

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
ANANTAPUR | TUESDAY | 23 FEBRUARY 2021

WEATHER

Max: 33.0°C
Min: 19°C
RH: 65%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky.
Misty morning. Max/Min
temp. 33/19 °C

COVID-19
COUNT

CASES

(+10,705)

1,10,15,776

DEATHS

(+77)

1,56,495

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+114)

TS: 2,97,712

(+41)

AP: 8,89,339

(+1)

1,625

(+0)

7,167

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

11,20,89,527

DEATHS

24,80,543

COUNTRIES
AREAS WITH
CASES

219

worldometers.info/
coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Shuddha Ekadasi till
5.59 pm
Star: Arudra till 12.25 am
Variyam: 12.48 am to 2.27 am
(Wednesday)
Durmuhurtam: 9.01 am to
9.47 am; 11.15 pm to 12.04 am
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm

HILIRI CALENDAR

Rajab 10, 1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.08 am
Zohar: 12.05 pm
Asar: 4.11 pm
Maghrib: 5.47 pm
Isha: 7.02 pm

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.48 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.13 PM
MOONSET 03.16 AM
MOONRISE 03.42 PM

COUNTER POINT

He is promising an
underground Metro
in every village!

SHORT TAKES

Modi seeks a rise
in defence output

New Delhi: India is working
hard to enhance its capabili-
ties and capacities in the
defence-manufacturing sec-
tor at a fast pace, Prime
Minister Narendra Modi said
on Monday as he urged the
private sector to come for-
ward for designing and man-
ufacturing of defence equip-
ment. He noted that there
were hundreds of ordnance
factories before indepen-
dence with large-scale
weapons export in both
world wars but this system
was not strengthened there-
after. He asserted that the
country has to come out of
the identity of being depen-
dent on imports and has to
establish its identity as a
leading defence exporter.

China backs Brics
summit in India

Beijing: China on Monday
expressed its support for
India in hosting this year's
Brics summit and said it will
work with New Delhi to
strengthen the cooperation
among the five-member
grouping of emerging
economies. India has
assumed the Brics (Brazil,
Russia, India, China, South
Africa) Chairmanship for
2021 and is set to hold this
year's summit. On February
19, External Affairs Minister S
Jaishankar launched India's
Brics 2021 website at the
Brics Secretariat.

NATION | 4

Centre not to repeal
laws till it is forced

VN resigns ahead of vote of trust in Pudy

Blames Centre, Bedi for defections in party

Puducherry, Feb. 22: The Congress government in Puducherry fell on Monday after chief minister V. Narayanasamy resigned ahead of the confidence vote sought by him in the Assembly after his government was reduced to a minority following a spate of resignations of party MLAs and a DMK legislator in the past few days.

Narayanasamy met Lt Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan and submitted the resignation of his cabinet, even as the ruling side's strength was reduced to 11 as against 14 of the opposition.

The Opposition, led by NR Congress chief and Leader of Opposition N. Rangasamy said it has no plans to form the government as of now and that discussions would be held. Soundararajan had earlier summoned the one-day special session Monday, mandating that

its agenda be confined only to the trust vote, after the opposition petitioned her last week saying the government had been reduced to a minority due to resignations.

A fresh bout of resignations on Sunday took the tally in the last few days to three and cumulative since last month to six and further reduced to – Congress 9 (including the Speaker), DMK 2, All India NR Congress 7, AIADMK four, BJP 3 (nominated but with voting rights) and one independent who supported

the government.

After mounting an attack on the Narendra Modi-led Centre and former Lt Governor Kiran Bedi with whom he had had frequent run-ins on administrative matters, Narayanasamy led his colleagues out of the Assembly after a debate over the rights of nominated members to vote during the floor test.

Subsequently, Speaker VP Sivakolundhu announced that the motion for a confidence vote moved by the chief minister in the morning was defeated, even as it was not taken up for either voice vote or division.

“Our view that only the elected members can vote in the House was not accepted by the Speaker. So we walked out of the assembly and met the Lt Governor and gave the resignation letter of my cabinet,” Narayanasamy said later. — *Agencies*

TTD PERFORMS BHUMI PUJA FOR TN TEMPLE

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, FEB. 22

The ceremonious bhoomi puja for the construction of TTD's fifth temple in Tamil Nadu was performed by priests at Ulundurpet in Kallakurichi district on Monday.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswamy took part in the celestial programme along with TTD chairman Y.V. Subba Reddy in the presence of devotees.

The bhoomi puja was performed amid chanting of Vedic hymns by pandits who placed four bricks and performed special puja.

Local MLA Kumara-guru, who donated land for Srivari temple, made elaborate arrangements for the ceremony. The MLA donated 3.98 acres of land and ₹3.16 crore towards the construction of the Srivari temple and sub-shrines for Padmavathi Ammavaru and Andal Godai.

Later, addressing a public meeting, Palani Swami appreciated the efforts of TTD in promoting Hindu Sanatana Dharma and the glory of Lord Venkateshwara by building temples in many states.

Subba Reddy said that they aspired to establish at least one Lord Venkateshwara temple in every state and union territory in the country. He also said TTD plans to build around 1,000 small temples in remote areas across AP and Telangana by spending ₹100 crore.

Modi calls for real change in Bengal

RAJIB CHOWDHURI |
DC
KOLKATA, FEB. 22

Pitching for the BJP to come to power in West Bengal, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday urged people to let the *kamal* (lotus) bloom in the coming Assembly election to bring *asol poriborton* (real change) which will replace the evils of the “syndicate raj through cut money”, *tustikaran* (appeasement) and *tolabaji* (extortion) culture of the ruling Trinamul Congress with the all-round development of the state.

“A BJP government has to be formed in Bengal not only for mere *poriborton* (change) in power but for *asol poriborton* (real change) here. The lotus needs to bloom here so that *asol poriborton*, for which our young generation is

waiting, is ushered in,” Mr Modi told a massive BJP rally at Chinsurah, Hooghly.

Mr Modi gave a fresh example of the state government's lethargy on implementing yet another Central welfare scheme, after PM Kishan Samman Nidhi and Ayushman Bharat.

He alleged: “The Jal Jivan Mission has been underway across India to connect households in villages with a pipeline for smooth water supply. It is more important for Bengal because it has over 1.45 crore rural households. You will be shocked to know about the situation they have pushed Bengal into. Out of 1.45 crores, only two lakh rural households have tap water supply. So far 3.60 crore such households have been connected with water supply nationwide.”

LOK SABHA MP ENDS LIFE BY SUICIDE

● Mohan Delkar, seven-term Lok Sabha member from Dadra and Nagar Haveli, was found dead in a Mumbai hotel on Monday. A suicide note in Gujarati was also found, said cops.

■ REPORT ON PAGE 4

POLICE GETS CUSTODY OF DISHA RAVI

● The Delhi Police was on Monday granted a day's custody of 21-year-old activist Dishar Ravi by a court in the toolkit case. They said she will confronted with two other suspects.

■ REPORT ON PAGE 4

WORLD | 5 Italian envoy killed in Congo attack

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 22

Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy advised officials on Monday to work with global organisations like UN, World Bank, IMF and UNESCO to achieve the state's goals in implementation of welfare schemes and developmental works.

The CM held a review meeting with officials from the planning department at his camp office here on Monday.

Jagan advised officials to give the responsibility of codification of data to digital assistants at village/ward secretariats under the supervision of a mandal level employee. Such codification from Rytu Bharosa Kendras would help understand whether e-cropping was being taken up or not.

He called for recording of data on the functioning of internet services at government offices like village/ward secretariats, RBKs and others in villages on a regular basis to ensure their functioning is effective.

The CM said officials should lay emphasis on analysing the data to

SPORTS | 8 Pacer Anderson sceptical of Ahmedabad strip

Minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy congratulates Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy by giving a bouquet for the party's unprecedented success of the gram panchayat elections at the camp office on Monday. — DC

enable them track the progress of works and find out whether the state is able to realise its goals in implementation of several schemes and programmes. This would also help rectify errors or flaws in implementation, on a regular basis.

The officials informed the CM that a series of programmes the state has initiated would help meet the

YSR CONGRESS WINS 80.51% SEATS IN POLLS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 22

The YSR Congress credited to the good governance of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for victory in the gram panchayat as their party supported candidates won 80.51 per cent of seats while the TD was confined to just 16.05 per cent.

■ Full report on Page 2

PLEA AGAINST ELECTIONS FOR URBAN BODIES

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 22

A petition was filed in the high court seeking cancellation of poll notification for the urban local body polls on Monday.

■ Full report on Page 2

Panic in Kongala in TS as leopard climbs tree

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, FEB 22

Inhabitants of Kongala in Vajedu mandal of Mulugu district spotted a leopard relaxing on a treetop about 2km away from the village, close to the Kongala waterfalls in the forest area, on Monday.

By the time forest officials reached the spot, the leopard has disappeared. They installed trap cameras in the area in the hope to capture it.

District forest officer Pradeep Kumar Setty said the leopard is a resident of this forest area for the past two or three years.

“We are creating awareness among the inhabitants of the forest's fringe villages about the movement of the leopard. The forest officials will remain vigilant. We would take assistance of the local police and revenue officials if needed,” he said.

The DFO added that all the required steps would be taken to ensure there is no man and animal conflict in the area. “Currently, the leopard has moved back into the forest,” he said.

The terrified villagers are remaining indoors after the sighting of the leopard.

The leopard seen by villagers atop a tree in Kongala village in Mulugu district in Telangana on Monday.

State enhances Covid tests to counter Covid-19 spread

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 22

With the number of Coronavirus infections rising in parts of Maharashtra and other states, Andhra Pradesh is gearing up to take necessary measures by enhancing the number of Covid-19 tests and increasing surveillance for detecting the spread of virus.

State health authorities have increased testing people for Coronavirus, with 80 per cent of such tests being RT-PCR (Reverse Transcription

Chain Reaction), which is more accurate in detecting the presence of virus.

Rapid Antigen Tests will be carried out only in emergency cases, as its accuracy in detecting the virus is relatively less.

Authorities are conducting daily sentinel surveillance among nearly 16 categories of people and in areas where virus is reportedly spreading. 330 persons are being tested for Covid-19 per day in every district, apart from 1,000 students and staff members in educational

institutions like primary, middle and high schools, polytechnic institutions, degree, PG and professional colleges. The move is to find the extent of virus spread.

Health authorities are also focusing on preventive measures including vaccination against the virus. They are asking targeted healthcare workers and frontline warriors not to miss their scheduled day of undergoing vaccination.

■ Page 3: 60% of healthcare staff were given jab

SHORT TAKES

Hydraulic cylinders installed for radial gates for Polavaram

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 22

Hydraulic cylinders were being installed for the radial gates on the spillway of Polavaram irrigation project at Polavaram in West Godavari on Monday. Each radial gate to have two hydraulic cylinders and as there are 48 gates on the spillway, 96 cylinders to be installed. The gates to be filed with 24 power pack sets and each power pack set will help lifting of two gates. As there are 192 girders supporting the spillway, the project executing agency is taking up erection of hydraulic cylinders.

BJP SAYS YSRC HAS COMMITTED IRREGULARITIES

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, FEB. 22

The BJP alleged that the government officials and ruling party leaders made a mockery of democracy by joining hands to bag the maximum number of Gram Panchayats in the just concluded Panchayat elections.

Speaking to media persons at the BJP office here on Monday, District President Bharat Kumar came down heavily against YSRC for its claims on landslide victory while pointing to several irregularities in the election process.

He said that their party senior leaders have complained about the shortcomings in the elections to the BJP bigwigs at the national level, Central Government, and the State Election Commission.

He dared the YSR Congress leaders to win the seats in the ensuing Civic body elections by following the rule book. BJP OBC Morcha District President Mukku Radhakrishna Goud and district secretary K. Narendra were present among others.

'CANDIDATE MUST BE PRESENT FOR WITHDRAWAL'

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, FEB. 22

District election officer Collector Chevuru Hariikiran has clarified that candidate must be present for withdrawal of municipal election nominations, as per directions issued by the Election Commission. He said a video recording of the process of withdrawal will be done.

Election officers would conduct the municipal elections in a transparent and efficient manner as per the rules and regulations of the EC. A one-day training programme for returning officers, assistant returning officers and master trainers participating in the Kadapa urban local body elections was held on Monday under the chairmanship of JC (Welfare) Dharmachandra Reddy at the collector's office.

The Collector thanked all the officers for the successful conduct of the gram panchayat polls in the district. Municipal polls should also be held smoothly and transparently.

The nomination process for the elections was completed last year. The elections were then postponed due to the Covid impact.

The Collector said the process of withdrawal of nominations would take place now under video camera surveillance. It needs to be ensured that the guidelines issued by the Election Commission, the Rules of Reservation and the Electoral Roll Process are duly implemented.

The Model Code of Conduct is mandatory as per the directions of the state election commissioner. EC also wants to take necessary steps for route map, ballot printing, provision of polling material, dispatch of material, setting up of reception centers, setting up of strong rooms and security arrangements during counting.

The Collector suggested that the returning and assistant returning officers should look into every aspect of the election with due diligence and conduct it in good faith and with maximum responsibility.

He said the master trainers want to give full training to the polling officers. Joint collector (development) Saikanth Verma, Kadapa sub collector Pridhvi Tej, Kadapa municipal corporation commissioner Sudanakoli Lavanna and other officers were present at the meeting.

YSRC wins 80.51% seats in GP polls

Leaders give credit to Jagan's good governance; Ruling party confident of record win in ZPTC polls

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 22

The ruling YSR Congress attributed credit to the good governance of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for witnessing overwhelming victory in the recently concluded gram panchayat as their party-supported candidates won 80.51 per cent of seats while the Opposition Telugu Desam was confined to just 16.05 per cent in the state.

Panchayat raj minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy told the media here on Monday that the YSRC supported candidates swept all four phases of gram panchayat polls indicating the support base to their party in the state and said that the TD was reduced to ignominy. He rejected the TD's claim that it won 41 per cent seats.

Referring to the claims of the TD that it won 41 per cent of seats in the gram panchayat polls, the minister slammed the party for trying to come up with distorted figures to mislead the people and said that though the TD supremo N. Chandrababu Naidu tried to manage the system during the polls, the people rejected the party and predicted that it would soon vanish.

In a separate development, minister for water resources P. Anil Kumar Yadav said that the Telugu Desam might have got single-digit seats in the polls if they were having no party rebels. On TD chief Naidu's claim that their party won 41 per cent of seats, he challenged him to prove it and asked him to step down if he failed to prove it. He said that the TD secured only eight seats on Naidu's native village and so was the case in the Kuppam segment. On Naidu's remarks that their party suffered defeat due to police atrocities, the minister castigated him for saying so.

