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Bulgarian body double for Kangana Ranaut’s *Dhaakad* in which she plays a spy



WINDOWS



Shyam Saran Negi, believed to be India's oldest voter at 103, shows his inked finger after casting his vote in the panchayat election at Kalpa in Kinnaur on Sunday. — PTI

Top Kremlin critic Navalny held on reaching Moscow

Moscow: Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny was detained at a Moscow airport after returning from Germany on Sunday, the prison service said. The prison service said he was detained for multiple violations of parole and terms of a suspended prison sentence and would be held in custody until a court makes a decision in his case. Mr Navalny, who is President Vladimir Putin’s most prominent and determined foe, had spent the previous five months in Germany recovering from a nerve agent attack that he blamed on the Kremlin. — AP
Earlier report on Page 7

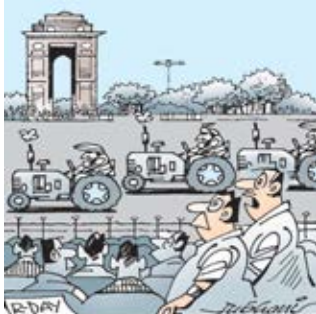
Classical maestro Mustafa Khan dies

Mumbai: Renowned Indian classical musician Ustad Ghulam Mustafa Khan passed away at the age of 89 on Sunday afternoon at his residence, his family said. Khan’s daughter-in-law Namrata Gupta Khan said that the veteran breathed his last at 12.37 pm at his Bandra home. — PTI
Full report on Page 2

2 Chinese arrested by ED in PMLA case

New Delhi: The ED has arrested two Chinese nationals in connection with its money laundering probe linked to an alleged hawala racket worth an estimated ₹1,000 crore that involved shell or dubious firms, official sources said on Sunday. **Full report on Page 3**

COUNTERPOINT



Full dress rehearsal of farmers for the parade!

WEATHER

Max: 20°C
Min: 9°C
RH: 79%
Rain: 10%

Forecast: Partly cloudy

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Pushya Shuddha Panchami till 9.15 am
Star: Purvabhadra till 7.43 am
Variyam: 6.12 pm to 7.57 pm
Durmuhurtam: 12.48 pm to 1.33 pm; 3.01 pm to 3.46 pm
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am
SUNSET TODAY 5.48 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 7.14 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 10.45 AM
MOONSET TODAY 10.48 PM

Active cases of Covid-19 fall below 2% of infections

3 hospitalised after jabs are discharged

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 17

As the Covid-19 vaccination drive entered the second day, India for the first time reported Sunday that its share of active cases within the total number of infections has shrunk below two per cent. Of the 2,08,826 positive cases reported in the country, the number of active cases had now gone below 1.98 per cent.

While over 1.91 lakh healthcare and frontline workers were vaccinated on the first day, only 17,072 received their jabs in six states on Sunday. The states and UTs have fixed specific days for vaccinations.

Of all 2.24 lakh people who have been vaccinated, 447 developed minor complications. Only three persons who were hospitalised have now been discharged.

India is the only nation in the world, including the United States, Britain and France, to have vaccinated the highest number of people on the first day of the immunisation drive. It is also the only country in the world which started a mass vaccination drive at a time when its infection rate is on the decline. In contrast, in European nations where the vaccination drive started before India, there has been a steep rise in the number of viral infections, posing a serious challenge to their medical facilities.

India has been reporting less than 20,000 daily cases in the past 10 days. Its total recovered cases — 10,196,885 — exceed the active cases by 99,88,059. The country’s death toll is now 1,52,274, with 181 fatalities
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Sundar, Shardul lead fightback at Gabba



Shardul Thakur (right) and Washington Sundar stitched together a 100-run partnership for the seventh wicket as India fought back from a precarious position on Sunday into almost first-innings parity in the series-deciding Test at Gabba. The

partnership formed with the visitors in trouble at 186 for 6 in reply to Australia’s 369, and with no more recognised batsmen in the pavilion, added 123 runs — an Indian record for the seventh wicket at the Gabba in Brisbane. **Report on Page 8** — Twitter

Mollah says govt causing delays, sees ‘conspiracy’

Farmers firm on tractor rally, SC to hear govt’s plea today

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, JAN. 17

The farmers’ unions protesting against the Centre’s agricultural reform laws on Sunday decided to go ahead with their proposed tractor parade in the national capital on Republic Day. The decision by the unions has come just a day before the Supreme Court will hear the Centre’s petition seeking an injunction against the proposed tractor rally or any other kind of protest that seeks to disrupt the celebrations on January 26.

At the Singhu border, where the farmers have been protesting for over 50 days, Swaraj India leader Yogendra Yadav said the farmers will hold the rally and hoist the tricolour on their tractors on Outer Ring Road on Republic Day. He said the rally will be “very peace-

BKU’s Tikait: We’re ready to protest till May 2024

Nagpur, Jan. 17: Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait on Sunday said farmers are prepared to protest against the Centre’s new farm laws “till May 2024”, and termed the ongoing agitation by peasants at Delhi borders as an “ideological revolution”.

Addressing a press conference in Nagpur, Mr Tikait said they want a

legal guarantee on MSP. Farmers have been protesting near Delhi since November 26, 2020, demanding scrapping of the three new farm laws, which have been projected by the Centre as major reforms in the agriculture sector that will remove the middlemen and allow farmers to sell anywhere in the country. — PTI
More on Page 3

ful” and there will be “no disruption” of the Republic Day parade.

Kisan Sangharsh Samiti (Haryana) convenor Mandip Nathwan, however, dispelled rumours that the protesters would unfurl the tricolour at Red Fort and that the tractors and tanks will roll together

on Republic Day. “It’s being said farmers will unfurl tricolour at Red Fort and tractors and tanks would roll together (on January 26). No such programme has been finalised by the morcha. Such statements are not in the interests of farmers,”
Turn to Page 3

British PM plans India trip before Cornwall summit

Boris invites Modi to attend G-7 in June

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, JAN. 17

Currently battling a fresh wave of the raging coronavirus pandemic at home and hailing India as the “pharmacy of the world”, Britain on Sunday officially invited New Delhi to attend the G-7 summit to be hosted by it in Cornwall from June 11 to 13 this year. It had first been confirmed last month that British PM Boris Johnson had invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to “join the UK-hosted G-7”. Mr Johnson will also now visit India before the G-7 summit.

India is not a member of the G-7 bloc that comprises seven countries — Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Britain and the United States — termed as seven of the “largest” advanced economies in the world, but the G-7 host nation can invite other nations as guests to the summit. Australia and South



THE CORNWALL summit is also likely to be the first in-person G-7 leaders’ meeting after Joe Biden takes charge as US President this week

Korea have also been invited to attend by Britain which launched a fresh condemnation on Sunday of “Russia’s annexation of Crimea”. This has made it clear that ties between the West and Russia will continue to remain strained, something that will worry New Delhi since Moscow has been its time-tested friend for decades.

The Cornwall summit is also likely to be the first in-person G-7 leaders’ meeting after Joe Biden takes charge as US

President this week.

It may be recalled that Mr Modi had earlier attended the G-7 summit in Biarritz, France, in August 2019 at the French government’s invitation. Mr Modi had also been invited by US President Donald Trump to attend the G-7 meeting that was to have been held in the United States last year but was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Britain on Sunday said: “The G-7 — which is made up of the UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the USA and the EU — is the only forum where the world’s most influential and open societies and advanced economies are brought together for close-knit discussions”.

Hailing India on Sunday as the “pharmacy of the world”, Britain pointed out that “India already supplies more than 50 per cent of the world’s vaccines, and (that) the UK and India have worked

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MVA row: Sena, Cong at war over Aurangabad renaming

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, JAN. 17

The political slugfest over renaming Aurangabad city as Sambhajnagar has continued as the Shiv Sena and Congress — alliance partners in the Maha Vikas Aghadi government in Maharashtra — have accused each other of indulging in votebank politics.

