighborhood of San Diego, California.

— AFP

Pence to attend Biden's inaugural

Washington, Jan. 10: Mike Pence will attend the upcoming inauguration of Joe Biden, multiple media reports said Saturday, the vice president becoming the latest longtime loyalist to abandon an increasingly isolated President Donald Trump.

Relations between Trump and Pence — previously one of the mercurial president's staunchest defenders — have nose-

dived since Wednesday, when the vice president formally announced Biden's victory in November's election.

A mob of far-right demonstrators stormed the US Capitol the same day in a failed bid to stop Congress from certifying Biden's win, in a riot blamed on Trump that left five dead.

Multiple media reports on Saturday cited senior

administration officials as saying that Pence — who was forced to take shelter from the intruders during the riot — had decided to attend Biden's inauguration on January 20.

The president-elect earlier in the week said Pence would be welcome at his formal swearing-in, due to take place in a scaled-down format due to the Covid-19.

"I think it's important

that as much as we can stick to what have been the historical precedents of how an administration changes should be maintained," Biden told reporters.

"We'd be honored to have him there, and to move forward in the transition." In his final tweet before being removed from Twitter on Friday, Trump said he would not attend the inauguration. — *AFP*

Amazon pushes Parler offline
after violent US Capitol attack

San Francisco, Jan. 10: Amazon will suspend Parler, the tech giant confirmed Saturday, sending the social media network offline after it was banned by Apple and Google for allowing "threats of violence" in the wake of a deadly riot at the US Capitol.

The Parler social network has become a haven for conservatives who say they have been censored by other social media platforms. It had soared in popularity in recent months, becoming the No. 1 free app on Apple's App

Store on Saturday after the much larger Twitter decided to permanently ban US President Trump from its platform for his role in inciting violence at the Capitol.

Messages of support for the Wednesday's rioters along with calls for new demonstrations had flourished on the platform, leading Google to remove it from its app store on Friday, followed by Apple on Saturday.

Amazon then moved to wipe it from its cloud hosting Amazon Web Services, pushing it offline

entirely. In a letter to Parler first published by Buzzfeed, Amazon said the network was not acting quickly enough against violent content on the platform.

"We've seen a steady increase in this violent content on your website, all of which violates our terms of service," the letter, the contents of which were confirmed by Amazon. Given the riot at the Capitol this week, the letter continued, there was a "serious risk that this type of content will further incite violence." — *AFP*

Elizabeth, Philip get vaccine

Rome, Jan. 10: The pope and Britain's Queen Elizabeth became the latest high-profile figures to join the global vaccination campaign against the Coronavirus as Germany on Sunday reported 40,000 fatalities since the pandemic began a year ago.

And German Chancellor Angela Merkel warned that the worst was still to come.

More than 1.9 million people worldwide have now died from the virus, with new variants adding to soaring cases and prompting the re-intro-

duction of restrictions on movement across the globe — even as with mass inoculation drives underway.

Pope Francis urged people to get the vaccination saying he would be inoculated against the virus himself next week when the Vatican begins its campaign and denouncing opposition to the jab.

"There is a suicidal denial which I cannot explain, but today we have to get vaccinated," the pontiff tells Canale 5 in an interview to be broadcast Sunday.

Britain's Elizabeth II and her husband Prince Philip received their Covid-19 vaccinations on Saturday, said Buckingham Palace.

A source told that the queen, 94, and Philip, 99, were given the injections by a royal household doctor at Windsor Castle.

More than 1.5 million people in Britain have so far been inoculated, in the biggest immunisation programme in national history, with the elderly, their carers and health workers first in line.

Countries across the

world are following suit with coronavirus shots approved including those by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna and domestically made jabs from Russia and China.

Britain is racing to protect as many people as possible as a new variant believed to be more contagious pushes infections and deaths to unprecedented levels.

Health authorities announced more than three million coronavirus infections since the pandemic began last year.

— AFP

Witnesses heard
explosion before
Indonesia crash

Jakarta, Jan. 10: Indonesian rescuers pulled out body parts, pieces of clothing and scraps of metal from the Java Sea early Sunday morning, a day after a Boeing 737-500 with 62 people onboard crashed shortly after takeoff from Jakarta, officials said.

Officials were hopeful they were honing in on the wreckage of Sriwijaya Air Flight 182 after sonar equipment detected a signal from the aircraft. Transportation Minister Budi Karya Sumadi told reporters that authorities have launched massive search efforts after identifying "the possible location of the crash site." "These pieces were found by the SAR team between Lancang Island and Laki Island," National Search and Rescue Agency Bagus Puruhito in a statement.

Indonesian military chief Air Chief Marshal Hadi Tjahjanto said teams on the Rigel navy ship equipped with a remote-operated vehicle had detected a signal from the aircraft, which fit the coordinates from the last contact made by the pilots before the plane went missing. "We have immediately deployed our divers from navies elite unit to determine the finding to evacuate the victims," Tjahjanto said.

More than 12 hours since the Boeing plane operated by the Indonesian airline lost contact, little is known about what caused the crash. Fishermen in the area around Thousand Islands, a chain of islands

north of Jakarta's coast, reported hearing an explosion around 2:30 pm Saturday. "We heard something explode, we thought it was a bomb or a tsunami since after that we saw the big splash from the water," fisherman Solihin, who goes by one name, told *The Associated Press* by phone.

"It was raining heavily and the weather was so bad. So it is difficult to see around clearly. But we can see the splash and a big wave after the sounds. We were very shocked and directly saw the plane debris and the fuel around our boat."

Authorities have yet to say why the Sriwijaya Air Boeing 737-500 went into a steep dive about four minutes after it left Soekarno-Hatta international airport on Saturday afternoon.

But, on Sunday, they said that they had pinpointed the location of its black boxes — cockpit voice and flight data recorders — that could be key to explaining why the plane slammed into the Java Sea off the sprawling city's coast.

The search and rescue agency said it had collected body bags filled with human remains, as well as debris from the wreckage, in waters about 23 metres (75 feet) deep.

Passengers Ihsan Adhlan Hakim and his new bride Putri were headed to Pontianak, the city on Indonesia's section of Borneo island which had been flight SJ182's destination, about 90 minutes away.

— *AFP, AP*US lifts curbs on
Taiwan relations

Washington, Jan. 10: The United States is ending decades-old restrictions governing official contacts with Taiwan, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement Saturday.

He said the "complex internal restrictions" on contacts with Taipei by diplomats, service members and others had been imposed "in an attempt to appease the Communist regime in Beijing."

Pompeo added, "No more." The declaration may be more symbolic than substantive in effect, but it nonetheless appears certain to anger China, which sees Taiwan as its own territory.

It comes in the final weeks of the Donald Trump administration, and at a time of already heightened tensions between Beijing and both Washington and Taipei.