The minister predicted that their party would continue the winning trend in the ensuing urban local body polls and also in MPTC/ZPTC polls in the state.

In the Nellore district, the YSRC bagged 205 gram panchayats while TD got only 29 and the JS and BJP combo managed to get just two gram panchayats out of 236 gram panchayats went for polls in Sarvepalli, Kovur, Venkatagiri and Nellore rural segments in the district.

Similarly, the YSRC secured 180 panchayats, TD bagged 23 GPs and one panchayat went to Jana Sena and four to independ-

Jana Sena demands fresh notification for MPTC, ZPTC polls

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB. 22

Jana Sena Political Affairs Committee Chairman Nadendla Manohar demanded the State Election Commission to conduct ZPTC and MPTC elections after issuing a fresh notification in order to protect democracy in the state. He said that the party had approached the Court to get justice in this regard. He was speaking at a felicitation function for his party's newly-elected gram panchayat sarpanches here on Monday.

Later, he told reporters that Jana Sena candidates contested in the panchayat elections by sincerely abiding by the principles of their chief Pawan Kalyan. He said that with the same spirit, they would give a tough fight to the ruling party in the ensuing municipal elections also.

Manohar said that during the election process last year, the YSRC government had committed several irregularities but now Jana Sena wants a smooth and fair election. He said that the party would give training to its candidates on how to make optimal use of funds for the development of villages.

He said that the party



Tourism minister Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao beats the drums to celebrate the victory of YSRC in the recently held gram panchayat elections on Bheemili Constituency in Visakhapatnam on Monday. Former minister P. Balaraju and party activists are also seen.

Minister plays drums to celebrate

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 22

Minister for tourism Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao and hundreds of YSRC party workers, including the elected sarpanches and ward members, celebrated the victory in the panchayat elections.

The YSRC-backed candidates made a clean sweep of all the 15 panchayats under the Bhimili mandal, the home constituency of the minister.

The celebrations began with the minister playing the victory drums at the party office on Monday morning. The members and largely present women sang, danced and raised slogans praising Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Later addressing the gathering, the minister

ents when the election was conducted for 208 GPs in the final phase at Markapur mandal apart from Giddalur and Yerragondapalem Assembly constituencies.

In Tirupati, Srikalahasti MLA Biyyapu Madhusudhan Reddy said that their party swept the fourth phase of polls by securing 120 of the 121 sarpanch positions in the Srikalahasti segment.

He said that their party

TD WILL DISAPPEAR FROM POLITICAL ARENA BY 2024, SAYS ANILKUMAR

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, FEB. 22

Water resources minister Dr Anilkumar Yadav forecasted that the TD will vanish from the political scene by 2024.

He observed that the results of the panchayat elections are a clear indicator for the impending collapse of opposition along with its roots.

Speaking to the media

said the YSRC created a history in Bhimili mandal with a record win. The party-backed candidates also won 95 per cent of the panchayats in Padmanabham mandal

and 90 under Anandapuram mandal. "The entire credit goes to Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy whose welfare schemes reached all the sections of the poor in

Mohan Reddy led state government and also effective handling of the Covid-19 pandemic have shown an impact on the polling. "Srikalahasti constituency people saw the Telugu Desam rule and rejected it. Now, they are seeing Jagan's rule and are a blessing. As a result, the YSRC-backed candidates made significant inroads into Srikalahasti mandal, which is the bastion of TD for the past 30 years, by

here on Monday, the minister said the TD victory has remained below 20 per cent in all the constituencies across the state since people have sided with Jagan Mohan Reddy because of his welfare programmes for the poor and downtrodden.

He said that the YSRC will repeat the same performance in the ensuing municipal elections as well as the ZP elections.

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● Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao said the YSRC created a history in Bhimili mandal with a record win. The party-backed candidates also won 95 per cent of the panchayats in Padmanabham mandal

the entire state," the minister said.

This election also wiped out Opposition Telugu Desam at the grass-root level. The people taught a lesson to TD national president Chandrababu Naidu who came in the way of allotment of houses to the poor by stalling the process in the court.

Stating that the landslide victory put them in a more responsible position, the minister said the party would surge in the municipal elections with the same spirit.

winning 35 out of 35 panchayats. "Jagan has only one point agenda in his governance – welfare of people and resolving their issues. By seeing his one-point agenda, voters had given their verdict in favour of YSRC. We are also confident that the party will also sweep the upcoming elections to civic bodies and MPTCs and ZPTCs and the party will remain in power for the next 20 years", he added.

Viswaroop belongs to Jidduvairipeta in Nadavapalli panchayat of Katrenikona mandal in Kona-seema area. But, an independent Telugu Desam rebel candidate won the election, defeating the YSRC-supported candidate.

Venugopalakrishna belongs to Adavipalem village. The ruling party candidate lost the election here too. P. Gannavaram MLA belongs to Nagaram village. But the Telugu Desam-Jana Sena-supported candidate bagged the gram panchayat. According to sources, as two YSRC groups had entered into a contest, it led to the victory of the opposition candidate in Tatipaka village. Overall, however, even during the fourth phase of gram panchayat polls, ruling YSR Congress retained its dominant position in East Godavari district. But Jana Sena Party also made its presence felt by securing 31 villages. Jana Sena bagged 15 villages in Razole assembly constituency from where Rapaka Vara Prasad had won as MLA on Jana Sena ticket but shifted his loyal-

Minister campaigns



Minister Velampalli Srinivas conducts campaign at One Town for YSRC candidates in municipal elections in Vijayawada on Monday.

ULB | POLLS

Election Commission is prepared to conduct elections for MPTCs, ZPTCs

SEC to voters: Turn up in large numbers

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 22

State election commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar called upon urban voters to turn up at the polling stations in large numbers to exercise their franchise in the urban local body polls to be held on March 10.

Speaking to media persons here on Monday, he said that he was delighted with the massive turnout for the gram panchayat elections. Each of the four phases recorded an average 80 per cent polling, he said and urged the urban voters to follow suit.

PETITION FILED IN HC TO CANCEL ELECTION NOTIFICATION FOR URBAN LOCAL BODY POLLS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 22

A petition was filed in the high court seeking cancellation of election notification for conduct of urban local body polls on Monday.

The petitioner in his

He said that they were making all arrangements at polling stations and also on issue of voter slips for the benefit of voters to

petition urged for conduct of polls by allowing new voters to cast their vote and said that such a move would help all eligible voters to exercise their franchise in the polls.

The court held hearing in the case and posted the next hearing to Feb. 23.

He thanked the chief secretary, director general of

1st time in Anantapur, no violence in GP polls

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, FEB. 22

For the first time in the history of Gram Panchayat polls, all the four phases went off peacefully without a single poll-related violence in Anantapur district this time.

No case of murder, murder-attempt or rioting came up in the 63 mandals. These are historically faction-fight areas since the time of Palegars. Further, the decades-old faction rivalries in Penukonda, Tadipatri, Dharmavaram Rapthadu and Kambadur areas appeared to be a thing of the past as the polls this time were incident-free.

During all previous elections, gram panchayat polls were hotly contested and these had an adverse impact on the polling in a majority of villages in the Rayalaseema region.

While the Palegars had tried to maintain their hold on villages through booth-captures and attacks, historian Dr. Harinath Reddy observed that the gram panchayat polls demonstrated a similar culture. The factionists had proven their existence in many past gram panchayat polls and created a tense situation to capture polling booths. This time, no such incident took place.

Special efforts made by SP Satya Esubabu by

deploying additional forces in sensitive villages along with support from striking forces helped prevent any poll-related violence.

Police and the district administration jointly succeeded in holding the polls in an orderly manner even as the Telugu Desam was having a strong hold on many areas including the faction-hit villages of Rapthadu, Tadipatri, Penukonda and Kalyanadurgam.

Sources said only four cases of injuries in clashes were reported in the entire four phases of polling in 63 mandals in the district. There was no incident of murder or attempt-to-murder, or riots. Police kept a close watch on the ground situations from the time when nominations were filed.

In the last gram panchayat polls, there were cases of one murder, 14 attempt-to-murder, 12 riots and 25 incidents of violence, police records revealed.

Collector Gandham Chandrudu said this time there was sincere efforts from both the district administration and the police in conducting the gram panchayat polls in a free and fair manner.

He said voters actively participated in all the four phases of polling as 84 per cent polling was recorded in the fourth phase and an average of 82 per cent across phases.

2 min. fail to secure win for partymen

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB. 22

Two ministers – social welfare minister P. Vishwaroop and BC welfare minister Ch. Srinivasa Venugopalakrishna – and P. Gannavaram MLA Kondeti Chittibabu could not ensure victory of candidates backed by them in gram panchayat elections held in their native places.

Viswaroop belongs to Jidduvairipeta in Nadavapalli panchayat of Katrenikona mandal in Kona-seema area. But, an independent Telugu Desam rebel candidate won the election, defeating the YSRC-supported candidate.

Venugopalakrishna belongs to Adavipalem village. The ruling party candidate lost the election here too. P. Gannavaram MLA belongs to Nagaram village. But the Telugu Desam-Jana Sena-supported candidate bagged the gram panchayat. According to sources, as two YSRC groups had entered into a contest, it led to the victory of the opposition candidate in Tatipaka village. Overall, however, even during the fourth phase of gram panchayat polls, ruling YSR Congress retained its dominant position in East Godavari district. But Jana Sena Party also made its presence felt by securing 31 villages. Jana Sena bagged 15 villages in Razole assembly constituency from where Rapaka Vara Prasad had won as MLA on Jana Sena ticket but shifted his loyal-

ty to ruling YSR Congress. In Konaseema region, YSRC bagged 162 panchayats, Telugu Desam 61, Jana Sena 31, Congress 1 and Independents 28. Jana Sena political affairs committee chairman Nadendla Manohar said his party-supported candidates have given a tough fight to the ruling party despite facing threats.

In Razole constituency, 31 candidates of YSRC, 15 of Jana Sena and 12 of Telugu Desam bagged the gram panchayat posts. In Gogannamatham village, initially, Jana Sena candidate won with four votes. Following this, YSRC candidate's supporters demanded recounting. Jana Sena party candidate was then declared winner by only two votes.

In Ubalanka panchayat, where a candidate Padala Ranga Reddy promised in an affidavit free BP, sugar tests, ration and cable connections to voters, was defeated miserably.

As elections to 12 municipal corporations and 75 municipalities and nagar panchayats are slated for March 10, he asked six political parties to file nominations in place of deceased candidates by 3 pm on February 28. He directed the authorities to use electoral rolls updated up to March 9, 2020.

SHORT TAKES

AP REPORTS 41 COVID CASES, NO DEATHS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 22

AP registered 41 fresh cases of Coronavirus infections and no death in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities reported here on Monday that out of 18,257 samples tested, 41 persons were found infected with the virus. Out of a total number of 1,37,46,985 samples tested so far, 8,89,339 persons were found infected with the confirmed Coronavirus and of them, 8,81,582 were recovered while 590 are still active with the virus.

Among daily cases of Coronavirus infections, Chittoor recorded the highest of 10 followed by seven in East Godavari, six in Nellore, four each in Srikakulam and West Godavari, three in Guntur, two each in Kurnool and Visakhapatnam and one each in Anantapur, Kadapa and Krishna and no case in Vizianagaram.

With regard to cumulative Coronavirus active cases, Krishna topped the state with 89 followed by 87 in Chittoor, 77 in East Godavari, 63 in Kadapa, 62 in Nellore, 49 in West Godavari, 43 in Guntur, 40 in Prakasam, 27 in Anantapur, 18 in Srikakulam, 15 in Visakhapatnam, 14 in Kurnool and six in Vizianagaram.

Among daily cases of death of infected persons, no case was reported and with this, the toll remained unchanged at 7,167.

The state health authorities discharged 71 infected patients after recovery.

ENGINEERING STUDENT DIES BY SUICIDE

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, FEB. 22

An engineering student who was offended by the police interrogation of him and his parents in the case of the disappearance of a young woman has ended life by suicide.

He wrote a note to his parents saying he had done nothing wrong, and hanged himself to a fan when no one was at home on Sunday evening.

According to the information revealed by Rayachoti Urban police inspector G. Raju, Marripati Venkatasai (18), who lives in Abbavaram area in Rayachoti town, a third year engineering student at IIT, Nuzvid, reportedly fell in love with a young woman who was said to be his distant relative.

She disappeared recently and went somewhere with another man. The girl's father lodged a complaint with the police about her missing.

As Venkatasai had an acquaintance with the girl and his number was also in the mobile call data, the police questioned him and his parents as part of the case investigation. It is learned that Venkatasai was also reprimanded by his parents on this issue. The young man, who was upset in the background, ended his life. The police have registered a case and are investigating.

● He wrote a note to his parents saying he had done nothing wrong, and hanged himself to a fan when no one was at home on Sunday evening.

ANANTAPUR WOMAN IN ANDHRA CRICKET TEAM

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, FEB. 22

B. Anusha, native of interior village in Anantapur district selected for Senior Andhra Women Team to participate in BCCI inter State Cricket Tournament for 2021. She is a native of Bandlapalli village in Rapthadu mandal in the district is from rural backdrop and player of Anantapur Cricket Association and player from RDT sports village. She is left arm spinner and also middle order batswoman and played quite well in ACA Women Selection Matches held at Mangalagiri, Krishna district.

She represented Andhra team for Under-16, Under-19 and now for the senior women Team of Andhra. Anantapur district cricket association president P. Mallikarjuna and district secretary K. Madhu congratulated the woman cricketer selected for Andhra team. She will attend the state coaching camp at Mangalagiri from 23 February. Anusha is presently being trained at RDT Cricket Academy, Anantapur sports village.

Back to college



A student reserves her bus seat while placing her bag from the window of her College bus while other students board the bus in a queue to reach their hostels opposite AU Central Library near Siripuram in Visakhapatnam on Monday. — K. MURALIKRISHNA

Anantapur GGH to get 640 additional beds soon

Seven government offices including AP Dairy to be relocated

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, FEB. 22

Health authorities heaved a sigh of relief as the state government has taken a firm step to expand the bed-strength of Anantapur government general hospital. It has decided to take over 12.79 acres of land housing various government departments to establish a 1,200-bedded hospital.

Thanks to the painstaking efforts of district collector Gandham

Chandrudu to upgrade the hospital, it has been decided acquire lands and buildings of seven state government departments, including the municipal guest house.