The Shiv Sena says the renaming might affect the votebank of “secular parties” as it will upset Muslims. However, call-

ing its alliance partner a “hypocrite”, the Congress said the Sena was raising the renaming issue as it feared losing its voters.

Writing for “Rokhthok”, a weekly column in Sena mouthpiece Saamana, party MP Sanjay Raut said: “Secular parties like the Congress are of the view that Aurangabad should not be renamed as Sambhajnagar. They feel minority communities like Muslims will not be happy if Aurangabad is renamed and it will

affect their votebank.” “However, Aurangzeb was never secular. He was religiously blind and harboured hatred towards other religions. He considered Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj as his enemy and killed Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj brutally. Hence, there should not be any city named after Aurangzeb, at least in Maharashtra. Call it ‘Shivbhakti’ (devotion to Shivaji Maharaj) or Maharashtra’s self-esteem,” said Mr Raut. **More on Page 2**

From Day 1, Biden to issue a blitz of directives to undo Trump’s damage

Washington, Jan. 17: In his first hours as President, Joe Biden plans to take executive action to roll back some of the most controversial decisions of his predecessor and to address the raging coronavirus pandemic, his incoming chief of staff said Saturday.

The opening salvo would herald a 10-day blitz of executive actions as Biden seeks to act swiftly to redirect the country in the wake of Donald Trump’s presidency without waiting for Congress.

On Wednesday, following his inauguration, Mr Biden will end Mr Trump’s restriction on immigration to the US from some Muslim-majority countries, move to rejoin the Paris climate accord and mandate mask-wearing on federal property and during interstate travel. Those are among roughly a dozen actions Mr Biden will take on his first day in the White House, his incoming chief of staff, Ron Klain, said in a memo to senior staff.

Other actions include extending the pause on student loan payments and actions meant to prevent evictions and foreclosures for those struggling during the pandem-



The spotlights (above) at the National Mall frame the Washington Monument as preparations are made on Saturday ahead of President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris’ inauguration ceremony at the US Capitol on January 20. Kolam, a traditional Indian art form of drawing geometric patterns on the floors as a sign of welcome (below), was part of the inauguration’s virtual kick-off ceremony. — AFP, AP



trillion virus relief bill he outlined on Thursday. Mr Klain said that Mr

Bhopal areas under curfew, tension fears over RSS land

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, JAN. 17

The Bhopal administration on Sunday imposed curfew in three police station areas and prohibitory orders under Section 144 CrPc in some other parts of Bhopal city as a precautionary measure over the possession of a patch of land by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

This was done as the administration feared the fencing of a patch of land by the local RSS office in the old city may lead to communal tension. A 20-year-old dispute over 30,000 sq ft between RSS and a particular community came to an end last week as the Madhya Pradesh high court announced its verdict on it, allowing the RSS to fence the land.

An order issued by Bhopal district magistrate Avinash Lavania said that one community was carrying out construction in the old city and there was the possibility of opposition by locals.

The state capital is known to be sensitive from a communal point of view and hence the decision was taken by the local administration to impose curfew, the order said.

SHORT TAKES

6-yr-old girl rescued, kidnapper arrested

Noida: The police here on Sunday rescued a six-year-old girl who had gone missing two days back and arrested a woman who had allegedly kidnapped her, officials said. The accused had taken the girl to Delhi in order to push her into begging, they said. "The girl lives with her family in Bhangel area. On Friday, they approached the Phase 2 police station and informed the officials that the girl has gone missing. An FIR was lodged immediately and investigation taken up," a police spokesperson said. Accused Neelu Kushwaha, who hails from Chhatrapur district in Madhya Pradesh, was tracked and held on Sunday from near a traffic signal in Sector 82 in Noida after which the girl was also rescued, the official said. "On interrogation, she told the police that she had picked up the girl with an objective to use her in begging," the spokesperson added. The accused has been booked under Indian Penal Code section 363A (kidnapping or maiming a minor for purposes of begging) and further legal proceedings were being carried out in the case, the police said. — *PTI*

5 robbers held after gunfight in Noida

Noida: Five people allegedly involved in the loot of ₹8 lakh from a petrol pump employee in Greater Noida were arrested following an exchange of fire, officials said on Sunday. Two of them were held after they were injured in the gunfight while the other three were nabbed during a combing operation post the shootout, the officials added. Central Noida additional deputy commissioner of police Ankur Aggarwal said the accused had looted ₹8 lakh in cash from a petrol pump employee in Greater Noida on January 8. They have also been accused of looting ₹1.50 lakh from a trader on December 29, Aggarwal said. "The gunfight broke out late Saturday night in the Surajpur police station area in which two accused suffered injuries in retaliatory firing by police officials," he said. Following the shootout, police recovered ₹6.15 lakh of the money looted from the petrol pump employee, Aggarwal said. Those held have been identified as Sunil Sisodia, Vijendra Singh, Vikas Pal, Brajesh Gujjar and Sunny, alias Chandrakant Bharadwaj. Police said they have also seized four firearms and some ammunition from them. — *PTI*

Weapons displayed to mark Army Day

New Delhi: To mark the 73rd Army Day and to commemorate the golden jubilee of 1971 war victory, a weapon and equipment display was organised on Sunday in Jalandhar Cantonment for families and children to promote knowledge and awareness about the organisation. The interaction during the weapon and equipment display highlighted the inquisitiveness and interest among the younger generation with respect to arms as also acknowledgement of the fact of contributions of Indian Army in nation building. It surely gave them a sense of pride and belief that the armed forces is capable of achieving any feat in order to protect the country. The aim of the event was to motivate the children to take up Army as a profession and to make them aware of the sacrifices made by the valiant soldiers for the country since time immemorial.

Rao new president of linguistic society

New Delhi: Professor Garapati Umamaheswara Rao is elected for the first time from the Telugu states as the president of the Linguistic Society of India (LSI). He has over 35 years of experience and also worked as director of the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies at the University of Hyderabad. He was also a former president of the Dravidian Linguists' Association and a member of the general council, Kendra Sahitya Academy. Founded about a hundred years ago, LSI is the contributor to the development of languages of 130 crore Indians.

Political slugfest continues over renaming of Aurangabad**Sena, Cong accuse each other of votebank politics**

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, JAN. 17

The political slugfest over the renaming of Aurangabad city as Sambhajnagar has continued as the Shiv Sena and the Congress – the alliance partners in the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in Maharashtra – have accused each other of indulging in vote bank politics over the issue.

The Shiv Sena has said that the renaming might affect the vote bank of "secular parties" as it will upset the Muslim community. However, calling its alliance partner a "hypocrite," the Congress said Sena is raising the renaming issue for the fear of losing its voters.

Writing for "Rokhthok", the weekly column in Sena

► **THE SHIV** Sena has said that the renaming might affect the vote bank of "secular parties" as it will upset the Muslim community. However, calling its alliance partner a "hypocrite," the Congress said Sena is raising the renaming issue for the fear of losing its voters.

mouthpiece "Saamana", party MP Sanjay Raut said: "Secular parties like the Congress are of the view that Aurangabad should not be renamed as Sambhajnagar. They feel that minority communities like Muslims will not be happy if Aurangabad is renamed and it will affect their vote bank."

"However, Aurangzeb was never secular. He was religiously blind and harboured hatred towards other religions. He considered Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj as his enemy and killed Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj brutally. Hence, there should not

be any city named after Aurangzeb at least in Maharashtra. Call it 'Shivbhakti' (devotion to Shivaji Maharaj) or Maharashtra's self-esteem," said Mr Raut.