It was not clear what the change means in practice, with Pompeo saying executive branch communications with Taiwan will be handled by the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), which is owned by the US government and serves as the de facto embassy.

The shift comes after a year of mounting US-Chinese tensions.

Trump has sent multiple senior officials to Taipei over the last year, even as he clashed with China on a host of issues, ranging from its handling of the coronavirus pandemic to disputes over trade, security and human rights.

The complex internal restrictions" on contacts with Taipei by diplomats, service members and others had been imposed "in an attempt to appease the Communist regime in Beijing."

— **MIKE POMPEO**
Secretary of State

Pompeo's statement also came just two days after China warned the United States it would pay a "heavy price" if its United Nations ambassador, Kelly Craft, made good on plans to travel to Taiwan on Wednesday.

Beijing opposes any diplomatic recognition of Taiwan. Craft's scheduled three-day visit will come just a week before Joe Biden's inauguration as US president, adding to a string of diplomatic headaches facing the incoming administration.

"The United States will pay a heavy price for its wrong action," the Chinese mission to the UN said in a statement responding to Craft's planned trip. "China strongly urges the United States to stop its crazy provocation, stop creating new difficulties for China-US relations... and stop going further on the wrong path."

An American statement said Craft's visit, which Taiwan has officially welcomed, would "reinforce the US government's strong and ongoing support for Taiwan's international space." — *AFP*

WEATHER | TROUBLE

Deadly snowstorm Filomena killed three, causing chaos across Spain

Spain races to clear snow before cold snap

Madrid, Jan. 10: After the worst snowstorm in decades, Spanish officials were racing on Sunday to clear the roads of snow before a cold snap transforms them into icy death traps.

Storm Filomena killed three people during its passage through Spain and kept emergency services workers and army snow ploughs busy through Saturday freeing 2,500 drivers trapped in their vehicles.

The storm also brought

● **A FLEET** of snow-ploughs and gritters were out on the streets of Madrid on Sunday where the city's mayor, Jose Luis Martinez-Almeida, said on Sunday there was not a minute to be lost.

heavy rains before moving through eastern Spain into southern France.

Spain's weather forecasters AEMET predicted heavy frost overnight Sunday to Monday in large parts of Spain. In moun-

tainous areas temperatures would drop below -10 celsius (14 Fahrenheit), conditions that could last until Thursday, the agency added.

Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska said Sunday that the danger was that the piles of snow could transform into ice because of the unprecedented low temperatures expected.

But despite the conditions, he said, the country's vaccination campaign against the coron-

avirus would go ahead as scheduled, with 350,000 doses due to be delivered on Monday.

A fleet of snow-ploughs and gritters were out on the streets of Madrid on Sunday where the city's mayor, Jose Luis Martinez-Almeida, said on Sunday there was not a minute to be lost. "Our aim is to make the most of every minute before Monday when the drop in temperature happens," Martinez-Almeida told Sexta television late Saturday. — *AFP*



A snowplough removes snow after a heavy snowfall in Madrid on Sunday.

— AFP

DECCAN
Chronicle

11 JANUARY 2021

How moving court over agri row may go wrong

The latest round of talks between farmers' unions and the Union government has produced little more than déjā vu: Both sides stuck to their positions and decided on the date on which the next round of talks would be held. However, there are reports about the government suggesting to the farmers unions that the issue be settled in the court of law. As per them, the government has said if the court pronounces them unconstitutional or illegal, then it will repeal the laws and if the court sustains them, then the farmers should withdraw their agitation. Representatives of the farmers unions have made it public that they have no plans to go by the suggestion. Leaving such an important issue to the court is not the way to settle it. This is so for several reasons. The farmers have consistently made it clear that they are not questioning the constitutionality or legality of the issue. For them, it's a policy decision by the government to withdraw from supporting agriculture and leave it to the whims and fancies of the corporate sector. This will undermine whatever sense of security the farming community enjoys at present, they say. They have opposed the proposed amendment to the Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2020, which, they feared, will cut power subsidies for the farming sector. Their grouse has been that all the bills together reflect the policy of the government — it is plotting to eliminate the agriculture market system in the garb of giving farmers more options, as the laws allow corporates unbridled freedom to monopolise procurement of agriculture produce and make farmers their captive producers. They warn the government to abandon it, legal or not.

Courts, especially the Supreme Court, show no enthusiasm to wield that constitutional power when it is required, and required urgently

There is a section of legal experts who hold the view that the Centre has legislated on agriculture which is a state subject and hence moving the court makes sense. And the courts are expected to make use of the all-powerful tool of judicial review to test pieces of legislations against the Constitution. They have done it in the past and held several of the laws unconstitutional. However, courts, especially the Supreme Court, show no enthusiasm to wield that constitutional power when it is required, and required urgently. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, and the virtual annulment of Article 370 are two legislative steps this government has taken which many perceive to be questioning the very idea of India as reflected in the Constitution. They have moved the apex court but the court has not found it compelling enough to take up. The petitions have been pending with the court for more than a year now. There is no guarantee that the courts will treat this issue differently.

Democratic governments have the right to legislate and the government has exercised that power, though in a questionable way — that the bills were rushed through Parliament is a fact even the government would not oppose. Now, the affected people are exercising their right, the right to protest, to compel the government to go back on its move. It is a matter to be decided in the spirit of democracy; calling upon an even-otherwise-reticent judiciary to decide on policy is hardly an option.

No room for racism

The India-Australia Test series was hit by complaints of racist abuse from spectators at the Sydney Cricket Ground. The touring Indian team was right to bring it to call it at once and the host board, too, reacted with alacrity not only in expelling at least six spectators but also profusely apologising for the despicable racist behaviour of some Australians in the crowd on two successive days of the third Test. There is just no place for racism in sport, whether such overt acts of discrimination come from within the game and its players or from a source beyond like spectators who come to watch games.

We are often reminded that cricket is a gentleman's game that prides itself on having been a constant metaphor for fair play. But sport also mirrors the society it is played in. Stray elements like rowdy or drunken spectators cannot be expected to eternally preserve a safe and inclusive environment. The only thing cricket can do is to keep such elements out of the arena. It must be seen acting with an iron fist at every instance of racially coloured comments. Cricket Australia has also promised to pursue the Sydney Test matter with law enforcement and in the courts.

Given its racial history as the country that had a "White Australia Policy" starting in 1901 and in place for decades, Australian society might be facing a real problem in racism even as it works hard on achieving equality amid diversity and to promote inclusivity. Soccer may have a much larger problem in tackling racism as well as hooliganism but it has firm policies that leave no room for racism anywhere — "in the stands, not at home, not on the streets". The universally popular sport of football has built a track record of acting against racist elements with sanctions against match-staging authorities too. Cricket must do, too, and not only in Australia but in India as well where racist abuse from the stands is common enough a phenomenon but doesn't get as much attention due to the language barrier.

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Subhani



Sitharaman's Third Act: What'll be her Big Idea?