There is also a move to increase seats in the medical college by 200.

It should be noted that the general hospital is the only major medical facility for people of Anantapur and Kadapa districts and some adjoining areas in Karnataka. The proposal to

● The proposal to increase the bed strength from 560 to 1,200 beds has been pending clearance for over a decade now

increase the bed strength from 560 to 1,200 beds has been pending clearance for over a decade now. The hospital receives between 2,000 and 2,500 outpatients every day and 200 to 250 admissions. An average of 1,000 deliveries, up to 400 caesarean

operations and around 900 major surgeries are reported every month.

Sources said that the land issue ran into legal hassles when the government tried to acquire the controversial Missamma Bungalow land located behind the hospital.

Collector Chandrudu took the initiative to acquire seven lakh sq. ft. land. The Municipal Guest House, Nehru Ball Bhavan, Command Control Centre, district fire office bungalow, 4.47

acres from the DM&HO premises, 3.82 acres in Irrigation office and 4.5 acres from the R&B office - a total of 12.79 acres have been selected. Tenders will be invited soon, the collector said.

The seven government offices will be accommodated in buildings of AP Dairy, ST Corporation, Archeology and DRDA as a make-shift arrangement. Permanent structures will be provided at HLC colony at a cost of ₹52 crore.

Dacoit gang again loots passengers at gunpoint

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 22

A gang of dacoits struck again by looting the passengers travelling in a car at gunpoint and took away valuables along with the van at the fourth hairpin bend on Daralamma Ghat road near Darakonda area under GK Veedhi mandal in Vizag Agency in the early hours on Monday. This is the fourth such incident on the ghat road in Agency.

The police said that four people, all Adivasis, were travelling in a four-wheeler from Darakonda village to Narsipatnam on Monday to get a patient operated to remove a steel rod. A

● A gang of six armed dacoits stopped the vehicle by placing boulders on the road and took away cash around ₹32,000. For the first time the dacoits disembarked the passengers and also took away the vehicle.

gang of six armed dacoits stopped the vehicle by placing boulders on the road and took away cash around ₹32,000. For the first time the dacoits disembarked the passengers and also took away the vehicle.

The victims said that the dacoits were equipped with sharp-edged weapons and

country made pistols.

It may be remembered that three similar offences were committed within two days on the same road during January second week this year. The police said that the dacoit gangs have been operating with a similar modus operandi on the ghat roads and as per the initial investigation, they hail from parts of Malkangiri district in South Odisha.

In the last four cases, property and cash to the tune of ₹1 lakh were robbed. The police formed a special team to nab the gangs apart from planning to deploy patrolling teams on the ghat roads.

‘REPEAL NEW TAXES IN MUNICIPALITIES’

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, FEB. 22

All party leaders in Kadapa are demanding that the state government repeal the recent amendment to the municipal law and support the people without raising new taxes. The government has announced that it will raise taxes from April 1 next month. It is working to impose new drainage tax, lighting tax and Conservative tax from April 1. Leaders of TD, CPI, CPM, Congress, Janata Dal and other parties submitted a petition to the Corporation Commissioner Sudanakoli Lavanna.

Leaders from all parties have alleged that amendments to the Municipal Law were made during the last assembly sessions during Corona. The government proposed amendments to the Municipal Law and passed five new types of taxes through Government Orders Nos. 197, 198 and 199. They said the government has directed the municipalities to implement these taxes from April 1 this year.

SIT QUESTIONING TREASURE HUNTERS IN TEMPLE CASE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 22

Continuing their search, the Special Investigation Team (SIT) comprising officials from CID and police are searching for the treasure hunters who might have come across the people who

vandalised Lord Ram idol at Sri Kodandarama Swamy temple atop Bodikonda hill, close to the famous Ramateertha temple in Vizianagaram district.

A senior official of the SIT said the treasure hunters were known to be prowling in isolated

places of historical importance and abandoned temples of centuries old looking for ancient coins and idols.

“We thought these treasure hunters are likely to accost the vandals during the course of their search,” the official said.

FERTILE LAND AP ranks first in area and production of fruits and spices

Horticulture has high potential: ICAR

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB. 22

The total horticulture production in the country is estimated to be 320.11 million tonnes this year, which is higher than the previous year's production. The area under horticulture crops in Andhra Pradesh is of 17.48 lakh hectares with an annual production of 301.73 lakh metric tonnes.

The horticulture sector has become a key driver for economic development and contributes to 30.4 per cent of GDP of Agriculture. Indian Council for Agriculture Research (ICAR) helped in this process through

its research works.

Secretary to the department of agriculture research and education and director general of ICAR Dr Trilochan Mohapatra stated this while participating via online in the fourth convocation of YSR Horticulture University at Venkatramannagudem in West Godavari district on Monday.

Dr Mohapatra said India's horticulture industry is expected to grow by leaps and bounds. The current turnover from horticulture is around ₹13.2 lakh crore. The investment in horticulture sector is expected to triple in the

coming years to meet the increasing demand from a burgeoning global population.

“The country is set to emerge as a major exporter of fresh and processed fruits and vegetables and an important hub in Asia with heavy investment and entry of major players from the horticulture industry,” he said and added that currently the agriculture sector employed 50 per cent of the population. In order to enhance productivity, it is imperative to encourage rural industries to go for value addition to their products, as also to processing and packaging, he said.

This will help India not only cater to the needs within the country but also enhance its export earnings. It will also minimise the post-harvest loss, which is about 30-40 per cent in horticultural crops.

Dr Mohapatra said Andhra Pradesh stood first in production of chillies, cocoa, lime, oil palm, papaya and tomato. It stood second in cashew, mango and sweet orange. Andhra Pradesh ranks first in area and production of fruits and spices and second in micro irrigation area coverage. Hence it deserves an institution like the Dr YSR Horticulture

University, the second horticultural university in the country, he said.

He said the university is playing a pivotal role in enhancing the horticultural production in AP and the neighbouring states. The central government has, for the first time, brought about a shift in agriculture strategy from growth in production to doubling farmers' income by 2022. A comprehensive framework has been set for the purpose, like increasing productivity and reducing losses, increasing market access through market reforms, reducing input cost through a balanced use.

Private operators seek state's help to allow boating

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 22

Tourist boat operators have urged the state government to allow boating on River Godavari to carry tourists to the popular holiday destination of Papikondalu.

The private operators say that ever since the boat tragedy on Krishna river in November, 2017 and two more mishaps on Godavari river claiming lives, boating operations have been seriously affected in these rivers. This also meant a loss of livelihood to hundreds of people.

Though some of them got their boats overhauled as per norms to ensure more safety and thus spent nearly four to seven lakhs for each boat, they are yet to get the permission to operate the services.

The operators said the water resources authorities meanwhile gave temporary permission to a film crew including mega star K. Chiranjeevi, his actor son Ram Charan, popular villain Sonu Sood, director Koratala Siva and others for shooting a big budget film, *Acharya*, for use of a punt and a boat to ply on Godavari river from Singanapalli to Mantur.

They say the authorities have carried out a temporary survey on the navigation route in the river spread over a distance of 14 km and permitted operation of the punt belonging to

APTDC and a boat.

Water resources authorities explained that they accorded temporary permission for operation on a specific route with instructions to follow all safety norms, including police escort as also presence of fire personnel and other safety equipment on board.

Godavari river conservator R. Mohan Rao said, “We have given the film crew only a temporary permission.”

Water resources authorities said an agreement was entered into by it with a Pune-based firm for a bathymetric survey on the Godavari river to prepare a navigation route map for boats and launches to operate for a distance of 60 km at a cost of ₹35 lakh. The survey would start from March first week and be completed in a month's time.

The authorities say that once the map is ready, boats will be allowed to operate, carrying tourists to Papikondalu and to tourist places along the river course from April second week.

Boat owner PV Ramakrishna Rao said, “We appeal to the state government to expeditiously permit operation of boats and launches on Godavari river as we were losing our only source of livelihood for so long. We also appeal to the authorities to give clarity on safety norms for launches also.”

60% of healthcare staff were given job

FROM PAGE 1

Of the targeted four lakh healthcare workers, 60 per cent of them have been given both doses of vaccination so far. Those who have missed out are being advised to undergo their vaccination by February 25, as it is the last date for administering them the vaccine.

Health director Dr T. Geetha Prasadini said, “Following rise in Coronavirus infections in other states, we are enhancing the number of Covid-19 tests and conducting sentinel surveillance. People are also being requested to follow Covid-19 protocol strictly by wearing masks, washing hands regularly, and maintaining social distance to protect themselves from the virus.”

AP Covid-19 nodal officer Dr K. Rambabu said, “It is time people played safe by avoiding all major public places and following all pre-

● AP is witnessing a rise and fall in Covid-19 cases on a daily basis, though the number of deaths has come down drastically to one, two or nil.

● The number of Covid-19 cases reported day-wise is Feb. 15 (30), Feb. 16 (60), Feb. 17 (51), Feb. 18 (67), Feb. 19 (79), Feb. 20 (54), Feb. 21 (88) and part of Feb. 22 (41).

cautions to avoid infecting themselves or others.”

The state government has not yet imposed any restrictions on passengers, especially those coming from parts of Maharashtra or other affected states. Health authorities say some parts of the country are witnessing a second wave of the virus. It is inevitable that some of the infected will be travelling to other states. As a result, AP too is vulnerable to the second wave.

JC FAMILY HELPS PARTY WORKER'S FAMILY AT KALYANADURGAM

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, FEB. 22

Tadipathri former MLA J.C. Prabhakar Reddy wife J.C. Uma reacted over suicide of party worker at Kalyanadurgam Assembly segment in the district and gave ₹1.50 lakh as immediate relief for the family. Telugu Desam staunch follower E. Nagendra of Cherlopalli village in Shettur mandal in Kalyanadurgam Assembly segment in the district committed suicide after the

party tasted defeat in majority of panchayats and wards in the district after second phase of gram panchayat polls a week ago.

He took extreme step following majority seats were won by YSR Congress and Telugu Desam was unable to prove its existence in many parts.

J.C. Prabhakar Reddy visited Cherlopalli village in Kalyanadurgam area on Monday and gave away ₹1.50 lakh financial aid for the family members of Telugu Desam worker.

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SHORT TAKES

AYODHYA AIRPORT TO BE NAMED AFTER LORD RAM

Lucknow Feb. 22: The under construction airport in Ayodhya will be named Maryada Purushottam Sriram Airport, Ayodhya after Lord Ram and a provision of ₹101 crore has been made for it in the budget presented in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly on Monday.

Besides the provision for the Ayodhya airport which will subsequently be made an international airport, the budget also provides for ₹2,000 crore for increasing the number of airstrips at Jewar Airport from 2 to 6.

Cities like Aligarh, Moradabad, Meerut will also be linked through air service soon, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath told reporters after the presentation of the budget by finance minister Suresh Khanna.

Under the Special Area Programme, a budget of ₹300 crore is proposed for special schemes of Purvanchal and a budget of ₹210 crore has been proposed for special schemes of Bundelkhand region.

Stressing on industrial and infrastructure development, a budgetary provision of ₹1.107 crore has been made for the Purvanchal Expressway Project, ₹1,492 crore for Bundelkhand Expressway Project and ₹860 crore for Gorakhpur Link Expressway Project.

PHOTOS OF COUPLE IN GOVT COPTER SPARK ROW

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, FEB. 22

A couple did a ‘wedding’ photoshoot in a government chopper in Raipur triggering a security scare, officials said on Monday.

A video of the couple posing for a photoshoot in the helicopter on Monday went viral, causing flutter in the security establishment in Raipur.

Director of aviation department of Chhattisgarh government Nilam Namdev has constituted a 3-member committee headed by chief pilot Pankaj Jaiswal to probe the incident.

The committee has been asked to submit its report within a week.

“A 3-member committee has been constituted to probe the incident. Information available till now suggests that a driver in the state aviation department had opened the state hangar for the couple to do the photoshoot. He has been placed under suspension. Accountability will be fixed on the officers found responsible for the security lapse leading to the incident after the probe”, Namdev said.

One Sanket Sai and his wife, the newly married couple, had done photoshoots in wedding attire in the chopper on Sunday. The couple posed for the photoshoot inside and outside the helicopter.

Sanket is sarpanch of Dhandi Bahar village in Jashpur district in Chhattisgarh and is said to be a relative of the driver in the state aviation department Yogeswar Sai who allegedly led the couple to the hangar.

GUJARAT RS BYPOLLS: BJP WINS BOTH SEATS

Ahmedabad, Feb. 22: BJP nominees Dineshchandra Anavadiya and Rambhai Mokariya were on Monday declared elected unopposed to the Rajya Sabha from Gujarat as the opposition Congress did not field candidates for the two vacant seats, one of which was held by its veteran leader Ahmed Patel.

The two seats had fallen vacant following the demise of the sitting MPs belonging to the Congress and the BJP.

One of the seats was held by veteran Congressman Ahmed Patel since 1993 till his death on November 25 last year due to complications related to Covid-19. The other seat fell vacant as BJP’s Abhay Bharadwaj, a first time MP elected to the RS in 2019, too, died on December 1 due to the Coronavirus infection.

Returning C.B. Pandya declared Anavadiya and Mokariya as elected uncontested from the two seats on Monday, which was the last date of withdrawal of forms.

Two dummy candidates of the BJP, Rajnikant Patel and Kirit Solanki, withdrew their nominations on Saturday.

With the bypoll to the two seats scheduled to be held separately, the Congress, decided not to field any candidate.

Bomb diffused



Bomb disposal squad prepares to defuse an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) in Srinagar on Monday, which was detected at a bridge, near the Srinagar-Jammu National Highway near Pantha Chowk. Central Reserve Police Force personnel, patrolling the highway, found a tin can by the busy roadside at Nowgam, a police official said.

— PTI

Mamata kin gives CBI 4 hours to grill her at residence today

Narula claims to be in dark about purpose of summons, her link to the probe

DC CORRESPONDENT KOLKATA, FEB. 22

A day after getting summons to face grilling in the coal smuggling case, wife of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee’s MP nephew Abhishek Banerjee Rujira Banerjee Narula gave the Central Bureau of Investigation a window of four hours on Tuesday to question her at her South Kolkata residence.

Narula, suspected by the CBI for her role in overseas financial transactions relating to the illegal trade, however, claimed herself to be in dark about the purpose of the summons to her and her link to the probe while replying to the CBI on a day her sister Menaka Gambhir faced its marathon questioning for her suspected link to the financial transactions.