Reacting to it, state Congress chief Balasaheb Thorat slammed the Sena and its previous ally BJP saying it is sheer hypocrisy to do politics on the renaming issue after being in power for the last five years.

"The BJP and the Sena ruled both at the Centre and the state for five years. But they did not remember the renaming issue then. Despite being in

power in Aurangabad Municipal Corporation for many years, they have failed to live up to people's expectations and hence they are now misleading people by raking up the renaming issue," he added.

Both Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and Sambhaji Maharaj are our deities. Hence, we will use our role models to seek votes and will strongly oppose if anyone does so, said Mr Thorat.

However, the senior Congress leader said that differences between the two parties over the renaming issue will not destabilise the MVA government. "We have made a common minimum programme to run this government and there is no place for emotions in it," he said.

8 Rohingyas without valid documents held in Delhi

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JAN. 17

Eight Rohingya migrants were caught from different parts of Delhi after they failed to show valid visa documents, the police said on Sunday.

In East Delhi, six people including two minors were detained outside Anand Vihar railway station and sent to the detention centre after questioning, it said.

DCP (East) Deepak Yadav said that information was received about six suspected Rohingyas coming to Delhi on train from Tripura on January 6.

"Out of the six, three were minor. They were detained outside Anand Vihar railway station. They were sent to detention centre after questioning," he said.

An FIR under the Foreigners Act has been registered in Patparganj Industrial Area police station and an investigation is ongoing," the DCP added.

In Dwarka district, two Rohingya migrants of Myanmar found living illegally in Uttam Nagar area were arrested on

► **IN EAST** Delhi, six people including two minors were detained outside Anand Vihar railway station and sent to the detention centre after questioning

Friday, said another senior police officer.

They were identified as Hamid Hussain (23) and Nabi Hussain (22), he said.

DCP (Dwarka) Santosh Kumar Meena said a case was registered under the Foreigners Act based on the complaint of head constable Neeraj Kumar of FRRO (Foreigners' Regional Registration Officer) and an investigation was taken up.

"During the course of investigation, it was revealed that both the accused are permanent residents of Myanmar and entered India illegally on November 1, 2020, from Bangladesh border," said DCP Meena.

The officer said both the arrested men belong to Buthidaung in Myanmar and were found living in Hastal village in Uttam Nagar area of Delhi without any legal passport or visa," he said.



Workers clean a train decorated for its launch at the Nizamuddin railway station in New Delhi on Sunday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off eight trains connecting Statue of Unity in Kevadia, Gujarat, with different regions of the country via video conferencing.

END OF AN ERA**Indian music industry including legendary singer Lata Mangeshkar, AR Rahman paid tributes****Musician Ghulam Mustafa Khan passes away at 90**

Mumbai, Jan. 18: Legendary Indian classical musician and Padma Vibhushan awardee Ustad Ghulam Mustafa Khan passed away on Sunday afternoon at his residence here. He was 89.

Khan's daughter-in-law Namrata Gupta Khan said that the veteran breathed his last at 12.37 pm at his Bandra home. "Today morning he was fine. We had a 24 hour nurse at home. During his massage he vomited and I ran immediately his eyes were shut and he was breathing slowly. I tried connecting to doctors and when they came he had already died," Namrata said.

She said the family is in shock due to Khan's sudden demise as he was keeping well. The musician was going to turn 90 on March 3. Khan had suffered a brain stroke in 2019 and left side of his body was paralysed. Namrata also shared the news of Khan's demise on her Facebook page.

"With a very heavy heart, I inform you all that my father-in-law the pillar of our family and a legend of our nation, Padma Vibhushan Ustad Ghulam Mustafa Khan sahab has left for his heavenly abode few mins ago," she posted on the social media platform.



President Ram Nath Kovind confers Padma Vibhushan on classical singer Ustad Ghulam Mustafa Khan during the Padma Awards 2018 function at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on March 23, 2018.

Khan's last rites will be performed at Santacruz Kabrastan later this

evening. Born on March 3, 1931 in Badaun in Uttar Pradesh, Khan was the eld-

Delhi schools to open today for Class 10 & 12 students**Frequent sanitisation, medical facilities to be on standby**

New Delhi, Jan. 17:

Staggered and shorter class hours, frequent sanitisation, and entry and exit through multiple gates are among the various new ways adopted by schools in Delhi as they prepare to welcome students of Classes 10 and 12 back on Monday for the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic forced closure of educational institutes in March last year.

The Delhi government has allowed all schools outside Covid-19 containment zones to reopen for Classes 10 and 12 from January 18 in view of the board exams. However, it made clear that physical attendance is not compulsory and students will attend schools only with the consent of parents.

The Directorate of Education (DoE) has instructed schools to follow all Covid-19 guidelines when classroom

► **THE DELHI** government has made clear that physical attendance is not compulsory and students will attend schools only with the consent of parents

studies resume.

A representative at Greenwood Public School said, "We are calling students in slots—half of the students in a class will be in the classroom while the other half will be in the laboratory for practical lessons. We have sent out consent forms to all parents and the number of students willing to come to school is high."

According to Alka Kapur, the principal of Modern School in Shalimar Bagh, the safest way for students to commute to school would be in private vehicles of their parents and guardians.

"There are a number of steps that the school

authorities will take to ensure that the students stay safe from the infection," she said.

Allowing 15 students at a time in a classroom, placing hand-washing consoles and sanitiser dispensers in corridors, deploying volunteers to ensure social distancing and temperature checks, and keeping medical facilities on standby for any eventuality are among the various other initiatives planned by schools.

Schools are also working out plans to ensure that students, who choose not to come to campus, do not miss out on anything.

Priyanka Barara, the principal of MRG School in Rohini, said that while the government has made it optional for parents to send their wards to school, it is recommended that they come for better preparations for the board exams.

— *PTI*

Senior citizen duped of ₹6 crore Fraud insurance syndicate busted in Delhi, 1 arrested

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 17

With the arrest of a man, the Delhi Police on Sunday claimed to have busted a syndicate of insurance fraud running in National Capital. The gang recently duped a senior citizen to the tune of ₹6 crore.

The accused has been identified as Vikram Singh who was arrested by the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of Delhi Police from Rajasthan's Jodhpur on January 15. Police has earlier arrested eight persons involved in the fraud and one juvenile was also apprehended by the police.

According to Dr O.P. Mishra, joint commissioner of police, EOW, the daughter of 86-year-old Satish Roy Kapur alleged that her father has been duped a sum of ₹6 crore by officials of insurance companies, their agents and HDFC Bank employees.

"In her complaint she alleged that her father is holding five bank accounts at HDFC Bank in which joint holders were her brother Gaurav Kapur, her sister an American citizen and herself. The bank account was operated by her father and a corpus of ₹4-5 crores was maintained in the bank," said the joint CP.

"The complainant noticed that huge amounts have been transferred to the accounts of the unknown persons from her father's account. On enquiry, her father said that certain individuals were helping him to retrieve his money from the insurance companies.

The five joint accounts operated by her father have been debited ₹85 lakh to the insurance companies and ₹5.16 crore have been transferred to other bank accounts operated by the syndicate," said the joint CP.

"Due to old age, her father did not realise that he had been duped by unscrupulous persons. A case was registered and investigation was taken up," said the joint CP.

"During investigation, police team found that the money was transferred in the name of a company Roop Shree Infotech in Jodhpur and its proprietor was Vikram. Further investigation also revealed that the accused along with his friends Jitender Yadav and Balbir Singh have cheated large number of victims and asked them to transfer the money in different bank accounts," said the joint CP.

"The accused Jitender and Balbir are yet to be traced. Crores of rupees have been transferred to different bank accounts after the inducement by above mentioned accused persons. It is a syndicate of insurance fraudsters targeting large number of people," he added.