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

Despite her best efforts, Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman has not yet secured her place in the history books. It may not be fair to expect ministers in the Narendra Modi government to aspire for a place in history given the towering and overshadowing personality of the Prime Minister. But then, some finance ministers have been able to carve out a place for themselves with their proposals or at least their speeches. Dr Manmohan Singh's 1991 Budget gave him a place in the history books long before he earned it again as Prime Minister with the India-United States civil nuclear deal. Palaniappan Chidambaram will be remembered for his "dream budget" that slashed income tax rates. Arun Jaitley will always be remembered for launching the Goods and Services Tax. Ms Sitharaman should also aim to leave her imprint on some idea.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown economics of 2020 have, without doubt, intervened to queer the FM's pitch. We now know from official data that the economy has shrunk by close to 8.0 per cent, and that India is among the worst performing economies this year in terms of growth and employment generation. While all this has spurred the government into action, the fruits of much of this action will take time to ripen. The FM can spend money and secure early results and Ms Sitharaman has promised to spend a trillion rupees on infrastructure investment. Her fiscal management, praised and criticised in equal measure, can nurture

the green shoots of economic revival, but with some inflationary consequences.

Opinion on such revival is sharply divided among the economy-watchers. While the finance ministry insists that the economy is on the rising arm of a V-shaped recovery, the government's critics believe that the shape of the recovery is at best a W, with the spike in the middle a mere bump rather than pyramidal in shape. The real alphabet to worry about is K — a mix of a V on top for some and an inverse-V at the bottom for others. Rising inequality, high levels of unemployment and the still hesitant improvement in investment suggest that some sections of society may well be experiencing a V-shaped improvement in their fortunes, but others are living through the downside of an inverse-V.

What ought to be the central message of this year's Budget speech? Clearly, it will have to boost the confidence of all sections of society that the economy can return to the medium-term trajectory of 7.6 per cent growth experienced through much of the Manmohan Singh era (2004-2014). During Dr Singh's first term (2004-09), the average annual growth rate was a record 8.0 per cent — the highest in recorded history for a five-year period — and in his second term (2009-14), it slipped to 7.0 per cent. The decline began in 2012.

While the Narendra Modi government has claimed that its growth record is no worse than its predecessor's the fact remains that after six years in office it has not been able to turn the investment rate up. The percentage share of

gross investment in national income (gross domestic product) fell to a low of 28.0 per cent, having climbed all the way up from below 30.0 per cent at the turn of the century to nearly 37.0 per cent in 2010. The government may have succeeded in getting consumers to consume, but getting investors to invest and savers to save remains a challenge.

In an essay written for a book I have recently edited on the post-Covid economy (*Beyond Covid's Shadow: Mapping India's Economic Resurgence*, Rupa, 2021), Dr C. Rangarajan, a former chairman of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council, among other things, underscores the fact that the lockdown has weakened an already weak pre-Covid economy and the Budget has to kickstart economic growth by stimulating investment, savings, demand and employment generation. Kickstarting the trillion rupee infrastructure programme, along with the privatisation of public enterprises, increased spending on education, health, research and development and encouraging the growth of employment-generating sectors can restore momentum to the economy.

In his essay in my book, economist and Parliament member Subramanian Swamy bemoans the lack of strategic thinking on economic policy and recommends a balanced mix of incentives for savings and investment with a more open and competitive economy that increases productivity of capital. He believes that Prime Minister Modi has so far not been able to

give a clear direction to the economic growth process. Rather than promise too many things to too many constituencies, this year's Budget should define the roadmap to make India a \$5 trillion economy by 2025. All policy must aim to serve that end. In their essays, both Bibek Debroy, currently chairman of the PM's Economic Advisory Council, and Rajiv Kumar, vice-chairman of the Niti Aayog, assure us that the government is aware of the nature of the challenge and that it would address it convincingly to ensure the revival of growth.

However, not everyone within the so-called Sangh Parivar seems to be equally aware of the negative impact that the politics of the ruling party is having on the economics of its government. Experience around the world through the past century shows that sustained high economic growth is a function of domestic political stability and moderation. Even China's growth acceleration began only after its domestic politics became more moderate and stable. The biggest challenge for economic policy today is not just to end the post-Covid and post-lockdown uncertainty but also for the Bharatiya Janata Party to re-establish its credentials in offering a development-oriented administration rather than one that is obsessed with divisive religious and communal issues.

Finally, a friendly word of advice for Ms Sitharaman. Get a good speechwriter. At least this year one prays that the FM's mouth will not go dry and she runs out of breath reading a long, boring speech. Budget speeches are remembered both for content and style. A smart finance minister should get both right at least to earn good editorials if not a footnote in the history books.

The writer is a public policy analyst, a former newspaper editor and adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh

LETTERS

SAVE POULTRY

It is a dangerous situation for poultry farmers in AP (*Poultry farmers fear flu impact on exports, DC, Jan. 10*). Naturally, their egg exports to different states will go down drastically and they may have to face huge financial losses. The government must save them.

P. Govardhana Rao
Kankipadu, Krishna

LOCAL BODY POLLS

Under the pretext of Covid, the YSRC is trying to get polls negated and escape public rebuke. When there was no problem in holding polls in TS, Bihar and other states, the contention of the YCRC is a sham. When the YSRC is ready to open schools and colleges despite Covid, there is no point in stopping the polls.

K. Sai Prasanna Tagore
Tadepalligudem

IMPEACHMENT

Impeaching outgoing POTUS Trump is not a good idea. At best, he must be made ineligible to contest again. At the same time his own brand of divisive politics may gain a new lease of life if he is made a champion.

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao
Vizianagaram

IDOL POLITICS

Politics is not sparing even the idols which keep to themselves in temples afraid of politicians who hanker for power. It would be better to leave idols to speak for themselves.

D.S.P. Rao
Kakinada

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

New jute mills for AP, other States likely

NEW DELHI, JANUARY. 10 New and modern jute mills are to be set up in North Bihar, Orissa, Assam, Tripura and Andhra Pradesh, it is reliably learnt here.

The Union Foreign Trade Minister, Mr. L.N. Mishra, is understood to have ordered a quick survey of the possibilities in this regard in these jute growing states with a view to formulate proposals and project reports.

The setting up of new jute mills in these states, it is stated, will meet regional requirement and also promote industrial development of the jute producing areas.

A.G. Noorani



When Shaheen Bagh sit-in won global respect, exposed govt

Recent events in India have brought to the fore the dimensions of the right to protest, which is itself absolute except in cases of extreme necessity. The problem arises, as it does in all cases of human rights, where the fundamental rights of other citizens and also the legitimate, recognised rights and duties of the state are involved. Protest can be expressed through the media, public meetings, or processions marching through public streets. Mammoth processions and sit-ins pose the greatest challenge.