On Monday morning Narula informed CBI additional superintendent of police (anti corruption

ED issues summons to TMC minister’s daughter

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, FEB. 22

After the Central Bureau of Investigation’s heat on West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee’s family in the coal smuggling case, another Trinamul Congress heavyweights’ kin has come under the scanner of a different central agency and also got its summons to face questioning over a suspected link to overseas financial transactions.

The top leader is state urban development and

municipal affairs minister and outgoing Kolkata Mayor Firhad Hakim who is also a trusted lieutenant of the Trinamul Congress supremo. His daughter Priyadarshini Hakim has reportedly been called by the Enforcement Directorate to face grilling this week at its office in CGO Complex in Salt Lake on the overseas financial transactions.

ED sources claimed that a huge amount of money was sent abroad to a bank account during multiple foreign tours by Priya-

darshini’s husband Yasir Haider in the last couple of years.

The Union finance ministry’s agency has also come across

a link of a foreign actress’ name with Yasir’s overseas visits, sources added.

Priyadarshini works at corporate communication department of the CESC. She was not available for comments. It is also not clear whether she would face the ED or not. Hakim, however, claimed, “I have neither heard nor do know anything about it.”

and 3 pm tomorrow, i.e. 23 February 2021. You are requested to kindly inform me your schedule.”

In the afternoon a drama, however, unfolded when Kumar and his team went to grill Gambhir at her flat in an upscale housing complex at Anandapur off EM Bypass in the city but were denied entry by the security guards keeping the giant gate closed.

The CBI officers were seen waiting in their cars outside for almost an hour before they were allowed to go inside only by walking after parking their cars outside the residential complex.

Later, the CBI team questioned Gambhir for three hours and recorded her statement on ₹36 lakhs which used to be deposited by Anup Majhi alias Lala, the absconding kingpin of the coal smuggling case, monthly to the Kasikorn Bank account at Bangkok in Thailand and another bank in London.

Gangrape accused held after 22yrs

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 22

In a breakthrough in the 1999 Anjana Mishra gangrape case that largely contributed to the end of the Congress rule in Odisha, the state police with the help of its Maharashtra counterparts has apprehended prime accused Vivekananda alias Biban Biswal, who was absconding for 22 years.

The accused was held on Sunday from Lonavala where he was working as a plumber, the Odisha police said on Monday.

Briefing media persons here, Bhubaneswar Cuttack Twin City Commissioner of Police

Dr Sudhanshu Sarangi on Monday said the accused had changed his name to Jalandar Swain and was staying in Aamby Valley in Lonavala near Mumbai.

“Biban had mentioned Naranpur (Cuttack) in his permanent address. When we initiated an inquiry, we found out that no such person belongs to Naranpur. He had a permanent job, Aadhaar card and bank account there. He was in contact with his family members and had asked his family to get a death certificate in his name to avoid police detention in future,” the CP informed.

Dr Sarangi said that a special mission under the title of ‘Operation Silent Viper’ was launched three

months ago with a team of three police personnel, including Cuttack deputy commissioner of police (DCP) Prateek Singh. On February 19, a special team led by Badambadi police station inspector Rashmi Ranjan Mohapatra left for Mumbai to arrest the accused.

“Odisha police with the help of Maharashtra counterparts launched operation ‘Aamby Valley.’ The cops got to know that a person named Swain works in Aamby Valley as a mechanic and stays in a staff quarters two and a half km away. Seeing the police, the accused tried to escape. However, the cops managed to arrest him

and brought him here,” Dr Sarangi said.

After the witnesses recognised the accused Biban Biswal, he was produced before the Special CBI Court here which sent him to judicial custody.

“The accused has been handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation which investigated the case. The next course of action will be taken by the investigating agency,” the senior cop added.

On the intervening night of January 9-10, 1999 Anjana was gang-raped by three persons near Baranga while she was going to Cuttack from Bhubaneswar along with a journalist-friend in a car.

4G services likely to be suspended in J&K in March, April

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 22

Security agencies are once again likely to recommend suspension of 4G services in J&K during March-April in view of specific Intelligence inputs that Pakistan-based terror outfits were planning “major infiltration and terror attacks” in the Valley and along the Indo-Pak border areas.

The Centre had decided to restore 4G services in J&K last month after a gap of nearly a year. These 4G services were restricted by the Centre, on recommendation of security agencies, after Article 370 was revoked in J&K in August 2019. Anticipating that the decision to scrap Article 370 could trigger large-scale unrest in the Valley it was decided to restrict usage of 4G services.

So though these services have now been restored security and Intelligence agencies are closely monitoring the situation in the Valley. Intelligence agencies said that though the situation as of now was under control but could deteriorate during the coming season.

Intelligence agencies have received specific inputs that a large number of militants, close to 500, were waiting at launch

● **THE CENTRE** had decided to restore 4G services in J&K last month after a gap of nearly a year.

pads along the Indo-Pak to infiltrate into India with onset of summer. Cell phone serves, particular messaging plays a crucial role in terror activities hence security forces are skeptical that 4G services may once again have to be suspended in case violence in the Valley escalates in the coming days.

“There is concrete information with us that major infiltration and terror attacks are being planned during March-April. Cell phones play a major role in terror operations so if security situation deteriorates in the coming days then we will have suspend these 4G services again,” a senior Intelligence official said.

Kashmir Valley witnessed a relatively peaceful winter this year with a sharp drop in number of terror incidents. But things, security official feel, could change with the onset of summers for which adequate preventive measures like strengthening anti-infiltration grid along the border areas and increasing deployment with the Valley were being done.

Rahul: Centre will not roll back farm laws unless forced

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB. 22

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday called for intensifying the farmers’ agitation saying that the Narendra Modi led-BJP government at the Centre was not going to roll back the three farm laws unless it is forced.

The Congress leader who was addressing a public meeting held as part of Tractor Rally held in his constituency Wayanad, said there was a reason why Modi was not withdrawing the three laws. “The reason is clear. These three laws are designed to destroy the agricultural system in India and give the entire business to two or three of Narendra Modi’s friends,” he said.

Gandhi said the world is watching the farmers struggle very closely. Even international pop stars have commented on the farmers’ stir. But the government in Delhi is

unable to feel the pain of the farmers.

“Agriculture is the only business that belongs to Bharat Mata and the government wants to snatch this from the farmers,” he said.

Earlier, Rahul Gandhi led a tractor rally from Thrikkaipetta to Muttill in Wayanad to protest against the farm laws.

At a separate meeting of Kudumbasree women self help groups, Rahul Gandhi took a dig at Prime Minister for ridiculing MGNREGA.

When he took office in 2014 he ridiculed MGNREGA. But later he was forced to accept that the rural job guarantee scheme held the poor in good stead during Covid pandemic.

Gandhi who was addressing the meeting of the self help groups Poothadi grama panchayat, said the self help groups and MGNREGA were brought by the UPA government to empower the people of the country.



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi takes out a tractor rally from Thrikkaipatta to Muttill in Wayanad district. — PTI

TOOLKIT | CASE Court told Nikita, Shantanu may be arrested in future if there is a requirement

Disha Ravi remanded to one-day police custody

New Delhi, Feb. 22: A Delhi court on Monday sent 21-year-old climate activist Disha Ravi, arrested in connection with allegedly being involved in sharing a “toolkit” on social media related to the farmers’ protest, to one-day police custody (PC) to be confronted with co-accused in the case.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Pankaj Sharma sent Ravi for custodial interrogation after police said she was required to be confronted with co-accused in the case which has transnational ramification. However Ravi, who was

produced before the court on expiry of her three-day judicial remand, through her lawyer opposed the plea of the investigators, saying “why should I (Ravi) be in police custody while those I have to be confronted with are on bail?”

Police only got one day custody of Ravi, though it had sought five days of custodial interrogation contending that during her interrogation, she shifted entire burden on two co-accused — Nikita Jacob and Shantanu Muluk — who “cannot be arrested because they are currently on transit bail.



Disha Ravi leaves after being produced at Patiala Court in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

“They need to be confronted with Ravi. Nikita was served with a notice to join the probe but she did not join the interrogation. “It is a case which has

transnational ramifications, with involvement of those who has expressed their disaffection for this country,” prosecution told the court.

The probe agency told the court that they may arrest Nikita and Shantanu as well in future if there is a requirement. “There was involvement of all three accused persons. We have to confront all three. We only have seven days more to seek custodial interrogation,” the prosecution told the court referring to the provisions of the law under which the case has been lodged that mandates custodial interrogation only upto 15 days post his/her arrest.

Ravi’s counsel opposed the police plea saying that other two accused are on bail and “why should I be

in police custody for the purpose of confrontation?”

Defence counsel also questioned as to why police did not summon the co-accused persons earlier. “I (Ravi) was already in their custody for five days. Prosecution is talking in a manner as if they got to know all the information about the case today itself. What is new there to seek fresh PC. If investigating officer wants to meet Ravi beyond 15 days, what he will do? Two people already on transit bail, why should I be in police custody,” the counsel questioned. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

OFFICER SHOT AT
McDees, KIDNAP
SUSPECT DIES

Lonoke (US), Feb. 22: An Arkansas police officer was hospitalised in stable condition after being shot during a confrontation at a McDonald's restaurant with a man who was kidnapping a 14-year-old North Carolina girl.

The suspect died from an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound on Sunday after fleeing from authorities, according to the Arkansas State Police. The girl was found safe.

Two Lonoke, Arkansas, police officers confronted the driver of an SUV parked at the fast-food restaurant Saturday night after the vehicle was connected to a North Carolina child abduction case. Lonoke is located about 27 miles east of Little Rock.

EVACUATION
AMID FLOODS IN
INDONESIA

Bekasi (Indonesia), Feb. 22: Thousands of residents are being evacuated on the outskirts of Indonesia's capital amid flooding after the Citarum River embankment broke.

Bekasi district in Indonesia's West Java province have experienced flooding since Saturday because of heavy rain. "Some embankments are broken, not only from the river embankment but also from the irrigation embankments," Public Works and Housing Minister Basuki Hadimuljono said Monday. Raditya Jati, spokesperson for the National Disaster Mitigation Agency, said that more than 28,000 residents in four villages in Bekasi district and 34 villages in Karawang district are affected.

CHILD SEX ABUSE
TRIAL OF EX-U.S.
PRIEST PUT OFF

Oecusse (East Timor), Feb. 22: East Timor abruptly postponed the trial on Monday of a defrocked American priest facing allegations he sexually abused young girls at a children's shelter he ran in a remote enclave in East Timor — one of the most Catholic places on Earth. Soon after Richard Daschbach, a former missionary from Pennsylvania, arrived in the courtroom, judges said they needed more time to make revisions to documents and asked the 84-year-old defendant to return on Tuesday.

The former priest is charged with 14 counts of sexual abuse of children under the age of 14, as well as counts of child pornography and domestic violence, according to the country's Prosecutor General.

INMATE ATTACK
KILLS 1 GUARD
IN INDIANA

Michigan City, Feb. 22: One correction officer is dead and a second is seriously injured after an alleged attack Sunday by a prison inmate, Indiana State Police said.

The attack occurred at Indiana State Prison in Michigan City around 2:40 pm, the agency said in a news release. Tymetri Campbell, 38, faces several preliminary charges including murder, the state police said.

Officials said the officers were attacked in a common area.

The officers were transported to St. Anthony's Hospital in Michigan City, where one was pronounced dead and the second was listed in serious condition. They were not immediately identified.

NZ VOLUNTEERS
TRY TO RESCUE
40 WHALES

Wellington, Feb. 22: Volunteers in New Zealand were trying to save 40 stranded whales Monday evening by refloating them on the high tide. Nine more whales had already died.

The pod of 49 long-finned pilot whales beached themselves on Farewell Spit, a remote beach on the South Island, the Department of Conservation reported. The whales were first noticed by a tour operator on Monday morning, the department said. About 65 conservation rangers and volunteers worked throughout the day to help the whales by keeping them cool and wet until the water was deep enough to refloat them.

The nonprofit whale rescue group Project Jonah was helping coordinate efforts. Farewell Spit has been the site of previous mass strandings.

Angry youth rattle Spain in
support of jailed rap artist

Demand roll back of Public Security Law passed by the previous admin

Barcelona, Feb. 22: The imprisonment of a rap artist for his music praising terrorist violence and insulting the Spanish monarchy has set off a powder keg of pent-up rage this week in the southern European country. The arrest of Pablo Hasél has brought thousands to the streets for different reasons. Under the banner of freedom of expression, many Spaniards strongly object to putting an artist behind bars for his lyrics and tweets. They are clamoring for Spain's left-wing government to fulfil its promise and roll back the Public Security Law passed by the previous conservative administration that was used to prosecute Hasél and other artists.

Hasél's imprisonment to serve a nine-month sentence on Tuesday has also tapped into a well of frustration among Spain's youths, who have the highest unemployment rate in the European Union. Four in every 10 eligible workers under 25 years old are without a job. "I think that what we are experiencing now with the cases of Pablo Hasél (...) and other rappers politically detained by this regime is a brutal attack against the freedom of speech," 26-year-old student Pablo Castilla said during a protest in Barcelona. "The protests are being brutally repressed by the allegedly progressive national government and the Catalan government. "They are attacking us youngsters because we



A man throws a road sign against police officers protecting a national police station during clashes following a protest condemning the arrest of rap singer Pablo Hasél in Barcelona, on Sunday.

— AP

are showing our anger."

For many, Hasél's case also represents what they perceive as a heavy-handed reaction by a state whose very structure is in need of deep reform. Hasél's lyrics that strike at King Felipe VI and his father, King Emeritus Juan Carlos I, have connected with a growing public debate on the future of Spain's parliamentary monarchy. Unquestioned outside fr-

inge circles of the Left until the past decade, the royal house has been plagued by financial scandal that has reached Juan Carlos himself. Many Spaniards were agast when the former monarch left Spain for the United Arab Emirates amid a court investigation into his alleged fiscal improprieties. As well as shouting its support for Hasél, a crowd that gathered in Madrid on Saturday

chanted "Where is the change? Where is the progress?" and "Juan Carlos de Borbón, womaniser and thief." The debate has caused tensions inside Spain's left-wing coalition government.

While Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and his Socialist Party back the parliamentary monarchy Spain has had since the end of Francisco Franco's dictatorship in the 1970s,

their minor partner, the upstart United We Can party, wants to get rid of the monarchy and has supported this week's protests for Hasél despite their violent turn.