CBI brings Rose Valley Group head to Bhubaneswar for questioning**At least 174 chit fund firms, have looted 20 lakh people in Odisha**

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, JAN. 17

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) officials on Sunday brought Subhra Kundu, the wife of Rose Valley Group chairman Gautam Kundu, to Odisha capital Bhubaneswar for questioning.

As per sources, the CBI is expected to conduct an intensive investigation to ascertain the involvement of other persons in the scam in Odisha.

Subhra Kundu's husband Gautam Kundu is also in jail since March 2015.

As per reports, Subhra was also running a jewellery chain – Adria –

which has been sealed since the investigation started.

Subhra Kundu was reportedly arrested from her apartment in south Kolkata. She was earlier brought to the CBI office at the CGO Complex at Salt Lake for questioning.

Subhra had also faced interrogation several times by the CBI and ED since 2015 when her husband was arrested.

The Rose Valley group has allegedly made substantial investments in hotels and resorts across the country including Odisha and Bengal by duping scores of people.

At least 174 chit fund firms, including Rose Valley Group, AT Group, Seashore and Micro Finance Group have looted 20 lakh people, especially small depositors, by promising high returns on their investments.

Several BJD leaders, including former Mayurbhanj Lok Sabha member Rama Chandra Hansda, former MLAs - Pravat Ranjan Biswar, Prabhat Tripathy and Subarna Nayak were arrested by the CBI in connection with their alleged links with the ponzi firms.

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— *PTI*

SHORT TAKE

INDIGO FLIGHT MAKES EMERGENCY LANDING IN BHOPAL

Bhopal: An IndiGo Airlines flight going to Kolkata from Surat with 172 passengers on board made an emergency landing at Bhopal's Raja Bhoj Airport on Sunday due to a technical glitch, said an official. Raja Bhoj Airport Director Anil Vikram said that the flight made an emergency landing just after 12 noon. "The IndiGo Airlines flight from Surat to Kolkata carrying 172 passengers made an emergency landing at 12.04 pm on Sunday. The landing was safe. The pilot informed the ATC (Air Traffic Controller) about the technical glitch and made an emergency landing safely," he said. Of the 172 passengers, 19 have to go further to Guwahati and Amritsar from Kolkata, and these passengers were sent to Bengaluru by flight to help them get connecting flights to their destinations, he said. "For the remaining passengers, a plane is coming from Nagpur, which will take them further to Kolkata," the airport director said. — PTI

UNION MINISTER NAIK'S HEALTH BETTER: DOCTORS

Panaji: Union Ayush minister Shripad Naik, who is undergoing treatment at the Goa Medical College and Hospital following a road accident, is doing well and his general condition is much better, an official said on Sunday. Mr Naik received injuries, while his wife Vijaya and an aide died on January 11 when their car met with an accident while he was returning to his home state Goa from Dharmasthala in neighbouring Karnataka. "Naik is doing well and his general condition is much better. All his vital parameters including blood pressure, pulse rate and oxygen levels are within normal limits," hospital dean Shivanand Bandekar said. — PTI

Cong wants 130 seats in Bengal, Left ally says no

■ **Continued from Page 1**
reduced to 24 in the House after 19 of its MLAs defected to the ruling TMC and one to the BJP. The Left, which had 33 MLAs five years ago, has been reduced to 25. With no outcome from Sunday's meeting, the two partners will sit again on January 25 before an announcement on their seat-sharing formula and candidates' list, possibly on January 28.
Silent on the Congress' demand of 130 seats, Mr Chowdhury later said: "The Congress and the Left have to fight the Assembly polls unitedly as a secular democratic alliance to defeat a communal BJP and an autocratic Trinamul Congress. We are heading in that direction. Our meeting, held in a cordial environment, was not only peaceful but also a friendly discussion through exchange of opinions. None of us wants to put anything onto each other. We want to finalise our seat-sharing within this month. It is a process and cannot be finalised overnight. As the Left will discuss it among its constituents, we will do the same."
Echoing him, Mr Bose said: "There is no gap in understanding between the Congress and the Left. There is no bitterness between us over the lack of results on the seat-sharing."

Indian Navy prepares for Republic Day



Indian Navy contingent prepare for the Republic Day parade in full swing, starting their practice in the early hours practices, at Rajpath in New Delhi, on Sunday. — PTI

Culling of poultry in Haryana Maha: Govt

New Delhi, Jan. 17: The Centre on Sunday said culling of poultry birds is underway in Maharashtra and Haryana, while fresh cases of bird flu have been confirmed in poultry in Mumbai as well as in the Mandasaur district of Madhya Pradesh.
So far, bird flu has been confirmed in 11 states -- Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Gujarat.
However, the Centre has requested states to "rethink their decisions to impose ban on sale of poultry and poultry products and allow such selling sourced from the non-infected areas/states".
In India, bird flu or avian influenza is spread mainly by migratory birds coming into India during winter months between September and March. The disease is zoonotic.
In a statement, the ministry of fisheries, animal husbandry and dairying said bird flu cases have been confirmed in poultry at the Central Poultry Development Organisation (CPDO), Mumbai, and Kheda Road in the Mandasaur district of Madhya Pradesh.
Not only poultry, the disease has also been confirmed in crows at Panna, Sanchi, Raisen and Balaghat; in crow and owl at Sheopur; while in swan and pigeon, in the Mandasaur district of MP, it said.
The viral disease has also been confirmed in crow and pigeon in Bastar. — PTI

Absence of Scindia in BJP function raises 'eyebrows'

Opposition Congress describes development as a 'sign of rift'

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, JAN. 17

Senior BJP leader Jyotiraditya Scindia's absence in a party function organised here on Sunday to felicitate the new office bearers of the state BJP has raised many eyebrows here with Opposition Congress describing the development as "sign of rift between him and state BJP leadership".
Madhya Pradesh Congress unit vice-president Raja Pateria said Mr Scindia's absence in the BJP function was significant considering inadequate representation given to Mr Scindia's camp in the recent reorganisation of BJP in MP.
"Only one leader from



► **MP CONGRESS** unit vice-president Raja Pateria said Mr Scindia's absence in the BJP function was significant considering inadequate representation given to Mr Scindia's camp in the recent reorganisation of BJP in MP

Mr Scindia's camp has been accommodated in the newly reconstituted BJP in MP. This has raised eyebrows in his camp. This indicates all is not well in BJP in MP," Mr Pateria said.
Madan Kushwaha, a leader from Gwalior considered Mr Scindia's loyalist, has been appointed state secretary of BJP. The BJP, however, dismissed the charges describing it a "conspiracy theory manufactured by Congress".
"It is not necessary for Mr Scindia to attend all party events. He has expressed his best wishes to all the newly appointed office bearers of the party individually. Many senior leaders of the party from MP such as Union minister Narendra Singh Tomar were also not present at the function. It is Congress which promotes

'my men, his men' culture. BJP shuns such culture", state BJP secretary Rajneesh Agrawal said.
State party president V.D. Sharma and chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan were among the senior party leaders who were present on the occasion.
Hailing the state BJP president for giving opportunity to next generation leaders in his team, the chief minister said BJP always promoted young people in the party, unlike Congress which never dared to look beyond its old guards.
In the reconstituted BJP in MP, 12 new vice-presidents, 12 state secretaries, one treasurer and one assistant treasurer, one office secretary and one media in-charge have been appointed.