One was the famous Shaheen Bagh meeting comprising mostly women, Muslim women at that. It predictably polarised society, with the BJP pouring scorn on the protesters. The law and administrative measures Modi's extremist government proposed affected mostly, if not only, Muslims. The sit-in was spontaneous and efficient. They prayed and protested, and aroused international admiration.

A petition was filed in the Supreme Court challenging their

right to do a 'sit-in' similar to those of the 1960s US civil rights movement. The court delivered a brief judgment, noting that "the grievance... was that the persons opposing the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens had adopted a method of protest which resulted in the closure of the Kalindi Kunj — Shaheen Bagh stretch, including the Okhla underpass. It was submitted that the public roads could not be permitted to be encroached upon in this manner..."

In their pursuit of an out-of-the-box solution, the court considered it appropriate to appoint two interlocutors to meet the protesters and submit a report. The court noted, "In what manner the administration should act is their responsibility and they should not hide behind the court orders or seek support therefrom for carrying out their administrative functions. The courts adjudicate the legality of the actions and are not meant to give shoulder to the administration to fire their guns from. Unfortunately,

despite a lapse of a considerable period of time, there was neither any negotiations nor any action by the administration, thus warranting our intervention."

That is a tall order to the police; for involved are complex issues of law that troubled in Indian, British and US courts in the past. India's apex court tried to come to grips with them years ago. A century ago, Justice Benson of the Madras high court said, "No doubt a highway is primarily intended for the use of individuals passing and re-passing along it in pursuit of their ordinary avocations, but in every country, and especially in India, highways have, from time immemorial, been used for the passing and re-passing of processions as well as of individuals and there is nothing illegal in a procession or assembly engaging in worship while passing along a highway, any more than in an individual doing so."

He added, "The practice of using the public highways for religious processions has existed in India for thousands of years. ... That alone is

sufficient to raise a presumption that it is lawful and to throw on those who allege it to be unlawful the onus of showing that it is forbidden by law, but this it admittedly is not. The law recognises the use of the highway by processions as lawful, and gives the magistrate and superior officers of police powers to direct the conduct of assemblies and processions through the public streets and to regulate the use of music in connection with them."

In 1973, the apex court ruled that processions may be regulated to a reasonable degree but that conferment of absolute discretion in the police was violative of the fundamental right to assemble peaceably without arms.

The best statement of law was made by Justice K.K. Mathew: "Public meeting in open spaces and public streets forms part of the tradition of our national life. ... [T]he people have come to regard it as a part of their privileges and immunities. The state and local authority have a virtual monopoly of every open space... [I]f the state or

municipality can constitutionally close both its streets and its parks... the practical result would be that it would be impossible to hold any open-air meetings in any large city. The real problem is that of reconciling the city's function of providing for the exigencies of traffic [and] recreation... with its other obligations, of providing adequate places for public discussion in order to safeguard the guaranteed right of public assembly."

Politics has marched ahead of the law. Unresponsive regimes create public dissatisfaction. The Supreme Court appointed 'interlocutors' in the Shaheen Bagh case. For over a month, Punjab's farmers have assembled in huge numbers on the borders of Delhi. Their organisation inspires respect. Old and young women and the youth set up a virtual city, sleeping in the bitter cold. Try and teach the law to them. It is sincere conciliation that is called for. This concept is alien to Narendra Modi.

By arrangement with Dawn

quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	48,782.51 1.43
Nifty 50	14,347.25 1.48
S&P 500*	3,811.72 0.21
Dollar (₹)	73.24 0.10
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.61 0.06
Euro (₹)	89.64 0.36
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	49,763*614 1.23
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	55.52 2.10
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.892 0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.088 0.017

* As of Friday/Saturday

Currency in circulation rises by ₹3.23 lakh cr

The currency in circulation (CIC) grew by around 13 per cent in the first nine months of the current fiscal as people preferred holding on to cash as a precautionary measure amid the pandemic. CIC grew by Rs 3,23,003 crore, or 13.2 per cent, to Rs 27,70,315 crore as on January 1, 2021 from Rs 24,47,312 crore as on March 31, 2020, according to RBI data. In the April-Dec. period of FY2020, it had grown by nearly 6 per cent.

Gold ETFs attract ₹6,657 crore inflow in 2020



Economic downturn due to the pandemic and weakness in the US dollar encouraged investors to infuse Rs 6,657 crore in gold exchange-traded funds (ETFs) in 2020 compared to just Rs 16 crore in 2019. The inflow came after witnessing a net pullout from safe-haven assets for six consecutive years. Meanwhile, a Crisil report said the mutual fund industry's AUM has gone past the Rs 31 lakh crore mark for the first time in December.

Foreign investors put ₹4,819 cr in equities in Jan.

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have pumped Rs 5,156 crore into Indian capital markets in the first six trading sessions this year amid expectations of strong third-quarter earnings and a reformist budget. As per depositories data, FPIs invested a net Rs 4,819 crore in equities and Rs 337 crore in the debt segment between January 1 and 8. This took the total net investment to Rs 5,156 crore.

India's 4 top steel producers hike output by 6%

The country's top four steel makers jointly produced 14.95 million tonne (MT) steel in the October-December quarter of the current fiscal, registering a 6 per cent year-on-year rise. The total steel output of JSPL, JSW Steel, SAIL and Tata Steel India was 14.09 MT during the same quarter of 2019-20. During the quarter under review, the total sales of the producers - excluding JSW Steel - surged 2.25 per cent.



Raw materials like edible oils have become costly FMCG firms could raise prices as inflation bites

New Delhi, Jan. 10: Consumers may have to shell out more for their daily use products as FMCG firms, which are facing inflationary pressure on their key raw material inputs, are considering raising their product prices. Some fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies like Marico and others have already gone for price hike, while some which include Dabur, Parle and Patanjali are closely monitoring the situation.

FMCG players have been trying to absorb the price increase of raw material inputs such as coconut oil, edible oil and palm oil, but they are unlikely to hold the prices of their commodities for a long time as that will impact their gross margins.

"We have seen a significant rise in input cost and especially edible oil in the last three to four months and that is putting pressures on our margins and costs. As of now, we have not taken any price hike but we are closely monitoring it and if it goes like this then probably, we may go for a price hike," Parle products senior category head Mayank Shah told PTI.

According to him, these commodities are cyclic in nature. When asked about the price hike, Shah said: "It will be across products as edible oil is being used in all products. It would be at least 4 to 5 per cent." Dabur India CFO Lalit



Malik said the recent months have seen inflation inching up for some key raw materials like amla and gold.

"Going forward too, we expect some inflationary pressure in key commodities. Our efforts will be to absorb the raw material price increase through our synergies and cost efficiencies, and undertake only selective and judicious price hikes, which will also depend on the competitive scenario in the market, said Malik.

While for Haridwar-based Patanjali Ayurveda, it's still a 'wait and watch' situation and yet to take a final call on this but hinted that it is also moving in that directions.