The anti-monarchic streak in the protests cuts across Spain. But in Hasél's home region of Catalonia, an already tense political climate appears to be magnifying the uproar.

— AP

Italian envoy
killed in DR
Congo attack

Kinshasa, Feb. 22: The Italian ambassador to Congo, an Italian carabinieri police officer and their Congolese driver were killed Monday in an attack on a UN convoy in an area that is home to myriad rebel groups, the Foreign Ministry and local people said. The ambush occurred as the convoy was travelling from Goma, Congo's eastern regional capital, to visit a World Food Programme school feeding project in Rutshuru, the UN agency said in a statement. WFP said it was seeking information from local authorities, as the ambush occurred on a road that had previously been cleared for travel without security escorts.

Luca Attanasio, Italy's ambassador to the country since 2017, carabinieri officer Vittorio Iacovacci and their driver were killed. Other members of the convoy were injured, WFP said. The attack occurred in the territory of Nyiragongo, in North Kivu, the same area, known as the "three antennas," where two Britons were kidnapped by unidentified armed men in 2018, said Mambo Kaway, president of a local civil society group. "There were five people aboard the vehicle, including the Italian ambassador," Kaway said.

"The driver died after being shot with several bullets, and others were wounded," he said. "The situation is very tense," he added. The wounded were taken to a nearby UN hospital. The North Kivu governor, Carly Nzanu Kasivita, said that the vehicles were taken hostage and escorted into the bush and that when local people saw them, they alerted the authorities. The Congolese army and park guards for Virunga National Park came to the rescue, he said.

"There was an exchange of fire. The attackers fired at the bodyguard and the ambassador," the governor said, adding that the ambassador later died from his wounds. Attanasio, a 43-year-old career diplomat, leaves a wife and three young children. The attack, a few kilometres north of the regional capital of Goma, was just next to the Virunga National Park. Last month gunmen shot and killed at least six rangers in the Rutshuru area of the park.

Marie Tumba Nzenza, Minister of Foreign Affairs, sent her condolences and promised the Italian government that the Congolese government would do all it could to investigate and find out who is behind the killings. — AP

Stop smearing CPC, halt support
to separatist forces: China tells US

Beijing, Feb. 22: China on Monday urged the US to stop "smearing" the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) and it's one-party political system, lift sanctions on trade and halt Washington's backing of "separatist forces in Taiwan, Tibet, Hong Kong and Xinjiang."

In his annual speech at the Lanting Forum, focusing on China-US ties, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the Biden administration should adjust the headline policy pursued by former President Donald Trump towards Beijing to check its growing influence.

We have no intention to challenge or replace the United States. We are ready to have peaceful coexistence and seek common development with the United States, Wang said.

Likewise, we hope the United States will respect

● **CHINA ON** Monday expressed its support for India in hosting this year's BRICS summit and said it will work with New Delhi to strengthen the cooperation among the five-member grouping of emerging economies.

● India has assumed the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) Chairmanship for 2021 and is set to hold this year's summit.

● On February 19, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar launched India's BRICS 2021 website at the BRICS Secretariat at Sushma Swaraj Bhawan in New Delhi.

China's core interests, national dignity and rights to development. We urge the United States to stop smearing the CPC and China's political system, stop conspiring at or even supporting the erroneous words and actions of separatist forces for 'Taiwan independence', and stop undermining China's sovereignty and security on internal affairs concerning Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Tibet, he said.

We hope that the US side will adjust its policies as

soon as possible, among others, remove unreasonable tariffs on Chinese goods, lift its unilateral sanctions on Chinese companies and research and educational institutes, and abandon irrational suppression of China, he said.

The relations between China and the US are at an all time low. The two countries are currently engaged in a bitter confrontation over various issues, including trade, the origins of the novel Coronavirus pandemic, the communist

giant's aggressive military moves in the disputed South China Sea and human rights. US President Joe Biden who spoke to his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping for over two hours in his first phone call on February 11 later said there would be repercussions for China's human rights abuses and he made the message clear to his Chinese counterpart in his talks.

In a CNN town hall on February 17, Biden said he stressed to Xi during their long conversation that the US would continue to assert its role as a voice for human rights on the world stage, including at the United Nations and other international agencies.

We must speak up for human rights. It's who we are, the Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post* quoted Biden as saying.

— PTI

EU weighs troubled Russia ties

Brussels, Feb. 22: European Union foreign ministers on Monday will look at options for imposing fresh sanctions against Russia over the jailing of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, as the 27-nation bloc considers the future of its troubled ties with the

country. The ministers will discuss possible names of Russian officials and whether to target them individually or whether to use a new system of measures aimed at human rights abuses.

But they appear unlikely to impose restrictions on

oligarchs close to President Vladimir Putin, as Navalny has requested. "It's clear that Russia is on a confrontational course with the European Union," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said.

"In the case of Mr Navalny, there is a blunt refusal

to respect their engagements, including the refusal of taking into account the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights." Navalny, 44, an anti-corruption investigator and Putin's most prominent critic, was arrested in Moscow last month. — AP

COSMIC | TRIP

Hayley Arceneaux will launch later this year with a billionaire
Bone cancer survivor to go into orbit

Cape Canaveral, Feb. 22: After beating bone cancer, Hayley Arceneaux figures rocketing into orbit on SpaceX's first private flight should be a piece of cosmic cake.

St. Jude Children's Research Hospital announced Monday that the 29-year-old physician assistant — a former patient hired last spring — will launch later this year alongside a billionaire who's using his purchased spacelift as a charitable fundraiser.

Arceneaux will become the youngest American in space — beating NASA record-holder Sally Ride by over two years — when she blasts off this fall with entrepreneur Jared Isaacman and two yet-to-be-chosen contest winners. She'll

also be the first to launch with a prosthesis. When she was 10, she had surgery at St. Jude to replace her knee and get a titanium rod in her left thigh bone. She still limps and suffers occasional leg pain, but has been cleared for flight by SpaceX. She'll serve as the crew's medical officer.

"My battle with cancer really prepared me for space travel," Arceneaux said in an interview with *The Associated Press*. "It made me tough, and then also I think it really taught me to expect the unexpected and go along for the ride." She wants to show her young patients and other cancer survivors that "the sky is not even the limit anymore."

"It's going to mean so much to these kids to see a survivor in space," she said. Isaacman announced his space mission February 1, pledging to raise \$200 million for St. Jude, half of that his own contribution. As the flight's self-appointed commander, he offered one of the four SpaceX Dragon capsule seats to St. Jude. Without alerting the staff, St. Jude chose Arceneaux from among the "scores" of hospital and fundraising employees who had once been patients and could represent the next generation, said Rick Shadyac, president of St. Jude's fundraising organisation. Arceneaux was at home in Memphis, Tennessee, when she got the "out of the blue" call in

January asking if she'd re-prepare St. Jude in space.

Her immediate response: "Yes! Yes! Please!" But first she wanted to run it past her mother in St. Francisville, Louisiana. (Her father died of kidney cancer in 2018.) Next she reached out to her brother and sister-in-law, both of them aerospace engineers in Huntsville, Alabama, who "reassured me how safe space travel is."

A lifelong space fan who embraces adventure, Arceneaux insists those who know her won't be surprised. She's plunged on a bungee swing in New Zealand and ridden camels in Morocco. And she loves roller-coasters. Isaacman, who flies fighter jets for a hobby, considers her a per-

fect fit. "It's not all supposed to be about getting people excited to be astronauts someday, which is certainly cool," Isaacman, 38, said last week.

"It's also supposed to be about an inspiring message of what we can accomplish here on Earth." He has two more crew members to select, and he plans to reveal them in March. One will be a sweepstakes winner; anyone donating to St. Jude this month is eligible. So far, more than \$9 million has come in, according to Shadyac. The other seat will go to a business owner who uses Shift4Payments, Isaacman's Allentown, Pennsylvania, credit card-processing company. — AP



Jeremy Winningham cleans snow from the windshield as his daughter Courtney drives at Rice Lake, Wisconsin on Saturday.

— AFP

U.S. HOSPITALS
GRAPPLE WITH
WATER CRUNCH

Houston, Feb. 22: Hospitals across the South grappled with water shortages as the region carried on with recovery efforts in the wake of a devastating winter storm, and the weather offered a balmy respite — temperatures as high as the mid-60s.

At the height of the storm on Sunday, hospitals were left scrambling to care for patients amid record cold, snow and ice that battered parts of the country more accustomed to going through winter with light jackets and short sleeves.

The icy blast ruptured water mains, knocked out power to millions of utility customers and contributed to at least 76 deaths — half of which occurred in Texas.

At least seven people died in Tennessee and four in Portland, Oregon.

— AP

DECCAN Chronicle

23 FEBRUARY 2021

Withdraw restrictions on academic webinars

In the pre-Covid-19 era, governments used the visa as a tool to prevent individuals from certain countries from taking part in educational, cultural or sporting engagements. India cut a sorry figure when it showed the world that it was ready to demonise an entire nation for political reasons. At other times, it was particular individuals who were targeted for the views they held, regardless of their country.

But what we have just seen is a whole new ballgame. A January 15 order by the education ministry that recently came to light asked all government entities, including publicly funded educational institutions and universities, to “seek approval” of the “administrative secretary” of the concerned department/ministry for organising any “online/virtual international conferences/seminar/training etc”.

On the other hand, those meant to confer approval were required to ensure that the subject matter of an event did not relate to the “security of the State, border, the Northeast states, UT (Union territory) of J&K, or any other issues which are clearly/purely related to India’s internal matters”.

In short, the very idea of discussion is being pushed into a room and the door banged shut in order to please Big Brother.

Has the government gone totally insane? Or is this just a way of imposing thought control through the backdoor because we are not — last heard — a country with a totalitarian constitution in which the single ruling party or dictatorial agency (the military, for instance) must decide and control everything, including who hears what and who says what?

In the Covid era, webinars became the lifeblood of intellectual and scientific interactions and exchange of ideas among peers internationally, and it is this which is being sought to be curbed, forcing Indian scholars and students in all fields to be shut in without being able to take recourse to the latest findings and thinking in the various domains around the world. In short, the very idea of discussion is being pushed into a room and the door banged shut in order to please Big Brother.

It is no surprise that the scientific community is not pleased. In a letter to education minister Ramesh Pokhriyal (and others), the president of the Indian Academy of Sciences, Partha Majumder, had called the order “too constraining” for the advancement of science in the country. He has also raised the valid point that frequently, even for domestic webinars, foreign scholars of repute, including Nobel laureates, are invited as interlocutors and discussants as exchanges with them are of extraordinary benefit to our own scholars and students. Are such forums to be classified as foreign?

Besides, even if we shut the doors on international experts, will Indians, when they are discussing crucial issues of science and other fields of scholarship, be wholly free to talk about issues for which the sanction-giving authority must specially look out? The answer seems fairly clear. Indeed, it is likely that it won’t be before long that private institutions of knowledge too will be brought under the mischief of the order.

The instruction must be withdrawn lock, stock and barrel. Seeing that the heads of scientific institutions representing over 1,500 top scientists of the country reacted publicly, principal scientific adviser K. Vijayaraghavan and secretary (technology) Ashutosh Sharma have hinted at a modification of the order. That isn’t enough, the whole thing must be scrapped. It is odd that that the PSA, a man of science, is not repelled by the tone and the meaning of the entire directive.

Cyborgs of tennis

Novak Djokovic, one of the three knights of modern tennis, turned on his best game on the hard court at the Rod Laver arena he can call his own backyard for having won nine times and never having been beaten in an Australian Open final. His opponent Daniil Medvedev was so much in awe of the champion that he calls him a “cyborg of tennis” alongside Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, who between them have won 58 Grand Slams and 15 of the last 16. And is there a more accurate yardstick than Grand Slam titles to measure who among the three is going to be judged as the greatest tennis player of the professional era?

The Serbian’s spotless returns of serve on a cool Melbourne night could be rated as his greatest weapon in the dismantling of a young challenger even as he played every ground stroke as if he were indeed armed with superhuman qualities. If tennis is all about eliminating errors, then Djokovic is just that champion. Not a crowd favourite because of the stand he has taken on various issues and because he called for leniency from the hard quarantine imposed on all visiting players before the Australian Open, Djokovic also had to battle many who were not chanting “Ole, ole, ole” in his support.

Naomi Osaka is the emerging great of the women’s game who won her fourth Grand Slam in a manner reminiscent of the dominating tennis of Serena Williams, who she beat in the semis before demolishing Jennifer Brady in the final. The youngster may have victories that favour the hard courts of the Australian and US Opens but, on the evidence of her Melbourne showing, she may need only an attitudinal change to win on grass and clay. Having once said that to become a tennis legend was her life goal, the 23-year-old is well on her way now with a polished game and a record of Grand Slams to lend greater weight to the voice to speak up on sensitive social subjects that she has never been afraid of.

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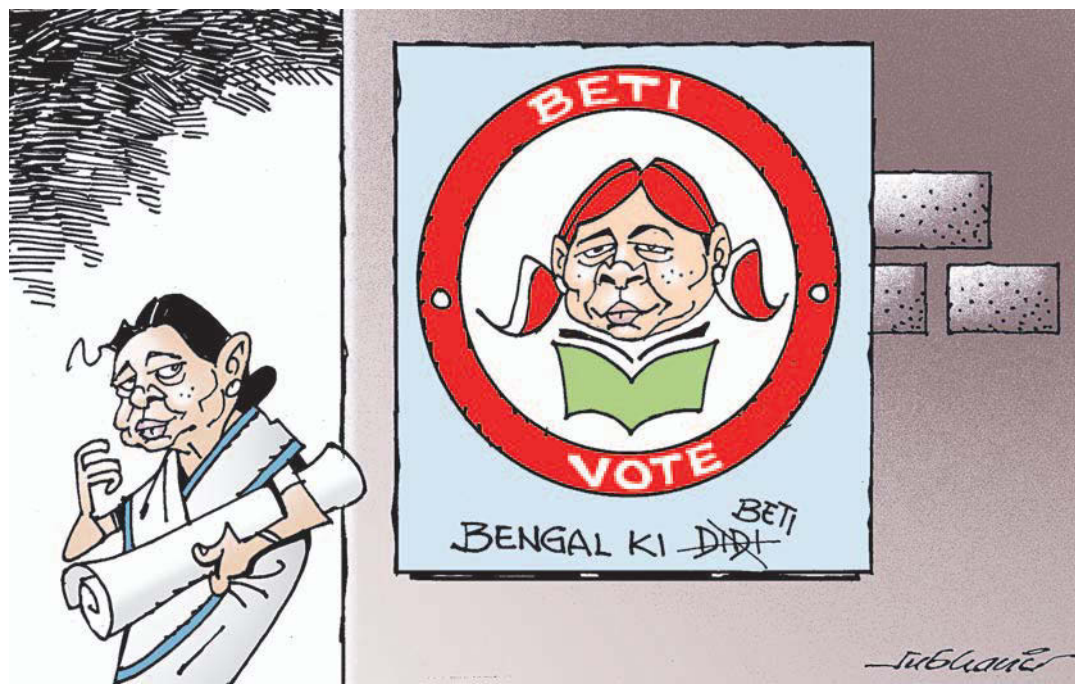
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Subhani



Hashtag power: Twitter, govt in fight for survival



Shashidhar Nanjundaiah

An Editors Guild of India webinar on February 12 reporting from the Naxalite badlands featured song videos, pornography and abusive language. Now, why would an organised group of “unknown persons” like to cyber-bomb a seminar? Perhaps the theme was inconvenient? As the guild pointed out later, the seminar would talk about the excesses of the government and the struggles of the tribals — or Adivasis — at the hands of the left-wing extremists. Open webinars are vulnerable to mischief anyway, and this writer has himself faced tough, disruptive questions during them. But such is the nature of free speech. Where does free speech end? Would we consider the disruption of the guild’s webinar also free speech, or would we find it unreasonable enough to be restricted? Should the guild be held responsible for those who misused the platform?