We are ready to protest till May 2024, says Tikait

Says ongoing farmer agitation an 'ideological revolution'

Nagpur, Jan. 17: Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait on Sunday said farmers are prepared to protest against the Centre's new farm laws "till May 2024", and termed the ongoing agitation by peasants at Delhi borders as an "ideological revolution".
Addressing a press conference in Nagpur, Tikait said they want a legal guarantee on Minimum Support Price (MSP).
Farmers have been protesting near Delhi since November 26, 2020, demanding scrapping of the three new farm laws, which have been projected by the Centre as major reforms in the agriculture sector that will remove the middlemen and allow

farmers to sell anywhere in the country.
However, the protesting farmers have expressed apprehension that the new laws would pave the way for eliminating the safety cushion of the MSP and do away with the mandi system, leaving them at the mercy of big corporates.
The Supreme Court last Tuesday stayed the implementation of the three new farm laws till further orders and decided to set up a four-member committee to resolve the impasse over them between the Centre and farmers' unions protesting at Delhi borders.
Asked how long will farmers will sit in protest, Mr Tikait said, "We are

prepared to sit in protest till May 2024...our demand is that the three laws be taken back and the government provide a legal guarantee on the MSP".
The next Lok Sabha elections in the country will be due around April-May 2024.
Dismissed allegations that the protest was being fuelled by "rich farmers". Mr Tikait said people from villages and various outfits have joined the protest.
"This is an ideological revolution of farmers started from Delhi and will not fail. Farmers from villages do not want us come back until the three farm bills are taken back," the Bhartiya Kisan Union leader said. — PTI

UP committed to doubling income of farmers: Yogi

Lucknow, Jan. 17: Expressing his government's resolve to turn Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision to double farmers' income into reality, chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday emphasised upon the need of innovative efforts in agriculture.
While digitally inaugurating a Strawberry Mahotsava in Jhansi, the chief minister also called upon government officials to take concrete steps to create awareness among farmers about innovative farming.
Terming the Jhansi's Strawberry Mahotsava an innovative effort in farming, he said the district administrations should take effective and concrete steps to promote it. — PTI

'Will incorporate K'taka-occupied areas into Maha'

Mumbai, Jan. 17: Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday said his government is committed towards incorporating into the state the areas of Karnataka where Marathi-speaking people are in majority.



This will be the "true tribute" to martyrs of the cause, the chief minister's office (CMO) said in a tweet.
Maharashtra claims Belgaum and some other areas, part of the erstwhile Bombay Presidency but currently in Karnataka, on linguistic grounds.
Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti, a regional organisation fighting for the merger of Belgaum and some other border areas with Maharashtra, observes January 17 as the "martyrs' day" for those who laid down their lives for the cause in 1956.
"Bringing Karnataka occupied Marathi-speaking and cultural areas in Maharashtra will be the true tribute to those who accepted martyrdom in the boundary dispute. We are

united and committed towards it. Respects to the martyrs with this promise," the CMO tweeted.
Maharashtra claims certain areas, including Belgaum, Karwar and Nippani which are part of Karnataka, contending that the majority of population in these areas is Marathi-speaking. The dispute between the two states over Belgaum and other border areas is pending before the Supreme Court for many years.
Mr Thackeray last year appointed Maharashtra ministers Eknath Shinde and Chhagan Bhujbal as co-ordinators to oversee the state government's efforts to expedite the case related to the boundary dispute. — PTI

2 Chinese held by ED in PMLA case

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 17

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested two Chinese nationals in a money laundering case. Charlie Peng and Carter Lee were arrested in connection with a probe linked to an alleged hawala racket worth an estimated ₹1,00,000 crore that involved shell or dubious firms. They were produced before a local court here on Saturday that sent them to 14 days custody.
The ED case against Peng stems from an income-tax department (ITD) investigation of last year and an FIR filed by the Delhi Police special cell against him in 2018. Peng's name had cropped up last year in connection with the detention of two persons in Himachal Pradesh who were allegedly tracking Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama's movements on his directions. The Chinese national and some of his alleged associates, including bankers, were raided by the Income Tax Department in August.
Peng, sources had alleged, had a fake Indian passport. Tax officials had claimed that he creat-

ed a web of sham companies to launder hawala funds to and from China in the past two-three years. Sources had said his front or showcase business was import and export of medical and electronic goods and some other items.
Peng was arrested by the Special Cell of the Delhi Police in September 2018 on charges of fraud and forgery and was allegedly running an illegal money changer. Both ED and I-T department, sources had said, are also probing allegations if Peng was "bribing" some Tibetans living in Delhi.
In a statement in August last year, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) had, without identifying the entities involved, stated that its searches were based on "credible inputs that a few Chinese individuals and their Indian associates were involved in money laundering and hawala transactions through a series of shell entities". It had said the "subsidiary of Chinese company and its related concerns have taken over ₹100 crore bogus advances from shell entities for opening businesses of retail showrooms in India".

Covid-19 cases fall below 2% of infections

■ **Continued from Page 1**
reported in the last 24 hours.
Of the total active Covid-19 cases, Kerala has the highest number, at 68,633, followed by Maharashtra at 53,163, Uttar Pradesh at 9,162, Karnataka at 8,713, West Bengal at 7,151, and Tamil Nadu at 6,128.
A day after India took its first steps out of the pandemic with shots of the Covishield and Covaxin vaccines, the Congress Party on Sunday hit out at the Centre, asking why didn't Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his ministers take vaccine shots.
Congress spokesman Randeep Surjewala also asked the government if people below the poverty line will get free coronavirus vaccines. He raised questions over the price of Covishield and Covaxin doses, and the Centre's decision to allow the export of one of the vaccines before immunising everyone in the country.
In Delhi, where 4,319 healthcare and frontline workers were vaccinated on Saturday, health minister Satyendar Jain said there were 51 cases of

minor complications. He said there was one "serious adverse" case, in which the patient was admitted to the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences. The vaccine recipient has, however, been discharged and his vitals are said to be stable.
The highest number of vaccines administered on the first day of the drive were in Uttar Pradesh at 21,291, followed by Andhra Pradesh at 18,412, Maharashtra at 18,328, Bihar at 18,169, Odisha at 13,746, Karnataka at 13,594, Gujarat at 10,787, Rajasthan at 9,279, West Bengal at 9,730, Madhya Pradesh at 9,219 and Kerala at 8,062.
Bharat Biotech's Covaxin, which is yet to submit its Phase 3 trial efficacy report, was administered in 161 session in Gujarat, 28 sessions in Himachal Pradesh, 41 in Jammu and Kashmir, 48 in Jharkhand and 133 in Kerala, two in Ladakh, one in Lakshadweep, 150 in Madhya Pradesh, 10 each in Manipur and Meghalaya, five in Mizoram, nine in Nagaland, eight in Puducherry, 59 in Punjab, two in Sikkim, 18 in Tripura, 34 in Uttarakhand and 183 in West Bengal.

Farmers firm on tractor rally

■ **Continued from Page 1**
he said. Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar said most farmers are in favour of the new laws and the government will hold the next round of discussions with them on Tuesday. All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) general secretary Hannan Mollah accused the Central government of "dragging" things in a bid to tire out the farmers. He also called it a "conspiracy" by the government. Mr Mollah said: "For almost two months, we are suffering and dying in cold weather. The government is giving us 'tarikh pe tarikh' and are dragging things out so that we get tired and leave the place. This is their conspiracy."
Farmers leader Darshan Pal Singh accused the National

Investigation Agency (NIA) of filing cases against those who were part of the protest or supporting it. "All the farmers' unions condemn this," he said, referring to the NIA summons reportedly issued to a farmers' union leader in a case related to the banned Sikhs For Justice outfit.
So far, the government and the farmers' unions have failed to resolve the impasse during their nine rounds of negotiations. The agriculture minister, however, claimed that most farmers and experts were in favour of the new farm laws. He said: "After the Supreme Court's order, the laws can't be implemented... Now we expect the farmers to discuss the laws clause-wise on January 19 and tell the government what they want other than the

repeal of the laws."
The government, Mr Tomar said, had sent a proposal to the farmers "in which we agreed to address their apprehensions regarding mandis, traders' registration and other things". He added: "The government had also agreed to discuss the laws on stubble burning and electricity... but the farmers' unions only want repeal of the laws." The government had earlier agreed to withdraw the penal provisions in the stubble burning ordinance and the Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2019.
A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice of India Sharad Arvind Bobde will hear the Centre's application on Monday, along with pleas raising the issue of farmers protesting at Delhi's borders.