"We always try to absorb the market oscillation but if compelled by the market factors, we would take a final decision on that," said the Patanjali spokesperson.

Marico, which owns brands as Saffola and Parachute, has faced inflationary pressure and had to go for an effective price hike.

"The quarter (October-December) was also characterised by inflationary pressure in key raw materials necessitating cutting back on some promotions and taking effective price increases across both Parachute and Saffola edible oil portfolios," said Marico in its quarterly updates for third quarter last week.

Edelweiss Financial Services executive vice president Abneesh Roy said many key raw materials are up sharply such as palm oil, tea, copra and edible oils.

"Price growth will come back in 2021 for the consumer companies after raw material pressure starts impacting their gross margins," he said.

However, Roy also added that the consumer companies have other cost levers to cushion this impact at Ebitda margin level.

"FMCG companies have very high pricing power. They normally take a price hike in a gradual staggered manner but eventually pass on the entire price hike. We expect the same to continue, given the demand is robust and most of the FMCG products have the advantage of low unit packs of Rs one, two, five and ten price points," Roy said.

EY partner and national leader (consumer products and retail) Pinakiranjan Mishra said: "While FMCG companies have seen a rise in cost especially of agri inputs, they will try and limit price increases through cost control measures to support consumer offtake in the current environment." — PTI

5G rollout to create more job opportunities

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JAN. 10

Hiring activity for the rollout of 5G services has started in a modest way. Industry expects numbers to swell multi-fold as the rollout begins.

While uncertainties still prevail and telecom service providers are seeking clarity on 5G auctions, the job opportunities would be huge once the rollout happens. "The application of 5G is across domains and hence the impact will be witnessed across sectors from manufacturing to telecom to e-commerce to agriculture. With advantages such as increased range to low latency, and more importantly less energy intensive, this tech will connect more users than before. Overall, the opportunity for 5G and its ecosystem is limitless...Hiring for this domain will continue for at least the next two to three years," said Vijay Sivaram, CEO of Quesst IT Staffing.

According to Aditya Narayan Mishra, director and CEO of CIEL HR Services, "Currently, some of the IT service providers like Tech Mahindra, HCL,



Accenture and smaller IT companies have started hiring professionals for software architecting, development and testing in 5G. The positions open for the next three months would be somewhere around 5,000. These jobs are mostly in cities like Benaguru and Gurgaon."

However, the telecom service providers have not yet started hiring people in a big way. "Telecom companies have been operating in a subdued environment for some time. In the backdrop of the pandemic, they will not be initially aggressive about investing heavily," says Rituparna Chakraborty, co-founder and executive vice president, TeamLease Services.

However, once the rollout happens, for the next

six months we would see increased hiring activity. The positions open could be more than 50,000 in the future," said Mishra.

Telecom service providers also might train their existing staff for the new technology as the number of people who have the required skills is also limited. 5G being a new technology, not many people with more than five years of experience are available globally.

"While the demand is high, the overall availability of talent is yet to catch up, hence models such as 'train and hire' are becoming more common. Telecom service providers will hire a mix of freshers and experienced candidates as global services firms are also hiring in big numbers," said Sivaram.

NEW ZEALAND CENTRAL BANK HIT BY CYBER ATTACK

Wellington, Jan. 10: New Zealand's central bank said it was responding with urgency to a "malicious" breach of one of its data systems, a third-party file sharing service that stored "sensitive information". Reserve Bank of New

Zealand governor Adrian Orr said the breach had been contained and the system was taken offline but it would take time to determine what information had been accessed. "We are working closely with domestic and interna-

tional cyber security experts," Orr said. "The nature and extent of information that has been potentially accessed is still being determined, but it may include commercially and personally sensitive information." —AFP

Life insurance sector to grow 12-15%: LIC chief

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, JAN. 10

Despite having a de-growth in life insurance businesses during lockdown periods last year, Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), India's largest public sector insurer, believes that the life insurance industry is likely to grow by up to 15 per cent in coming years.

"Life insurance business, being done by 24 players in the country, is expected to grow by 12 to 15 per cent in the coming years. The industry has added 1,06,035 agents to the force by the end of November last year," LIC chairman M.R. Kumar said while addressing an event.

"We can expect the number of agents will grow steadily in the coming years, too. Keeping in mind the unlimited opportunity of life insurance business in India, life insurers will continue to play a vital role in the job market under this new normal as well," Kumar added.

Due to the lockdown and related restrictions, which impacted the mobility of the marketing force, the life insurance industry, at the end of May 31, 2020, recorded a de-growth of 27.92 per cent in first year premium (FYP) to Rs 20,466.75 crore as com-



M.R. Kumar

pared to Rs 28,395.89 crore and a de-growth of 51.02 per cent in policies-14,24,373 policies compared to 29,08,093 in the previous year, he said.

"However, the phased unlock process started from June 2020 resulted in increased economic activities, and our industry adopted innovative digital business processes in meeting the expectation of the market. As on November 30, the life insurers clocked a FYP of Rs 16,662.96 crore compared to Rs 1,69,251.19 crore. The de-growth was brought down to 1.53 per cent," he said.

"The Ulip policies are giving an opportunity to market savvy customers to reap higher benefits in the new normal," Kumar said.

He said the rural market holds promise for insurers to expand their business. Irdai data for 2018-2019 shows out of the 286.48 lakh new policies sold, the share of the rural sector was just 66.37 lakh.

VEDANTA PARENT LAUNCHES OPEN OFFER FOR 10% STAKE

BIJOU GEORGE
JAN. 10

Vedanta Resources launched an open offer for a 10 per cent stake in its India unit, two months after a failed delisting attempt for Vedanta Ltd.

The London-based parent of Mumbai-listed Vedanta Ltd will buy as many as 371.75 million shares, comprising 10 per cent of the outstanding equity of the Indian unit, according to an exchange filing on Saturday.

The open offer, which will be managed by JPMorgan Chase & Co's India unit, will be a voluntary open offer, with no minimum level of acceptance by Vedanta, according to the filing. If Vedanta Ltd holders were to accept share tenders for the entire 10 per cent, the consideration for the deal would be Rs 5,948 crore (\$812 million).

— Bloomberg



US revenues, cost savings to bolster pharma results

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JAN. 10

Brokerages expect a good third quarter performance from pharmaceutical companies, driven by good growth in the US market, recovery in branded markets, continued cost savings and low bases for select companies, such as Lupin.

ICICI Securities expects moderate top line growth of around 8 per cent, led by India business and marginal growth in US business with 130 basis points year-on-year (YoY) improvement in Ebitda margin to 22 per cent.

Emkay Global expects top pharma companies YoY revenue, Ebitda and earnings growth of 9 per cent, 21 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively.

"Cipla and Dr Reddy's have the potential to beat our and consensus estimates," Emkay Global said.