Gatherings, virtual or physical, promote mobilisation of thought, and that can be problematic. That is why the recent spat between the Centre and Twitter has rich meanings for a researcher.

The Twitter-government conflict is a fight for survival. In Twitter’s constitutional framework, economic survival is founded on a business model of big numbers and a systematic process of ensuring openness and diversity of voices. Let us remember, to be fair, that Twitter’s understanding of freedom of speech is rather American. The courts there allow restrictions posed only from a clear and explicit call to violence or breach of national security.

A landmark judgment in the 2014 Elonis vs US case stated that an explic-

it threat includes one where “reasonable people hearing it will perceive it to be a threat”. No amendments were made, however, in what free speech meant on the social media. Of course, national security is a reasonable restriction in American law too. But the courts relentlessly uphold the free speech rights of an individual. Most courts also rule in favour of protecting the voices of minority groups, unless there is an explicit threat, but Twitter usually watch groups with historical problems more carefully.

Twitter’s country-specific censorship has disabled accounts that were clearly neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic. The site does not usually block accounts that are critical of regimes, whether or not a country is authoritarian. Governments then tend to take action against individuals who may use disagreeable or inconvenient language against a regime about its majority religion. Instances are replete from Turkey, Bahrain, Thailand, and several other countries — not exactly stellar examples of individual freedom-granters.

The social media has two broad roles — the organisational and the dialogic, and it is the former that is spooking nervous governments. By threatening Twitter officials with jail and publicly contemplating the application of media laws to the social media, the government is putting on public display how spooked, rather than concerned, it is. For the Indian government, in particular, irrespective of party, there are several historical precedents — most glaringly so over the last six years. To cry conspiracy on groups of like-minded people who use a convenient technological tool — the hashtag — to

galvanise support and make claims is extremely thin-skinned.

People and political parties — many on Twitter, such is the delicious irony of the social media — have raised doubts about whether the Delhi police wittingly or unwittingly facilitated the Republic Day drama. Should we therefore assume that our government liberally allowed the virtual mobilisation to brew on Twitter, and then failed to protect a public monument where the real action was?

Certainly, history has shown us that mobilisation topples governments even through rhetorical intent. Organisational power can often translate into transactional power — and from Indira Gandhi to Narendra Modi, it poses a human challenge to professed development goals. The social media is just the latest galvanising force that transcends geography.

But can the social media enable a coup in India? But is it possible to argue that it can? Similarly, can a group of people hoist a private flag atop a public building as the police watch? But can the Centre argue that the breach was a security problem? That’s what matters. And the public display of anger is a warning to the rest of us not to rub the government the wrong way. Consider the potent words of BJP leader Anil Vij in Disha Ravi’s context: “Those who even think in anti-national terms must be eradicated”.

Let’s flip a question: Would the flag be hoisted atop Red Fort on Republic Day if the social media had not existed? This sounds like a rhetorical question. Like during the Arab Spring, “hashtag mobilisation” can indeed take on unimaginable, real proportions. But which political leader has not used it to campaign and

The social media has two broad roles — the organisational and the dialogic, and it is the former that is spooking nervous governments.

discredit, proclaim and decry, often using clever but false equivalence?

But false narratives cannot be confused with fake news. It should worry us that instead of seeking to protect its citizens’ privacy (it took the Supreme Court to state recently that privacy is paramount), or protect conventional media businesses like Australia, Spain and several other countries are now doing, the Indian government and its agencies are seeking to use the social media to identify inconvenient people to fit into its narratives that can fuel pseudo-nationalistic frenzy. Disha Ravi’s arrest is only the latest example. As a former SC judge noted on a prominent news channel, it seems the new tendency is to arrest in a hurry, ask questions later — no wonder a judge has questioned the police on its “conjectures”.

Any government should be responsible for creating an ecosystem that enables its citizens to feel involved but secure, responsible but free. Knee-jerk reactions from the State and highly publicised arrests of people who are merely practising their rights tend to inhibit citizens from speaking up. As a medium, the social media does not represent — it merely amplifies.

Meanwhile, the home-grown Twitter, Koo (I understand the onomatopoeic word is a call that people in coastal Karnataka use to catch someone’s attention) has deftly built a base of political support and is a perfect platform for mobilisation. And as expected, the BJP government has taken the lead. Sure, Koo is no less dialogic, but fair dialogue depends on whether the government indeed ends up painting social media in the same brush as the editorial media — and if Koo can adopt editorial interventions that are fair and just to all.

The writer has led reputed institutes of media and communications, and is the founder of “Being Responsible”, which promotes media literacy. The views expressed here are personal.

LETTERS

NAIDU TELUGU LOVE

It was under the TD rule that corporate education system flourished in AP. At that time N. Chandrababu Naidu never spoke about the importance of learning Telugu at school level as the corporate schools preferred to teach everything in English. All the corporate schools ignored Telugu even though it was part of the three language formula. That is why many students who passed out of corporate schools were successful at the international level and the US in particular.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

IMPENDING MUSIC

It seems like the BJP is taking a political gamble without realising its repercussions (*Ganta criticises AP BJP for changing stance on VSP, DC, Feb. 22*). Farmers of Amaravati have been agitating for the new capital by pooling their lands, but the governments ignored it. Now, the VSP lands which were contributed by farmers at throwaway prices are being targeted by cohorts of state and the Central dispensations.

Udatha Rama Chandra Rao
Yeleswaram, East Godavari

WORLD’S PHARMACY

It makes every Indian proud that Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General, has hailed India’s fight against Coronavirus (*DC, Feb. 22*). Being a developing country with huge population, India could keep Covid-related deaths low. Nearly 150 countries are the grateful recipients of vaccines donated by India.

Parthasarathy Mandadi
Tirupati

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Opposition writ against PM rejected

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 22

A combined bid by five Opposition parties for a writ against Government failed in the Delhi High Court. They had alleged that the Prime Minister and other Central Ministers had used Government machinery for furthering Ruling Congress Party’s prospects in the ensuing elections.

Chief Justice Mr. H.R. Khanna dismissed the petition, observing that the petitioners had not proved any violation.

Aakar Patel



Who’s to blame for ₹100 petrol: Nehru, Indira or Modi Sarkar?

The price of petrol has crossed ₹100 in some parts of India for the first time. A parallel development is that of the total revenue that the government receives — 33 per cent, or one-third, now comes from the tax on fuel. India’s consumers pay the highest rate of tax on the petrol and diesel that they consume. The nations that follow India on the list of those with high taxes are all European nations, plus the United States and Japan. These are of course places where consumers are much better off than us and the government can in fact extract money from them without significant hurt.

In India, the majority of consumers are poor. And a tax on fuel affects all of us equally and hurts the poor disproportionately. The autorickshaw owner and the Uber driver pay the same to fuel up their vehicle as the corporate executive and or business tycoon. This makes very little sense. Ideally, taxation should be focused on those who can afford to pay more, and this is through direct taxes like income-

tax. But this has not happened in India for a variety of reasons. The base of people who file their income-tax returns has gone up, but the actual money that comes in as direct taxes has not gone up proportionally.

The other reason that taxes from fuel have gone up as a proportion of all taxes is what has happened to the Goods and Services Tax. This was meant to replace a series of other taxes and create a single market where more trade and more commerce would happen, expanding the economy. But the GST was not able to produce as much revenue as the taxes it replaced. And the market has not grown. Indeed, in the last 36 months, the Indian economy has slowed significantly, falling from around eight per cent growth in the quarter starting January 2018 to around three per cent in the quarter starting January 2020. And in the period after that, the economy has actually contracted for the first time in decades. And so, the short-term prospects for growth are not good, and the government must look

around for immediate ways in which it can fund itself. The easiest way is through taxes on fuel.

Petrol and diesel had been deregulated before Prime Minister Narendra Modi took office. The logic of deregulation was that the Indian State kept subsidising the consumer even when the price of crude rose globally, putting the mostly state-run oil businesses here at a loss. The consumer was protected no matter what the price of crude was. But now the reverse has happened. The government is protected no matter what the price of crude is. If the price goes down it takes more profits and does not lower the retail rate of petrol and diesel. If the price goes up, it hikes up the rates further. This was not the purpose of deregulation.

The Prime Minister says that it is not his fault and previous governments are to blame for keeping India dependent on imported crude. But that is the case with all the world’s nations who do not have a reserve of oil that can be tapped. Alternative sources of energy are a

recent phenomenon and their ability to match fossil fuels in terms of price is something even more recent. We should know that in the area of petrol and diesel in automobile use, this parity has still not come.

Petrol and diesel are very energy dense. About 50 kg of fuel or a full tank can take the car for about 700 km. For an electric car to do that, it needs a lithium ion battery pack that must be at least 45 or so kilowatt hours. The price of this battery alone is around \$5,000, and so approximately ₹4 lakh. Add the rest of the car and the minimum cost of a vehicle that can do the same range as a petrol or a diesel-driven car can do today is around ₹10 lakh, which is out of the budget for three-fourths or more of India’s car buyers. This will change over time and the cost of battery packs will fall as more and more nations take to electric vehicles for environmental reasons. But it is wrong to assume that it could be done today and certainly wrong to assume it could have been done in the past.

The last aspect is that of infrastructure. Lithium ion batteries in cars take about 10 hours to charge at home, assuming all car buyers have a garage with access to electricity. America, Europe and China have tens of thousands of direct current fast chargers in networks that span their nations.

This enables cars to charge up in about half an hour or so. India does not have these networks because the government has not built them. Even if all cars today were to magically become electric and not dependent on fossil fuel, where would they be charged? That the Prime Minister did not say.

The reality is that no matter what Jawaharlal Nehru or Indira Gandhi or Atal Behari Vajpayee did, we would be dependent today on petrol and diesel. The question is whether the government should extract such a large share of tax from us. That is a question only Narendra Modi can answer and not Jawaharlal Nehru.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,744.32	-2.25
Nifty 50	14,675.70	-2.04
S&P 500*	3,886.18	-0.53
Dollar (₹)	72.49	0.22
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.39	0.23
Euro (₹)	87.62	0.10
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,013.278	0.60
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	64.53	2.58
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.202	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.345	0.00

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Labour surveys to begin across India by April

The Labour Bureau would launch its five all-India surveys, including on migrant and domestic workers, by April 1, as two of the three mandated pre-testings of the studies yielded "encouraging and positive results". Labour Bureau director general D. P. S. Negi said, "We are hopeful to launch all five surveys across the country by April 1 and work on ground to release results in seven to eight month."

IndRa ups outlook on banking sector to stable



India Ratings & Research revised its outlook on the banking sector to stable for FY22 from negative even as it sees higher stress emerging in the retail loan segment. For PSBs the outlook has been revised to stable from negative and for private banks, the stable outlook is retained. Overall stressed assets (gross NPA+ restructured) could rise 30 per cent for the banking system, almost 1.7 times in the retail segment in H2FY21.

Smaller realtors hurt in K-shaped recovery: Icra

A 'K-shaped recovery' is underway in the realty sector, where access to credit and demand consolidation has helped large players grow handsomely even as their smaller sized rivals struggle. Their struggle will weigh heavily on the sector as a whole, rating agency Icra said, adding such players hold an 80 per cent market share. Icra said the top-10 listed companies witnessed a 61 per cent growth in the December quarter.

Hyundai starts new maintenance scheme for users

Hyundai Motor India Ltd said it has launched a new maintenance programme under which customers would be able to replace parts like brakes and clutch across nine models. For the first five years of the purchase, a customer would be able to replace 14 parts such as wipers, bulbs, hose belts and much more across its nine models. Customers can buy the Hyundai Shield of Trust package before the first free service.



■ Covid fear, bond yields pull down stocks
Sensex sinks below 50,000

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, FEB. 22

The Sensex tumbled below the 50000-mark on negative global cues, as bond yields and crude oil price rose globally. Besides, Covid concerns leading to localised shutdowns in parts of Maharashtra added to the market anxiety.

The Sensex fell 2.25 per cent, or 1145 points, to close at 49744 on sustained selling. Monday's fall is the biggest in the last two months.

The Nifty-50 Index also fell 2.04 per cent, or 306 points, closing at 14,675 points.

This is the fifth straight session the market has fallen over rising bond yields.

BSE's market capitalisation dropped below Rs 200 lakh crore as investors suffered notional loss of over Rs 4 lakh crore in the Monday sell off.

"Global cues were weak as yields on the benchmark US 10-year Treasury notes rose to a one-year high, worrying investors that money might move away from emerging markets. Further, there were concerns over the risk of higher inflation due to sharp jump in commodity prices, which tempered optimism around a vaccine-led economic recovery," said Siddhartha Khemka, head-retail research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

Except Metals, all other sectoral indices closed in the red. The top losers included the Nifty Bank



SBI CALLS ON RBI TO MAKE SHORTING BONDS COSTLIER

SUBHADIP SIRCAR
FEB. 22

The RBI should consider steps to disincentivise short selling, which may have triggered the recent sell-off in the sovereign bond markets, according to the chief economic adviser at SBI Research.

Banks and primary dealers resort to such short-selling when they expect bond prices to fall, and this becomes a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' sometimes with traders borrowing securities from the repo market and rolling them over till yields rise, Soumya Kanti Ghosh wrote in a note to clients on Monday.