Boris invites Modi to G-7

■ **Continued from Page 1**
closely together throughout the pandemic", adding: "Our Prime Ministers speak regularly and Prime Minister Johnson has said he will visit India ahead of the G-7".
In a statement, the British high commission in New Delhi said: "Indian PM Narendra Modi (has been) invited to attend G-7 as a guest. The summit will be held in English region of Cornwall from 11-13 June 2021. The UK will use the G7 presidency to unite leading democracies to help the world build back better from coronavirus and create a greener, more prosperous future. Australia and South Korea (have) also (been) invited as guest

countries." Britain said the three nations had been invited "to attend as guest countries to deepen the expertise and experience around the table".
The high commission added: "UK PM Boris Johnson will use the first in-person G-7 summit in almost two years to ask leaders, including Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to seize the opportunity to build back better from the coronavirus, uniting to make the future fairer, greener and more prosperous." It further said: "PMs and Presidents from the world's leading democracies will come together in the UK in June to address shared challenges, from beating coronavirus and tackling cli-

mate change, to ensuring that people everywhere can benefit from open trade, technological change and scientific discovery.
Britain also said: "The (British) PM's ambition is to use the G-7 to intensify cooperation between the world's democratic and technologically advanced nations. Between them the 10 leaders represent over 60 per cent of the people living in democracies around the world."
It may also be recalled the British PM had last month initially accepted India's invite to be the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations on January 26 but had announced cancellation of his visit earlier this month due to the pandemic.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,034.67	-1.11
Nifty 50	14,433.70	-1.11
S&P 500*	3,768.25	-0.72
Dollar (₹)	73.04	0.00
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.71	0.01
Euro (₹)	88.70	0.17
Gold (10gm) (₹)	48,690,286	0.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	55.10	-2.34
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.988	1.08
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.087	-0.92

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Bank credit up 3.2% in first nine months of FY21

Bank credit grew 3.2 per cent to Rs 107.05 lakh crore in the first nine months of the current financial year against a growth of 2.7 per cent in the same period of 2019-20. In the fortnight ended March 27, 2020, bank advances stood at Rs 103.72 lakh crore. Bank deposits rose 8.5 per cent to Rs 147.27 lakh crore in the April-December 2020 period against an increase of 5.1 per cent a year ago, RBI data shows.

FPIs invest close to ₹18,500 cr in stocks this month



Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) put in Rs 14,866 crore in Indian capital markets in the first half of January with participants expecting strong third-quarter results by companies. As per depositories data, FPIs invested a net Rs 18,490 crore into equities but pulled out Rs 3,624 crore from debt segment between January 1 and January 15. This translated into a total net investment of Rs 14,866 crore.

Alkem arm recalls over 20K bottles of drug in US

Ascend Laboratories LLC, subsidiary of Mumbai-based Alkem Labs, is recalling over 20,000 bottles of antibacterial drug cephalexin for oral suspension from the US market, as per a report by the US drug regulator. The US-based Ascend Laboratories is recalling bottles of cephalexin for oral suspension, USP, 125 mg per 5 ml, manufactured by Alkem Laboratories, according to the US FDA's Enforcement Report.

2021 to be good year for Indian IT: Balakrishnan

The year 2021 will be good for India's information technology sector and most of the companies in the space are expected to clock high single digit growth, according to IT industry veteran V. Balakrishnan. The former CFO of Infosys said Indian IT companies have handled the Covid very well in terms of transitioning to work-from-home and capturing new business opportunities in the wake of the pandemic.

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■ May propose SLR, CRR requirements for big players

RBI mulls stricter norms for NBFCs

AFTAB AHMED, SWATI BHAT & NUPUR ANAND
NEW DELHI/MUMBAI, JAN. 17

India's central bank is likely to propose tightening rules on "shadow banks" in a bid to strengthen solvency and sustainability of a sector that has been showing signs of stress in recent years, two sources said.

The Reserve Bank of India has been trying to tighten regulatory norms on the sector since Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services, the largest non-bank financial company, went bankrupt in 2018 and Dewan Housing Finance Corp and Altico Capital defaulted on payments in 2019.

The RBI is expected to set out proposals in a discussion paper this week, recommending that bigger shadow banks maintain a statutory liquidity ratio, the sources said.

India's banks must maintain at least 18 per cent worth of deposits that they must hold in cash, gold or government securities.

The RBI could also suggest large non-banks be required to maintain a cash reserve ratio. For banks this ratio is 3 per cent, reduced from 4 per cent in a measure the central bank imposed that is to be reversed after March 31. The move could be a huge cash drain for the sector which is currently free from maintaining these reserve ratios, allowing them to lend to subprime lenders as well.

CUTTING SYSTEMIC RISKS

- ▶ RBI is expected to recommend phased implementation of reserve ratios
- ▶ Currently banks must maintain at least 18% of deposits as statutory liquidity ratio
- ▶ They must also set aside 3% of deposits as cash reserve ratio
- ▶ Mandating the ratios could proved to be a huge cash drain for the sector

FINMIN LOOKS AT BANK INVESTMENT COMPANY

New Delhi, Jan. 17: The finance ministry is looking at other avenues for affordable capital infusion, including setting up of a Bank Investment Company (BIC), as the RBI has raised concern over the issuance of zero coupon bonds for recapitalisation of public sector banks (PSBs), sources said. Setting up BIC as a holding company or a core investment company was suggested by the P. J. Nayak committee. The report recommend-

ed transferring shares of the government in the banks to the BIC, which would become the parent holding company of all these banks, as a result of this, all the PSBs would become 'limited' banks. BIC will be autonomous and it will have the power to appoint the board of directors and make other policy decisions about subsidiaries. BIC will serve as a super holding company and reduce the dependence of PSBs on government support. — PTI

The proposal is expected to recommend a phased implementation of the reserve ratios, giving non-banks time to comply, one official said.

"Cost of compliance to rules and regulations should be perceived as an investment, as any inadequacy in this regard will

prove to be detrimental," RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said in a speech on Saturday, referring to increased regulation in recent years for banks and shadow banks.

One official said that move is to avoid failures of big shadow banks that could pose systemic risks

and is expected to encourage some of the larger ones to move towards becoming full-time banks.

But shadow banks believe the new norms will hurt their operations.

Shadow banks enjoy "certain flexibilities which allow them to do last-mile financing which banks can't do," said an executive at a non-bank. "Blurring the lines" between banks and non-banks would "be detrimental for India, where financial inclusion is still low."

At its last monetary policy meeting last month Das said regulations of shadow banks need review and that a discussion paper would be issued by mid-January.

There are nearly 10,000 shadow banks in India but just over two dozens are thought to be large enough to pose systemic risks, sources said.

Raising liquidity ratios "or other liquidity buffers could pose a drag on their earnings" said A.M. Karthik, head of financial sector ratings at Icra. Lenders will also have to manage their treasuries more effectively, which would entail additional operating costs, he said.

The RBI will also recommend stricter checks on thousands of smaller non-banks, one official said. The central bank may not propose norms such as statutory lending or cash-reserve ratios, but it will recommend more scrutiny of their books, the official said. —Reuters

REALTY SECTOR ASKS FOR ITC ON LEASED PROPERTY

New Delhi, Jan. 17: The government should allow commercial real estate developers to set off GST paid on inputs like cement from the tax liability on rental income to avoid double taxation and boost the office market realty firms and consultants said on Sunday.