"We expect easing of lockdown to support some recovery in acute portfolio and injectable products. US revenues may witness marginal growth sequentially, led by improvement in volumes of injectables, specialty portfolio and new launches. We estimate



India businesses to grow in the high single digit as seen in secondary sales data, ICICI Securities said.

"Growth in the US will be driven by new product approvals/launches; benign pricing environment due to ongoing Covid-19-related uncertainty; and continued ramp-up in limited competition and specialty products," Emkay Global said.

"Quarter-on-quarter, we expect a recovery in Sun Pharma's specialty business and ramp-up in limited competition product market share for Cipla and Lupin. Dr Reddy's,

Aurobindo and Cadila are expected to benefit from product shortages and new product launches," according to Emkay Global.

"Companies with a good Covid-19 portfolio such as Cipla, Dr Reddy's and Cadila are expected to beat the Indian Pharma Market growth in third quarter (Q3). Ipca is also expected to outperform the market due to its leading brand position."

Cost savings due to hampered field-force activity in the branded market will be the major driver of YoY Ebitda margin improvement.

However, with the easing of Covid-19-related restrictions, marketing and selling expenses are expected to move up.

Key factors to watch out during management commentary, according to ICICI Securities, are growth outlook in India for the industry and respective companies, update on restart of USFDA inspections, price scenario in base US business and traction in specialty products, growth in emerging markets with demand outlook and sustainability of recovery in diagnostics and hospitals.

ANNUAL OIL USAGE FALLS BY 11%

DEBJIT CHAKRABORTY
JAN. 10

India's petroleum consumption fell for the first time in more than two decades in 2020 as the coronavirus pandemic shuttered businesses and factories, hurting demand from one of the world's largest users of the fuel.

Total petroleum demand declined 10.8 per cent last year from 2019, and was at a five-year low of 193.4 million tonnes, according to Bloomberg calculations of provisional data published by the oil ministry's Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell. The annual contraction was the first on record, going back as far as 1999.

Consumption of petroleum fuels by Asia's second-biggest oil importer collapsed by as much as 70 per cent after it embarked on one of the world's most stringent nationwide quarantines in March. The drop resulted in a sharp cutback in crude processing and operations at petrochemical plants.

The strict restrictions ravaged the Indian economy, which is set for its biggest contraction in annual gross domestic product in records going back to 1952. The government has relaxed most of the curbs to pull Asia's third-biggest economy out of the slump.

Demand is picking up as restrictions are eased. Monthly consumption of petroleum fuels, a proxy of crude oil demand, was about 1.8 per cent short of previous year's levels in December, and touched an 11-month high.

Petrol consumption last month rose 9.3 per cent year-on-year, the highest since May 2019, on increased use of personal vehicles. Diesel demand was 2.8 per cent lower from a year earlier. — Bloomberg

NOWHERE TO GO

Ship leaves China after more than six months' wait at port

GE Shipping caught in China-Oz spat

RAJESH KUMAR SINGH
JAN. 10

An Indian ship with 23 crew members on board has been allowed to leave China's Jingtang port after unsuccessfully waiting for more than six months for clearance to offload its cargo, Great Eastern Shipping Company Ltd, which operates the ship, said.

The bulk carrier was set to leave for Japan's Chiba port later on Saturday, where Mumbai-based Great Eastern's back-up



crew has been waiting to take over, the company's spokeswoman Anjali

Kumar said by phone. Arrangements had been made for the stranded sea-

farers to fly back to India, she said.

Indian-flagged Jag Anand, loaded with Australian coal, arrived at Jingtang in mid-June. By November, at least 21 bulk carriers with almost 400 crew members were queuing up at the Chinese port, roughly 230 kilometers east of Beijing.

The deadlock played in the backdrop of a diplomatic spat between China and Australia that was escalating into a trade war, China blacklisting a range of Australian com-

modities from coal to lobster for imports. While the vessels remained anchored, a humanitarian crisis was unfolding, as the port authorities restricted movement of the crew members, citing Covid rules.

"We are still waiting for instructions from the charterer about the cargo," Great Eastern's Kumar said on Saturday. "Right now, our top priority is to help our crew members reach home. We have all the permissions needed for that." — Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Ashwin speaks on racial abuse

Sydney: Seasoned off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin on Sunday said racist abuse from the crowd at the SCG is not new and needs to be dealt with an iron fist after some spectators were asked to leave for targeting Indian players during the ongoing third Test against Australia here.

Speaking at the end of the fourth day's play, Ashwin said the Indian players have faced racism in Sydney earlier too and "disappointment" will be a "mild word" to describe how they are feeling after young pacer Mohammed Siraj was subjected to racial slurs on two consecutive days.

"Look, I would like to point out something. This is my fourth tour to Australia. Sydney, especially here, we have had a few experiences even in the past," Ashwin said at the virtual press conference.

He said in no unequivocal terms that this needs to be dealt with an iron fist. — *PTI*

Ball youngest to score triple-double

Charlotte, North Carolina: LaMelo Ball became the youngest player in NBA history to record a triple-double with 22 points, 12 rebounds and 11 assists, and the Charlotte Hornets beat the Atlanta Hawks 113-105 for their third straight win. The 19-year-old Ball replaced Markelle Fultz as the youngest NBA player to record a triple-double by 177 days. Ball, the third overall pick in the NBA draft, was 9 of 13 from the field as the Hornets handed the struggling Hawks their fourth straight loss. He became only the fifth rookie in NBA history to record a triple-double and the first Hornets player ever to reach that plateau coming off the bench.

Terry Rozier scored 23 points for the Hornets.

Nikola Jokic had 15 points and 12 assists to lead Denver past Philadelphia, beating a 76ers team that had only seven available players because of injuries and Covid-19 protocols. — *AP*

Rakshna, Panwar win air rifle trials

New Delhi: Tamil Nadu's C. Kavi Rakshna and Rajasthan's Divyansh Singh Panwar won the women's and men's 10m Air Rifle events respectively at the National Shooting T2 trials here on Sunday.

Kavi Rakshna, who has come through the ranks of the junior programme, emerged on top in a quality field which included current world number one Elavenil Valarivan as well as Tokyo Olympics quota holders Apurvi Chandela and Anjum Moudgil, among others. Rakshna shot 251.4 in the finals to win the event ahead of Rajasthan's Nisha Kanwar (250.7). Gujarat's Elavenil, who had won the T1 trials earlier, finished third. Nisha had topped the 60-shots qualifying round with a score of 630.7 while Rakshna had shot 627.7 to qualify in seventh spot. In the final though, Rakshna led from start to finish. — *PTI*

Chennaiyin FC, Odisha split points

Bambolim: Odisha FC and Chennaiyin FC traded missed chances to play out a goal-less draw in their Indian Super League match here on Sunday. The match saw both teams failing to convert clear-cut chances. That Odisha had three shots on target while Chennaiyin managed just two exemplified how much both sides cancelled out each other. Chennaiyin, the better side in terms of possession, though had a couple of chances to get a winner but their forwards were unable to convert them. It was Chennaiyin who dominated the opening exchanges, creating multiple chances in the opening quarter. — *PTI*

Live on TV

CRICKET

Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20
Tournament: Delhi vs Mumbai from 11.55 am; Kerala vs Puducherry from 6.55 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

FOOTBALL

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

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Oz tighten grip

Australia dismiss set openers as India face uphill task

Sydney, Jan. 10: Cheteshwar Pujara was left to summon his trademark doggedness with skipper Ajinkya Rahane after India lost their openers in pursuit of an improbable 407, setting the stage for an intriguing final day of the third Test against Australia in which the visitors will primarily try to bat out three sessions here.