"The only way to break such self-fulfilling expect-

tations is for RBI to conduct large scale open market operations to provide necessary steam to the bond market to rally and with the increase in price many short-sold positions will trigger stop losses and market players will scramble to cover open positions," he said.

Yields on the benchmark 2030 debt rose 14 basis points last week amid fears about how the RBI plans to manage the huge government borrowing programme and a rise in global bond yields. The 2030 yield was up 6 basis points to 6.20 per cent on Monday.

Short selling typically involves selling security borrowed from the repo market. —Bloomberg

(-1.63 per cent), Nifty IT (-2.89 per cent) Auto (-2.28 per cent) and Nifty Realty (-2.80 per cent).

"The recent spike in the Covid cases combined with subdued global cues

is weighing on the sentiment," said Ajit Mishra, VP-research, Religare Broking.

FPIs were net sellers by Rs 893.25 crore and DIIs, by Rs 919.88 crore.

Kochi firm completes phase 2 trial of Covid drug

Kochi, Feb. 22: The city-based PNB Vesper Life Sciences has successfully completed phase 2 clinical trials of PNB-001 (GPP-Baladol), its proprietary drug to treat the coronavirus infection and said it will soon move the government for deploying the drug for emergency use.

The company, which has its labs in England, had in early September 2020 received the approval from the Drug Controller General (DCGI) to conduct the phase 2 clinical trial of GPP-Baladol in patients with moderate infection of the pandemic with oxygen support.

The company on Monday said the clinical trial was initiated in November at BJ Government Medical College and Sassoon General Hospital in Pune, and Victoria Medical College and Research Institute in Bengaluru on 40 patients.

"We will submit the clinical trial report to the DCGI on Monday itself," the company's promoter and chief executive P.N. Balaram said, adding the trial protocol was designed in-line with the solidarity trial conducted by the WHO and other international clinical trials.

The Kochi-based was firm the first in the world to begin phase 2 trial for a new chemical entity.

—PTI

SC halts NCLT okay for Future-Reliance deal

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 22

The Supreme Court has on Monday halted regulatory approval by the National Company Law Tribunal for the Future-Reliance deal till further orders. While this comes as a relief to e-commerce giant Amazon, it is a setback for Future Retail, which has been maintaining that it will face liquidation if the deal collapses.

The Supreme Court ordered that the NCLT can continue reviewing the deal and overseeing the approval process, but cannot pass a final order till the court hears Amazon's concerns. The stock exchanges and the antitrust watchdog Competition Commission of India have already cleared the deal.

"In the meantime, the NCLT proceedings will be allowed to go on but will not culminate in any final order of sanction of scheme," the court said in its order. The court has given two weeks to file the counter-affidavit and another week for rejoinder affidavit, if



any. The case will come up for further hearing after five weeks.

Amazon had filed a special leave petition in the Supreme Court against the Delhi High Court's division bench order of February 8. The division bench had stayed the status quo order passed by a Single Judge of the court on February 2, asking Future Group and concerned authorities to maintain status quo in the Reliance-Future deal till it pronounces the final order.

The division bench had said that statutory authorities like NCLT and Sebi should not be restrained from proceeding in accordance with law on Future-Reliance deal.

Future Retail also said the NCLT can issue directions to convene

meetings of shareholders and creditors of applicant companies, including Future Retail, to consider the deal.

Amazon had approached the Delhi High Court last month, seeking enforcement of the October 25 interim order of the emergency arbitrator (EA) at the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) that had restrained Future Retail from going ahead with the deal with Reliance. Amazon alleges that the deal violates an earlier contract between the company and the Future Group.

As part of the agreement entered while buying 49 per cent stake in Future Coupons in 2019, Amazon would have a call option to acquire all or part of the promoters' shareholding of 47.02 per cent in Future Retail between the third and tenth year of the transaction and this would be subject to law. Amazon also claims that the 2019 agreement had categorically prohibited Future Retail from selling a stake to Reliance Industries.

DHFL: AUDITOR UNEARTHS FRESH FRAUD WORTH ₹6,180 CR

New Delhi, Feb. 22: Dewan Housing Finance Corporation (DHFL) on Monday said its transaction auditor, Grant Thornton, has reported another fraudulent transaction of Rs 6,182 crore in the company.

The administrator of the company received an initial report from Grant

Thornton indicating that there are certain transactions which are "undervalued, fraudulent and preferential in nature", DHFL said in a regulatory filing.

"As per the transaction auditor report shared with the administrator, the monetary impact of the above transactions covered under

the application amounts to Rs 5,381.90 crore towards outstanding principal, Rs 589.36 crore towards accrued interest and Rs 210.85 crore towards notional loss of interest on account of charging lower rate of interest," said the filing about the impact on the company. —PTI

Goldman sees Brent oil at \$75 as supply response trails demand

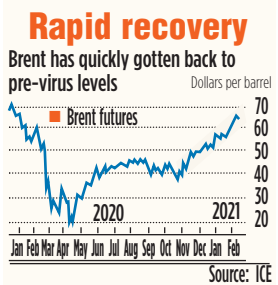
SHARON CHO
FEB. 22

Oil prices will rally sooner and higher than previously thought as the global energy demand recovery outpaces the supply response from the Opec+ alliance, shale and Iran, according to Goldman Sachs Group Inc.

Consumption will get back to pre-virus levels by late July, while output from major producers is

likely to remain "highly inelastic" to the rising prices, the bank said in a note. Goldman raised its Brent forecasts by \$10 a barrel, to \$70 next quarter and \$75 in the following three months.

"This faster re-balancing during what was expected to be the dark days of winter will be followed by a widening deficit this spring as the ramp-up in Opec+ production lags our above-consensus demand



recovery forecast," bank analysts including

COMMODITIES FLARING UP

Damien Courvalin said in the note.

Oil's rebound to levels last seen before Covid-19 wreaked havoc on the global economy has been driven by Saudi Arabia's unilateral output cuts together with the improving demand outlook. The rally has also been supported by investors using crude to position for a

reflationary environment, Goldman said. Brent oil traded above \$63 a barrel on Monday and is up around 22 per cent this year.

Supply will keep lagging behind demand for several reasons, the bank said:

Opec+ will fall behind the market rebalancing, especially as the pace of global drawdowns of

stockpiles has accelerated;

There are no signs of more activity from most non-Opec+ producers outside of North America, creating a risk supply will fall 900,000 barrels a day short of the bank's estimates in the coming year;

The US earnings season confirms that big explorers and producers, the key drivers of US shale output, remain focused on returning cash to shareholders. —Bloomberg

TATA MOTORS SEES DOUBLE-DIGIT GROWTH FOR CAR INDUSTRY THIS YR



MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, FEB. 22

Tata Motors, India's biggest automaker by revenue, expects domestic passenger vehicles industry to grow in double digits in 2021-22 on account of continued robust demand momentum driven by shift towards personal mobility after the Covid pandemic.

Shailesh Chandra, president at Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles told a virtual media conference on Monday after the launch of its SUV, the new Safari, that sales growth for Tata Motors would be better than the automobile industry.

"There is a market momentum which continues on the demand side because of the shift towards personal mobility," Chandra pointed out, adding that this would remain till everybody gets vaccinated. "We don't know when everyone will get vaccinated."

He said by and large people are and will be cautious and, therefore, there is this gravity towards personal mobility.

As for Tata Motors, he said, "We would expect growth to be much better than the industry."

The new generation Tata Safari is sold in six variants, including options of manual and automatic transmission as well as 6/7-seat configurations.

The prices range from Rs 14.69 lakh for the entry-level XE variant to Rs 20.20 lakh for the top-end XZ+ (Adventure Persona edition) in the manual trims, while the automatic versions of the full-blown SUV cost between Rs 17.25 lakh and Rs 21.45 lakh at Delhi showroom.

Copper surges above \$9,000 as deficit drives record rally

Feb. 22: Copper rallied above \$9,000 a tonne for the first time in more than nine years on bets that increased demand driven by the recovery from the pandemic will spur a historic deficit, putting the economic bellweather on course for a record run of monthly gains.

Prices climbed more than 3 per cent on Monday and are heading for an unprecedented eleventh monthly rise in February. Base metals are on tear on expectations that post-crisis consumption will outstrip near-term supply, with raw materials like copper and nickel getting an addi-

tional boost from their importance to the clean-energy transition. The furious pace of the advance has market watchers debating whether a new commodity supercycle is now in the offing.

The metal's revival marks a turnaround from earlier in the month, when copper hit turbulence as investors signalled the need for more details about stimulus measures and on concerns about a softening in Chinese demand. But prices rose during China's Lunar New Year as factory production was more buoyant than usual. Expectations for a revival

in inflation have helped, too.

"Market sentiment is heated right now in anticipation of a new cycle of global inflation," Jia Zheng, an analyst with Goldtrust Futures Co, said from Shanghai. "Chinese investors returning from Lunar New Year holidays are waiting for more stimulus from the US and Europe. Fundamentally, Chinese demand has exceeded expectations, as travel restrictions boosted consumption."

Goldman Sachs Group Inc reinforced its bullish stance last week, saying that China's return from the week-long break had

triggered another leg higher for prices. The market is facing the largest deficit in a decade this year, with a high risk of scarcity over the coming months, according to the bank.

There are already signs of emerging tightness on the London Metal Exchange, as spot contracts trade at a premium to futures. That pattern, known as backwardation, was a feature of the market during a record-breaking boom in Chinese demand last year, and suggests that spot demand is once again outpacing supply as exchange inventories run low.

Adding to concerns about a supply squeeze are possible production cuts at a top Chinese smelter. Inventories tracked by the Shanghai Futures Exchange are the lowest for this time of year in more than a decade.

Three-month copper traded at \$9,110 a tonne on the LME at 9:58 a.m. in Singapore after hitting \$9,187, the highest since 2011. In China, the Shanghai Futures Exchange contract hit the daily limit. Other metals rose, with LME tin at the highest since 2011, and nickel rallying toward \$20,000 a tonne.

—Bloomberg

Potash rally may prod India to cut imports

PRATIK PARIJA
FEB. 22

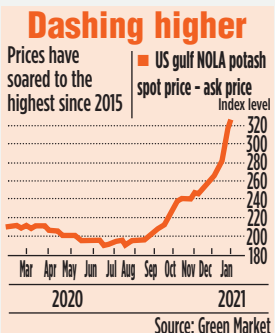
India would be buying less potash after a run-up in prices, according to the country's largest importer of the fertiliser, a move that may undercut expectations for global demand to hit a record this year.

Purchases in the fiscal year starting April may drop from about 5.5 million tonne the year before, said P.S. Gahlaut, managing director of Indian Potash Ltd, which accounts for almost 50 per cent of the country's imports. He declined to give a forecast, but said

demand will weaken as India still has a sizeable stockpile.

"In India, consumption of potash is very price sensitive," Gahlaut said in an interview. "Whenever prices have gone up, there's an immediate effect on consumption."

Potash is a nutrient that helps plants withstand drought and diseases. Prices have risen amid a surge in agricultural commodities to multi-year highs as this implies farmers will be planting more acres and using more fertiliser. Bloomberg's Green Markets sees global potash demand at a record



in 2021, while Morningstar Inc says it will likely set a new "high watermark."

Weaker India demand could put pressure on potash suppliers such as

K+S AG, Uralkali PJSC and Canpotex Ltd as these companies may have to lower prices for new deals. India is the fourth-biggest user of potash.

India and China recently signed potash contract deals with Belarusian Potash Co at \$247 a tonne. Although that's above 2020 prices, it caused a stir among some producers expecting even higher prices. Nutrien Ltd, the world's biggest fertiliser company, is selling potash in the US corn belt for about \$350 a ton, while prices in Brazil rose \$50 this year.

Stockpiles of Indian companies and traders

still total more than 1 million tonnes, said Gahlaut. The proposed 11 per cent cut in subsidies for imported phosphatic fertilisers and potash will further dent demand and hurt the government's push for balanced use of fertilisers.

Gahlaut said India's potash consumption is already lower than what is required under the policy. The country promotes balanced fertiliser use to improve crop yields, boost profitability for farmers and reduce subsidy burden. Currently there's an excessive use of urea given the higher financial support. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Anand in Global Chess League

Chennai: In what would be a shot in the arm for chess in India, IT giant Tech Mahindra is all set to launch a franchise-based league. Five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand will be the "mentor, advisor and facilitator-in-chief" of the Global Chess League, which will have eight teams competing for the top prize in the inaugural edition. With a first-of-its-kind 'phygital' league — physical and digital — the league organisers are aiming to raise the profile of chess by expanding the fanbase. The league will use new-age technologies such as 5G, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality. Anand expects the global league to be a game changer. "There is a renewed interest in the game of chess and through this unique global league format, we will be able to keep the spirit of chess intact," he said.



Sports Authority of Telangana State chairman Allipuram Venkateshwar Reddy (left) greets Hyderabad Mayor Vijayalakshmi Gadwal after she assumed charge on Monday. Mr Reddy said she assured support for development of sports in the city.

Kabaddi trials for RR district

Hyderabad: The Ranga Reddy District Kabaddi Association is conducting selection trials from 3 pm on Wednesday at the SATS Indoor Stadium in Saroornagar, Hyderabad, to pick the junior boys and girls teams for the 47th Junior Inter-District Kabaddi Championships to be held at Thorur in Mahabubabad district. Boys and girls from Ranga Reddy District should be below 20 years of age and weigh under 70 kg and 65 kg respectively to be eligible for selections. They should report at the venue along with the copy of their Aadhar Card or SSC memo. For further details contact M. Ravikumar, Secretary, Ranga Reddy District Kabaddi Association, on 9849532287.

TENNI-KOIT SELECTIONS

Selection trials to pick the Telangana State senior men & women and junior boys & girls (under 18 years) tenni-koit teams will be held on February 28 from 7 am at Lal Bahadur Stadium in Hyderabad. Entries should be sent to S. Laxmi Kantham on 8309857074 or A. Yadaiah on 9393053838.

Team India finish 5th in ALMS race

Abu Dhabi: Chasing the Le Mans dream, Racing Team India, the first all-Indian team to compete at the international endurance racing stage, ended its first Asian Le Mans Series campaign fifth in the overall championship standings. The trio of Narain Karthikeyan, Arjun Maini and Naveen Rao, raced their ORECA 07 LMP2 car to a pair of fifth place finishes in the final two races of the season at Abu Dhabi's Yas Marina track. The results came on the back of the fifth and fourth-placed finishes the team chalked up in the two season-opening races in Dubai. The team will now have to make a presentation to the ACO next week to get an entry for the '24 Hours of Le Mans'. A committee will vet all the applications before finalising the invitations in March.