In its Budget recommendation for the 2021-22, industry body CII has demanded that Section 16 read with Section 17(5) of the CGST Act should be amended to enable the real estate players to avail ITC (input tax credit) on procurement of goods and services during the construction phase when the space is intended for commercial leasing or renting. The denial of ITC, leads to blockage of funds for a real estate player, it said.

"In case of commercial leasing of properties and outlets at malls, the renting of such premises attracts 18 per cent which is available as credit to the client. Disallowance of credit during the construction phase leads to the increased cost of construction, working capital loss and increased financing costs," the CII said. — PTI

Publishers seek duty waiver as newsprint cost shoots up

New Delhi, Jan. 17: The cost of paper used in printing newspapers and magazines has jumped 20 per cent in the past three months due to a demand-supply imbalance post-pandemic, prompting news publishers to rush to the government seeking the waiver of 5 per cent import duty to cut cost.

An industry that was facing headwinds from a slowing economy even before the pandemic was hit hard when most readers stopped buying newspapers and magazines on fears of them being carriers of viruses.

While no medical studies have established the virus transmission theories, sales did not pick up even after lockdown restrictions were relaxed, industry leaders said.

Now, the rising cost of newsprint created due to a drastic fall in supplies after 3 million tonnes of manufacturing capacities were either closed or converted to brown paper grades worldwide has dealt a second blow that is threatening the survival of the industry. Indian Newspaper

WFH bares wage disparity for industrial homeworkers

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JAN. 17

While the pandemic has brought work from home to the limelight as a strategy to prevent mass unemployment, traditional homeworkers in India earn 60 per cent less than their counterparts who do not work from home, finds a study by the International Labour Organisation.

In India home work is dominated by industrial homeworkers, who are employees working from their home premises. The Periodic Labour Force Survey in 2018 has identified 31 lakh as homeworkers. When 2.35 million home-based beedi rollers and almost 8,00,000 home-based embroiderers were recast as probable homeworkers, the total homeworkers in India stood at 62,41,333, says ILO.

Around 66 per cent of these homeworkers are women. Most of them are in the age group of 35-59 years of age. Further, 58 per cent are into craft and related trades.

The industrial homeworkers of India are paid by piece and their earnings are just 41 per cent that of workers who do not work from home. The monthly earnings of garment workers in India are 11 per cent of the average Indian wage.

The earnings gap is 18 per cent due to fewer hours and 82 per cent due to very low hourly wages as they are paid per piece. In India homeworkers in all occupational categories are paid less.



The gender wage gap is higher among homeworkers in low or middle income countries like India, Mexico and Argentina. However, average weekly working hours for women homeworkers were higher at 36 hours, while it was 28 hours for non-home-based women workers.

At one end of the category of homeworkers are some of the poorest workers in the world of work, such as the 2.5 million women rolling beedi in India, while at the other end are the well-educated and highly paid employees of leading corporations working remotely from their home. In India, the Department of Telecommunications has given IT workers an exemption that allows them to work from home. This has led to 90 per cent of India's 4.3 million strong IT workforce shift-

ing to full-time telework, says ILO.

"Given the possibility of other labour market disruptions in the future, homeworking may well feature as a key method of operation adopted by firms and their workers," says ILO. Hence, the governments have the responsibility of establishing comprehensive home work policies. Key policy areas include improving the visibility of homeworkers, raising awareness of their rights and responsibilities, setting fair wages and limiting working hours, ensuring safe and healthy workplaces, eliminating child labour, applying a strategic compliance model of enforcement, ensuring social protection coverage, ensuring access to quality childcare and promoting training and career development.

LUXURY CAR FIRMS WANT CUT IN TAXES



New Delhi, Jan. 17: Luxury car makers Mercedes-Benz, Audi and Lamborghini expect the government to lower taxes on automobiles in the upcoming Budget, saying the premium segment of the auto industry has not been able to grow due to high taxation besides being hit hard by coronavirus.

Any hike in taxes on luxury cars will hit demand and prevent recovery from the disruptions witnessed last year, according to officials of the companies.

"Anything which is a deterrent to the demand in the sector we should stay away," Mercedes-Benz India MD & CEO Martin Schwenk said.

He was responding to a query on the company's expectations on the tax front from the government in the budget.

Seeking a reduction on taxes on the auto sector, Schwenk said, "Already the auto industry is highly taxed...from the import duties to GST and cess which is 22 per cent (on luxury cars). I think the target should actually be to support the growth of the sector and reduce tax."

Expressing similar sentiments, Audi India head Balbir Singh Dhillon said the challenges for the luxury car segment in 2021 are "more or less the constants from the past".

"One is, of course, the high taxation on luxury cars, including cess. That remains a challenge because what it has done is that it has not let luxury cars grow beyond 1 per cent (of the total automobile markets in India). It is just hovering around 1 per cent and in last year 2020 it could have dropped probably 0.7-0.8 per cent," he added. — PTI

Over 1.26 cr join stock market rush in last one yr

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JAN. 17

The Covid period saw a record number of new investors joining the stock market, with at over 1.26 crore unique client code being added during the last one year, taking the total to over 5.96 crore registered investors as on January 15, 2021.

Of these, the maximum, of over 27 lakh investors, were added in Maharashtra and in per cent term the maximum rise at 71 per cent, or over 6.55 lakh investors, was registered from Telangana against the all-India annual rise of 26.86, BSE data shows. Telangana added 6.55,354 unique code

clients in the last one-year period, taking the total registered investors tally in the state to over 15.70 lakh. Andhra Pradesh added over 6.77 lakh new investors at an annual growth rate of 27.46 per cent.

The largest number of retail investors is based out of Maharashtra, at over 1.30 crore.

Gujarat (11.77 lakh), UP (10.51 lakh), Karnataka (7.46 lakh), Rajasthan (7.28 lakh) and Andhra Pradesh (6.77 lakh) were the states from where maximum number of retail investors was added. Northeastern states also added retail investors at high rate due to their low base.

Survey finds 68% not benefitted from specific measures

Limited gains to MSMEs from schemes

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JAN. 17

Funding remains the biggest challenge for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) despite the government announcing several measures to address the financial crisis faced by them. The majority of units has not benefitted from the various schemes in the last 12 months, finds a survey.

The government has in 2020 introduced various measures to enhance credit access to startups and MSMEs under schemes like Startup India, MSME Samadhan, no or low interest loans, Make in India and Aatmanirbhar Bharat. However, in an annual survey of startups and

MSMEs conducted by Local Circles, only 21 per cent said they have benefitted from the government schemes while 68 per cent said they have not. The share of respondents who said they have not received any benefits has gone up from 50 per cent in last year's survey to 68 per cent this time.

Raising funds and loans continues to be the biggest challenge for MSMEs. Finding growth is the second big challenge for almost 25 per cent respondents while it was just 10 per cent in last survey. Survival of the business continues to be the third major challenge. The survey received over 20,000 responses from more than 8,000 startups and MSMEs.



"MSMEs need to be qualified for the schemes. Access to loans has never been easy...But ECLGS (emergency credit line guarantee scheme) has disbursed Rs 2 lakh crore during the pandemic times. More and more buyers are being pushed on TReDS (trade receivables discounting system) platforms helping MSME to finance receivables. So while the market conditions are yet to be fully

conducive for growth, the legacy issues continue to bog MSMEs down. In normal circumstances too barely 15 per cent MSMEs have access to loans from banks," said Anil Bhardwaj, secretary general, Federation of Indian MSMEs (Fisime).

The survey further found that only 31 per cent respondents have more than three months of cash. About 10 per cent said they had cash for more than six months and 18 per cent maintained they were out of funds. This is a vast improvement from the mid-June survey that had indicated only 16 per cent had cash to survive for more than three months while 42 were already out of funds.