Having drawn flak for his 50 off 176 balls in the first innings, none would mind such an effort from India's Test specialist after the visitors finished the fourth day on 98 for 2 largely due to a 71-run opening stand between Rohit Sharma (52) and Shubman Gill (31).

Rohit's untimely dismissal at the fag end, trying to pull Pat Cummins, did hurt India but it's two best defensive players Pujara (9 batting off 29 balls) and skipper Ajinkya Rahane (4 off 14 balls) were at the crease when stumps were drawn.

The pitch, with variable bounce and the dark patches acting like snake pits for Nathan Lyon, would pose its own set of challenges for a team with two injured batsmen in their line-up.

Both Rohit (52 off 98 balls) and Gill (31 off 64 balls) showed admirable application under pressure but most importantly didn't let the bad deliveries go unpunished.

The three cover drives off Rohit's blade and a cross-batted straight drive of Gill were out of top drawer.

Rohit, for good measure, pulled Cameron Green over mid-wicket for a six and they both looked comfortable while negotiating the Australian attack.

It was after 53 years that an Indian opening pair had struck two 50 plus partnerships in the same Test Down Under.

Last time also it was in Sydney where Farokh Engineer and Syed Abid Ali had a decent outing albeit in a lost cause.

It took a peach of a delivery from Josh Hazlewood (1/11 in 8



Australia's Pat Cummins (right) celebrates after taking the wicket of Indian batsman Rohit Sharma on the fourth day of the third Test match at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Sunday.

overs), coming for his second spell, which straightened after pitching and the resultant nick, ended an impressive 71-run stand.

Pujara, just after coming in, successfully asked for a DRS review after being adjudged leg before.

A delectable chip shot coming down the track off Lyon helped Rohit bring up his half-century but his dismissal in the next over left fans yearning for more.

As far as Australia are concerned, they hardly put a foot wrong during

the two sessions that they batted.

Steve Smith (81 off 167 balls) missed out on a second hundred but rookie Cameron Green flayed a hapless Indian attack with a well-made 84 off 132 balls that had four sixes. They declared at the stroke of tea, having scored 312 for 6.

Marnus Labuschagne (73 off 118 balls) once again batted positively during his second century partnership of the match (103 runs) with mentor Smith, who employed a more cautious approach. — *PTI*

SCORECARD

Australia 1st Innings 338
India 1st Innings: 244
Australia 2nd Innings (overnight 103/2): David Warner lbw b Ashwin 13, Will Pucovskic Saha b Siraj 10, Marnus Labuschagne c W Saha b Navdeep Saini 73, Steven Smith lbw b Ashwin 81, Matthew Wade c Saha b Navdeep Saini 4, Cameron Green c Saha b Bumrah 84, Tim Paine not out 39. Extras (b-1, lb-4, nb-3) 8. **Total (for 6 wkts, in 87 overs) 312 decl.**
FoW: 16-1, 35-2, 138-3, 148-4, 208-5, 312-6.
Bowling: Jasprit Bumrah 21-4-68-1, Mohammed Siraj 25-5-90-1, Navdeep Saini 16-2-54-2, Ravichandran Ashwin 25-1-95-2.

India 2nd Innings: Rohit Sharma c Starc b Cummins 52, Shubman Gill c Paine b Hazlewood 31, Cheteshwar Pujara batting 9, Ajinkya Rahane batting 4. Extras (lb-1, nb-1) 2. **Total (for 2 wkts, in 34 overs) 98.**
FoW: 71-1, 92-2.
Bowling: Mitchell Starc 6-0-27-0, Josh Hazlewood 8-3-11-1, Pat Cummins 9-1-25-1, Nathan Lyon 9-3-22-0, Cameron Green 2-0-12-0.

JADEJA MIGHT BAT WITH INJECTIONS IF REQUIRED

Sydney, Jan. 10: All-rounder Ravindra Jadeja, who dislocated his left thumb on Day Three of the third Test against Australia on Saturday, has been ruled out of the first two games in the upcoming series against England.

Jadeja was not able to bowl in Australia's second innings after a short ball from Mitchell Starc hit him on the gloves, requiring immediate medical attention.

"Ravindra Jadeja is out of first two Tests against England. He will need 4-6 weeks minimum to recuperate and complete rehab which rules him out of first 2 Tests," a BCCI source said.

The four-Test series against England starts with a double header in Chennai from February 5.

The left-handed cricketer, who made a valuable 28 and took four wickets in the first innings might take a painkiller injection and come out to bat on the final day of the game at SCG as India seek to save the Test.

"He might bat if needed with injection to save the Test," the source added.

India have been hit by a slew of injuries in the ongoing series with senior pacers Umesh Yadav and Mohammad Shami already flown back home.

Batsman K.L. Rahul too was ruled out with left wrist injury. — *PTI*

Hyderabad lose to Assam by 2 runs

Kolkata, Jan. 10: Riyan Parag's 51 turned the match in favour of Assam, who got the better of Hyderabad in a close-fought match in their opening game of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy here on Sunday.

After making a modest 159 for 5 even as Hyderabad's Kartikeya Kak took 3 wickets while conceding 42 runs, Assam managed to restrict Hyderabad to 157 for 8.

Himalay Agarwal was Hyderabad's top scorer with 29.

Meanwhile in Vadodara, Krunal Pandya's all-round show helped Baroda beat Uttarakhand by five runs.

Put into bat in a Group 'C' game, hosts Baroda first rode on Pandya's blazing 76 to post a competitive 168/7 on the board before the bowlers held their nerves to restrict Uttarakhand to 163/6 despite a fighting 77 by Dikshanshu Negi.

Krunal, who is Baroda's captain, also contributed with the ball handsomely to return with figures of 2/33. He along with Smit Patel conjured a crucial 89 run stand for the fourth wicket and rescued the team after they were reel-

ing at 41/3 at one stage.

For Uttarakhand, right-handed batsman Negi hammered nine boundaries and six in his 57-ball 77 run knock, while Kunal Chandela, who came in at number seven, stuck a 26-ball 48 but the two could not take their side home.