Live on TV

CRICKET

South Africa T20 Challenge: Warriors vs Cobras from 1.30 pm; Lions vs Knights from 5.55 pm on Star Sports Select 2

FOOTBALL

Champions League: Atletico vs Chelsea from 1.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 2; Lazio vs Bayern Munich from 1.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 1

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ROOT FOR GRASS

Anderson happy with grass on Motera strip but says it won't be there on match day

Ahmedabad, Feb. 22: Veteran fast bowler James Anderson is pretty sure that the newly laid track at the Motera Stadium will be devoid of any grass for the upcoming Day/Night Test against India even though there is a nice green cover on it at the moment.

The third Test under lights will start from Wednesday and for England's premier fast bowler, he doesn't expect it to behave much differently from the second Test track at the Chepauk which India won by 317 runs.

"The pitch, it has got grass on it but I am pretty sure it's not going to be there when we turn up on the match day," Anderson said with a wry smile during a virtual conference on Sunday.

"So we have to wait and watch. As seam bowlers, we have to be prepared to bowl as best we can in any given condition. If it swings, it's great and if it does not, we still have a job to do," Anderson said. He felt that the pink SG Test ball that he bowled with during the net sessions, swung more than its red counterpart.

"Look this is the second pink Test in India and first in February so we don't know how it would behave."

He urged critics of the much-debated rotation policy to look at the "bigger picture", considering the massive amount of cricket to be played by the England team in the coming days.

England did not play Jonny Bairstow and Mark Wood in the first two Tests but have brought them back for the final two games as part of a rotation policy while first-choice keeper Jos Buttler is back home after the opening Test. The idea is to help players cop up with life inside the bio-bubble.

"You have got to try and look at the bigger picture."



Members of the Indian team during a training session at Motera in Ahmedabad on Sunday. — BCCI

The idea was if I missed that one, that would give me the best chance of being fit and firing for the pink-ball Test," Anderson said.

Former players, especially Kevin Pietersen, have criticised ECB's thought process, saying the board must play its best players in a big series like this against India.

Anderson, 38, himself played the series-opener where he took five wickets in England's victory but was rested for the second where India emerged triumphant by a massive 317-run margin.

"I am feeling good and fresh and ready to go again if called upon. It's frustrating to an extent but I can see the bigger picture with the amount of cricket that we have got."

— PTI

BLACK CAPS CON KANGAROOS TO WIN FIRST T20

Christchurch (New Zealand), Feb. 22: A Devon Conway batting masterclass inspired New Zealand to a 53-run win over Australia in the opening Twenty20 international in Christchurch on Monday.

Conway smashed an unbeaten 99 off 59 balls as the Black Caps overcame a shaky start to finish on 184/5 after losing the toss and being put in to bat.

In reply, the tourists were all out for 131 after 17.3 overs, with Black Caps spinner Ish Sodhi taking four wickets for 28 to give the hosts an early edge in the five-match series. Australia captain Aaron Finch refused to blame the loss on his team's two-week Covid-19 quarantine upon arrival in New Zealand. — AFP

Brief scores: New Zealand 184/5 (Conway 99 n.o., Phillips 30, J Richardson 2/31) beat Australia 131 (Marsh 45, Sodhi 4-28, Southee 2/10).

Paddler Snehit dumps defending champion

Panchkula, Feb. 22: SFR Snehit could not have asked for a better platform than the 82nd National Table Tennis Championships to showcase his growing confidence. The 20-year-old from Telangana first slayed defending champion Harmeet Desai 4-0 and then accounted for sixth-seed Sushmit Sriram 4-1 in the quarterfinals, at the Tau Devi Lal Indoor Stadium here on Monday.

The Hyderabad lad drubbed Harmeet 11-9, 11-7, 11-9, 11-5 in the pre-quarterfinals before beating Sriram 8-11, 12-10, 11-9, 11-8, 11-3 in the quarters.

They were the result of his fitness, speed and power that he could add to his game. Besides, he had been seeing a psychologist to increase his mental strength. All of these, Snehit admitted



SFR Snehit in action at the TT Nationals on Monday.

after the match, have brought windfall gains to him.

THE RESULTS

■ **Quarterfinals:** SFR Snehit bt Sushmit Sriram (TTFI) 8-11, 12-10, 11-9, 11-8, 11-3; A. Sharath Kamal (PSPB) bt Anthony Amalraj (TTFI) 11-8, 11-3, 5-11 13-11, 11-2; Manav Thakkar (PSPB) bt Ronit Bhanja (Ben) 11-7, 12-10, 10-12, 12-10, 11-6; G. Sathiyar bt Sanil Shetty (PSPB) 11-9, 11-9, 11-13, 11-8, 11-6. **Pre-Quarterfinals:** SFR Snehit bt Harmeet Desai (PSPB) 11-9, 11-7, 11-9, 11-5; A.

faced with.

"The thing about being a Test batsman is that you need to be able to handle all types of conditions. India is one of the places where it is a lot tougher for overseas batsmen to come and be successful, but then so too is England," he wrote in a column for the *Daily Mirror*.

"And that is part of the game, the challenges and why we love it," he said.

The turning tracks in India became a talking point during the ongoing series when some former

England players such as Michael Vaughan asked whether such strips were ideal for Test cricket.

The series is tied at 1-1 after India's brilliant 317-run win in the second Test in Chennai.

Stokes' bowling quota of just two overs in that game raised a few eyebrows but he said it was about

"Don't read too much into the fact that I didn't bowl a huge amount in the second game, I'm sure if it was a green seamer I would have bowled a lot more overs."

— PTI

BAGAN SNATCH THRILLING DRAW AGAINST HYD

Vasco, Feb. 22: Trailing twice in a high-pressure clash, leaders Mohun Bagan fought their way back and played out a thrilling 2-2 draw against 10-man Hyderabad FC in the Indian Super League here on Monday.

Aridane Santana (8') put Hyderabad up ahead before Manvir Singh (57') restored parity for Bagan.

The Nizams once again took the lead through substitute Roland Aalberg (75') before Pritam Kotal (90+2') found the net late to help Bagan snatch a crucial point.

The result effectively means that Bagan will have to wait for either Mumbai City to drop points in their next game or deny the Islanders a win in their last game to secure the League Winners Shield.

A win in this match would have handed Bagan the title.

— PTI

Hebbar's high as Andhra beat TN

Indore, Feb. 22: Ashwin Hebbar slammed an unbeaten 101 and powered Andhra to a seven-wicket win over Tamil Nadu in the second round of Vijay Hazare Trophy on Monday.

Andhra bowlers did very well to dismiss TN for 176 in 41.3 overs.

Hebbar was in cracking form and toyed with the opposition to attack to fashion a comfortable win.

Left-arm medium-pacer C. Stephen (3/46), off-spinner Shoaib Mohammed Khan (3/24) and right-arm medium-pacer Girinath Reddy (2/33) struck at regular intervals to restrict a strong Tamil Nadu batting line-up, led by Dinesh Karthik. Girinath Reddy struck an early blow by dismissing left-handed opener C Hari Naishaanth (4). The other opener N Jagadeesan (11), who scored a ton in the opening match, was bowled by Girinath to leave the team at 23 for 2.

Tamil Nadu, winner of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy recently, never really recovered from the early setbacks.

TANMAY TON IN HYD WIN

Meanwhile in Surat, Gujarat, captain Tanmay Agarwal proved his batting prowess once again as he smashed a swashbuckling century in Hyderabad's seven-wicket victory over Chhattisgarh.

Tanmay followed up his first match score of 86 with 122 on Monday as he stroked 17 boundaries in his 116-ball knock.

Tanmay has been knock-



Tanmay Agarwal

BRIEF SCORES

■ Tamil Nadu 176 in 41.3 overs (B. Aparajith 40, R. Sonu Yadav 37, R. Sai Kishore 28, Shoaib Mohammed Khan 3/24, Stephen 3/46) lost to Andhra 181/3 in 29.1 overs (Ashwin Hebbar 101 not out, Ricky Bhui 52 not out). **Points:** Andhra 4, Tamil Nadu 0.

■ Chhattisgarh 242/7 in 50 overs (Shashank Chandrakar 36, Harpreet Singh Bhatia 63, Ashutosh Singh 51, Shashank Singh 31, Mehdi Hasan 3/32) lost to Hyderabad 243/3 in 40.4 overs (Tanmay Agarwal 122 — 116x4, Tilak Varma 60, Himalay Agarwal 49). **Points:** Hyderabad 4, Chhattisgarh 0.

ing on the doors of IPL teams but has been overlooked of late.

Thakur Tilak Varma (60) played second fiddle while Tanmay's cousin Himalay contributed 49 as Hyderabad cantered to victory with almost 10 overs to spare.

Electing to bat, Chhattisgarh could only muster 242 in their stipulated 50 overs. Mehdi Hasan (3/2) was the pick of the Hyderabad bowlers.



The tournament's youngest players Viyan (from left), Eshwar Sai and woman player Maanasvi pose ahead of the Telangana State Ranking Snooker & Billiards Championship in Hyderabad on Monday.

Colour on table as TS snooker starts

DC CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD, FEB. 22

Bharat Choudhary, Vibhas, Sai and G. Srikanth made winning starts at the Telangana State Ranking Snooker & Billiards Championship which got underway at the Telangana Cue Sports Association premises at Khajaguda on Monday.

In the junior snooker category, Bharat Choudhary beat Maanasvi in straight frames 59-14, 42-20 while Vibhas too registered an emphatic 51-23, 65-24 win over Mohammed Sami.

In other matches, Sai had it easy against Mohit 58-21, 50-26 and G. Srikanth clawed back to beat Venkat Sai Ram 31-56, 53-43, 52-20 in the first round of the event in which more than 200 players are competing for top honours in the junior as well as senior categories.

THE RESULTS

■ **Junior Snooker first round:** Bharat Choudhary bt Maanasvi 2-0 (59-14, 42-20); Vibhas bt Md Sami 2-0 (51-23, 65-24); Sai bt Mohit 2-0 (58-21, 50-26); G. Srikanth bt Venkat Sai Ram 2-1 (31-56, 53-43, 52-20).



Medallists at the 4th Telangana Master Games Table Tennis event pose at the presentation ceremony along with TMGA secretary Prabhakar Rao (left) at MLRIT.

MANOHAR IS TT MASTER

DC CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD, FEB. 22

B. Manohar, five-time State champion and No.7 among world veterans, continued his winning run to emerge victorious in the 40+ category of the 4th Telangana Master Games — Table Tennis Event conducted at MLRIT in Dundigal near Hyderabad.

Manohar from Oriental Insurance silenced Shayamal 3-0 — 11-9, 11-6, 11-6 to stamp his authority in the final. He is now eyeing the World Masters to be held in Japan next year. Vishal Reddy won the 30+ singles category by blanking Vishwal Jaiswal 3-1 — 11- 9, 6-11, 11-7, 11-8 while Hemanth took the 50+ singles title with a 3-0 — 11-6, 11-8, 11-6 win over Suresh in the summit clash.

In the 60+ singles, N. Thairat Natraj Sharma 3-1 — 12-10, 3-11, 13-11, 11-9 and S. Ramesh took the 70+ title by defeating Jagannath 3-1 — 11-9, 4-11, 11-8, 11-2.



Arvind Shetty



Nishanth Reddy



E. Srikanth

Brief Scores:

A-2 DIVISION (TWO-DAY) LEAGUE

Day-1

■ Anu CC 170 in 45.3 overs (Sachin 36, Rizwan 62 n.o., Rasheed 30, M. A. Jaweed 4/66, Srinivas 5/54 (16.3-5-54-6) lost to Canara Bank 172/3 in 23.5 overs (Arvind Shetty 100 — 55b, 21x4, 2x6, Suresh 30). **Points:** Canara Bank 5, Anu CC 0.

■ SN Group 409 in 84.3 overs (M. Gaurav 67, Aryaman Thakur 35, Nishanth Reddy 137 — 167b, 14x4, 1x6, Ritwik 54, Atharva 34, Ghanraj 4/44) vs Kishoresons 17/0 in 7 overs.

A-3 DIVISION (ONE-DAY) LEAGUE

■ ML Jaisimha 317/9 in 50 overs (G. Gopi Krishna Reddy 202 n.o., Gnana Prakash 32, R Vedvysa 4/63) bt St Andrews 147 in 37.3 overs (Aditya 37, SM Hussain 41, Dheeraj Goud 4/58). **Points:** ML Jaisimha 5, St Andrews 0.

■ Team Kun 93 in 39 overs (Vishal Dhumal 5/6) lost to Victory CC 96/3 in 17.3 overs (Harikiran 34 n.o). **Points:** Victory 5, Team Kun 0.

■ Southend Raymonds 312/4 in 47 overs (Kowshik Reddy 69, Noman Ahmed 135, CH Rahul 3/55) bt AB Colony 71 in 29.3 overs (Md Irfan 3/13, Md Khaleel 3/24). **Points:** Southend Raymonds 5, AB Colony 0.

■ MP Blues 305/8 in 47 overs (S. Raju 73, E. Srikanth 101 n.o., Naveen 60) bt Mahesh CC 182 in 36.3 overs (Sudharshan 32, Vinay Reddy 32, Yesudas 3/51, Satish 4/40). **Points:** MP Blues 5, Mahesh CC 0.

■ Red Hills 130 in 44 overs (Meraj 31, Naresh 4/24) lost to PPMCC 132/3 in 39.3 overs (Sanju 35, Pavan 58 n.o). **Points:** PPMCC 5, Red Hills 0.

■ Dhruv XI 101 in 29.2 overs (Praveen 4/24) lost to Lal Bahadur CC 102/2 in 24.1 overs (Pranav 58 n.o). **Points:** Lal Bahadur 5, Dhruv XI 0.

■ All Saints 191 in 34.4 overs (Koushik 30, Ronith 49, Chandra 4/25) lost to Youth CC 192/5 in 39.1 overs (Harshvardhan Reddy 32, Parikshit 74). **Points:** Youth 5, All Saints 0.

■ LNCC 248 in 40 overs (Pranav 30, Gopi 45, Yashwanth 35 n.o., Advit 4/44) bt Starlets 122 in 38.3 overs (Praneeth 42, Prathap 3/24, Lalit 3/5). **Points:** LNCC 5, Starlets 0.