In another match, host Bengal began their campaign in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20 tournament with a thumping nine-wicket win against Odisha in an Elite Group 'B' match.

Tamil Nadu also posted a crushing 66-run win over Jharkhand, courtesy opener C. Hari Nishanth's unbeaten 92-run knock and an all-round effort by the bowlers.

BRIEF SCORES

■ Assam 159/5 in 20 overs (Riyan Parag 51, S. Jain 31; Kartikeya Kak 3/42) bt Hyderabad 157/8 (Himalay Agarwal 29; Pritam Das 3/30).

■ Baroda 168/7 (Krunal Pandya 76, S. Patel 41; A. Madhwal 3/16) bt Uttarakhand 163/6 (D. Negi 77 not out; Kunal Chandela 48; Krunal Pandya 2/33).

■ Tamil Nadu 189/5 (C. Hari Nishanth 92 not out, Dinesh Karthik 46) beat Jharkhand 123/7 (Anand Singh 28 not out, Sonu Yadav 3/31, Sandeep Warrier 2/22).

City, Arsenal and Chelsea earn wins

made multiple changes.

Emile Smith Rowe - who earlier had a red card overturned after a VAR check - broke the deadlock in a disappointing game, drilling the ball home in the second half of extra time, and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang made the game safe.

Mikel Arteta turned his attention to the Premier League match against Crystal Palace on Thursday.

Meanwhile, Leeds suffered a humiliating FA Cup exit against Crawley as the League Two side swept to a shock 3-0 win on Sunday, while Timo Werner ended his Chelsea goal drought and Bernardo Silva sparked for Manchester City as the Premier League giants eased into the fourth round.

After the spiking coronavirus pandemic wreaked havoc with matches across the third round on Friday and Saturday, the FA Cup was back on more familiar ground as Leeds became the competition's latest big name to be knocked out by a feisty underdog. — *AFP*



Arsenal's Emile Smith Rowe (left) celebrates with Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang after scoring the opening goal against Newcastle during their English FA Cup at the Emirates Stadium in London, England, on Saturday. — *AP*

Paine joins India huddle, Langer calls him class act

Sydney, Jan. 10: The iconic Sydney Cricket Ground on Sunday witnessed the good, bad and ugly in varying degrees for sure if not in equal measure.

While the cricket community exploded after Indian players were subjected to racial abuse during the fourth day of the third Test at the SCG, Australian skipper Tim Paine won hearts by joining the visiting team's huddle.

Australian coach Justin Langer called Paine a "class act".

"It was nice to have Tim out there when that incident happened today. He's a class act as we



Tim Paine

know. The game of Test cricket is always going to be played tough but there's been a really good feeling amongst both teams and let's hope that continues," Langer said.

Paine was batting at

the time.

The former Australia Test opener was disappointed that incidents like these are threatening to tarnish a hard-fought series played in the right spirit between the two teams.

Speaking further about Paine's gesture, Langer said, "We talked at tea about what was going on. As hosts, we never want to see our visitors being treated poorly do we? And there's different levels of that."

"We were in England last year and some of our guys have felt it before, there's nothing pleasant about it." — *PTI*

Saha's glove work is much superior to that of Pant



Hemant Kenkre
Silly Point

When Wriddhiman Saha dived to his left to catch Marnus Labuschagne off the bowling of Navdeep Saini, the radio commentator shrieked "it was a sensational catch." The wicket keeper had anticipated the shot (a flick) and had made enough ground to fly and get (not one) but both his gloves under the ball, which otherwise would have raced towards the fine-leg boundary. Instead of the red cherry, the young Australian batsman had to trudge towards the

ropes on his way to the dressing room after scoring a well compiled 73, his second fifty of the match.

An internet search will reveal Saha's nicknames as 'Flying Saha' and 'Superman' both of which justify the wicket keepers act, the only thing missing being a furling red cape. Watching that brilliant catch, took me back to the pictures coming in from Australia in the 70s showing the legendary Rodney (Rod) Marsh levitating mid-air while poucing catches off Dennis Lillee

and Jeff Thomson.

Marsh had made his debut in the 1970-71 Ashes series replacing Brian Taber (thanks to his better batting capabilities) and was dubbed "Iron Gloves" thanks to the number of catches he had dropped.

Saha, who has 38 matches under his belt since he made his Test debut a decade ago, was dropped after India's debacle in the first Test at Adelaide. He came in to keep wickets in the second innings of the ongoing Sydney Test (as a keeping substitute) due to an injury suffered by Rishab Pant while batting in India's first innings. Saha's axing for the second (Melbourne) Test match had created a controversy. The reason being his failure with the bat (not so much his gloves) which

made him a soft target for those baying for blood.

Pant's inclusion in the second and third Test matches once again brought up the debate of whether the team needs a wicket-keeper batsman or the other way around. His dropped catches in the first innings of the Sydney Test flared up the argument further with purists going for a specialist wicket-keeper who can bat rather than one whose skills with the bat are better. The preference of Pant over Saha in many Tests over the last few years is because he is perceived as a better batsman. This needs to be looked at a bit more closely.

A dispassionate analysis between their skills will throw a bit of light on who is the better bet for the

team in that position. Pant's batting average of 38.31 is almost 10 runs over that of Saha who averages 29.09. Saha has three hundreds compared to Pant's two, which came against England and Australia at the Oval and Melbourne, in trying circumstances. The senior player scored against the West Indies (at Gros Islet), Bangladesh and Australia (at home). Pant's ability to pump up the strike rate and take the fight to the opponents makes him a better choice if batting needs to be considered the bigger yardstick for the job.

When it comes to guarding the area behind the stumps, it is another matter altogether. His coach at Delhi Capitals, Ricky Ponting believes that Pant has got some work to do

with his wicket-keeping and that he has dropped more catches than any other keeper in the world ever since his Test debut. It is a fact that Saha is much above Pant as a custodian especially when it comes to standing up to the stumps while the spinners are operating. Saha's anticipation, rising up with the ball, soft hands and overall technique make his glove work much superior to that of Pant.

Pant is a destructive batsman who has the potential to add strength to the (mostly) brittle Indian batting order in foreign conditions. The downside, though, is his lack of consistency which is a result of his impetuosity and eagerness to up the ante. Saha, on the other hand is a safe 'keeper-batsman

in the mould of old timers like Alan Knott and Syed Kirmani, brilliant behind the stumps and more than a handful with the bat.

So should it be Saha or Pant? Purists like me will always pump for a specialist 'keeper who can bat rather than one who is a destructive batsman but muffs up simple, regulation catches with more consistency than scoring runs. Pant would do well to have a chat with Rod Marsh whose iron gloves turned to silken ones as his career progressed, finishing as one of the best in the business. Irrespective of what happens on the last day of the Sydney Test, the Indians should look at Saha for the last Test at Brisbane simply because of the adage that still stands - 'catches win matches.'