THE ASIAN AGE

18 JANUARY 2021

Transparency the key to success of vaccine drive

India has a population of 136 crore people and the highest number of Covid-affected people after the United States, and hence a campaign to inoculate the entire population is critical to the success of humanity's fight against the pandemic. It ought to be an exercise without parallel in history for the sheer number of the target group and the logistical and economic challenges it would face. The Union government is working with the states and vaccine manufacturers to ensure that about three crore people, who are mainly Covid warriors, are inoculated in the first phase with two made-in-India vaccines in a drive that began on Saturday. Reports say 1.91 lakh people were vaccinated on the first day against a target of three lakh.

Everyone wants the campaign to be a success, but it is regrettable that the government has been less than transparent about it. Prime Minister Narendra Modi takes justifiable pride in the fact that both the vaccines are made in India and underlines the role of Indian scientists in making it happen. But the truth is that one of the two vaccines, Covaxin, which is developed jointly by the Indian Council of Medical Research and Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech International Limited, and manufactured by the latter, has been in a clinical trial mode. Those people who were given the Covaxin jab were made to sign a consent form, which says that they are participating in a trial. A section of doctors in the government-run Dr Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital in Delhi insisted that they be given the vaccine developed by Oxford University and manufactured by Pune-based Serum Institute of India. They said they are a bit apprehensive about the lack of complete trial in the case of Covaxin.

This is unfair and unacceptable. If a vaccine is under trial and has not gone through the due process, then its administration should be called a clinical trial, and not vaccination. It should be given only to volunteers and its administration should not be part of the inoculation campaign. This is the minimum the government owes to the people. The Prime Minister's statement that Indian vaccine scientists, medical system, Indian process and institutional mechanism are trusted globally and that this trust is earned with a consistent track record is true, but it does not square with the present campaign. Also true is the fact that about 60 per cent of children the world over receive life-saving vaccines which are made in India and passed through stringent Indian scientific tests; but the only point is that Covaxin has not gone through those tests.

That the head of All India Institute of Medical Sciences and the member (health) of Niti Aayog took the Covaxin jab proves nothing; it can only be seen as a persuasive act. Even if the Prime Minister is administered the vaccine, it proves nothing except sending a message on vaccination, not on the vaccine. The government must be upfront about the whole programme and respect science and scientific processes. Tom-tomming national pride is not a great idea in the face of a pandemic.

Afghan: Get US to stay on

When he assumes charge as US President two days from now, it is not quite clear yet if Joe Biden can change tracks in significant ways from Donald Trump's policy of a complete withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan by May this year, but this is a matter that cannot but deeply concern the government of President Ashraf Ghani in Kabul. Among the regional powers, India is on the same wavelength as the Ghani government. It is to be hoped that the incoming Biden administration begins to seriously invest in counter-terrorism in the Afghanistan theatre.

This is in view of the monstrous proportions terrorist violence has assumed all through 2020 after the Trump administration signed a peace deal with the Taliban in February last year under which the US troops have been withdrawn almost entirely. In the last quarter of 2020, more than 500 civilians were killed in the country and more than 1,000 injured. There have been targeted assassinations of prominent politicians, social workers and journalists. Vice-president Amrullah Saleh, well known for his opposition to Pakistan's policy of promoting extremism and terrorism in Pakistan, barely escaped death. Places of worship and educational institutions have been bombed. Only last week, a plot to assassinate highly placed US diplomatic officials in Kabul is thought to have been mounted.

It is in this backdrop that national security advisor Ajit Doval was in Kabul last week. If the Taliban assume real control in Kabul as a result of the peace deal, whatever the appearances, we may expect a full-fledged renewal of terrorism-related pressure on India from the Pakistan side. On January 13, after Mr Doval called on President Ghani, the Afghanistan President's office said in a media release, "Both sides discussed counter-terrorism cooperation and efforts for building regional consensus on supporting peace in Afghanistan." The statement also quoted Dr Ghani as saying that "Afghanistan and India in joint efforts with Nato and the United States will be able to succeed in the fight against terrorism".

As a leading regional player invested in peace in Afghanistan, it redounds on India to persuade the new government in Washington to re-establish the focus on counter-terrorism, and to coordinate peace-oriented moves with Kabul and like-minded regional players.

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Subhani



Bolstering corporates was intent of farm laws



Manish Tewari

State of the Union

The recent Supreme Court decision staying the farm laws, protecting the minimum support price regime and directing that no farmer would be dispossessed of his land is appropriate under the given circumstances. Perhaps if the committee appointed by the Supreme Court could also have also been constituted in consultation with the protesting farmer unions, it would have inspired far greater confidence.

When the Supreme Court finally does decide to hear the farm laws matter, for many petitions that deal with equally contentious decisions taken by the current government continue hanging fire in the apex court, it must keep in mind that agriculture, with its allied sectors, are the largest source of livelihoods in India.

A total of 70 per cent of our rural households still depend primarily on agriculture for their livelihood. Of them, 82 per cent of farmers are small and marginal. On the whole, about 60 per cent of the Indian population, i.e. 81 crore people, are agriculture-dependent.

They can be called small entrepreneurs, for they mostly own the land they till and it is their labour on that small patch, varying from one to five acres, that keeps the home fires burning. The average size of a land holding in India is 1.16 hectares. This is roughly 2.8 acres. Moreover, these farm laws also have the added potential of making us import-dependent bringing back the spectre of ship-to-mouth that the green revolution finally surmounted in the early 1970s.

These farm laws are actually intended to give Corporate India a legal licence to muscle in on these small guys who have unequal or no bargaining power.

Look at what has happened to the Indian economy over the past 80 months. The chairperson

of the Competition Commission Of India in a recent interview stated, "The Commission has now decided to undertake market studies in pharmaceutical sector, telecom sector and digital market sector... The Commission has received cases with allegations of anti-competitive conduct by market players in these sectors as well as reviewed various combination notices in these sectors..." The goal is to ensure that competition remains "vibrant" and "there are enough players who are able to participate in the award of concessions".

A classical example of this is the aviation sector where the government despite opposition from both the department of economic affairs (DEA) ministry of finance and the Niti Aayog allowed the Adani Group of companies to take six key airports and also acquire a controlling stake in both the Mumbai and the upcoming greenfield Navi Mumbai Airport. These seven airports, namely Ahmedabad, Mangalore, Lucknow, Jaipur, Guwahati, Thiruvananthapuram and Mumbai, roughly handled 80 million passengers during the last fiscal (2019-20). This converts into nearly one-fourth of the 340 million odd domestic air passenger traffic.

On the 11th of December 2018 when the NDA/BJP government's public private partnership appraisal committee (PPPAC) considered the civil aviation ministry's privatisation pitch, the DEA in a note ostensibly red-flagged it, stating, "These six airports projects are highly capital-intensive projects, hence it is suggested to incorporate the clause that not more than two airports will be awarded to the same bidder duly factoring the high financial risk and performance issues. Awarding them to different companies would also facilitate yardstick competition."

Niti Aayog also surprisingly demonstrated spine and, in a note, opined, "A

bidding lacking sufficient technical capacity can well jeopardise the project and compromise the quality of services that the government is committed to provide."

Brushing aside these concerns, the government still went ahead and allowed one company with no previous experience in airport management to take control of all these airports albeit through a public auction.

However, therein lies the problem. Even if it is through the bidding route allowing monopolies to develop in sector after sector of the economy tantamount to creating economic oligarchies and chaebols.

An oligarchy is a country or industry that is controlled by a small group of powerful people while a chaebol denotes a "wealth clique" in Korean. They are popularly assumed to have been influenced by the Japanese zaibatsu — both sharing the same Chinese characters and meaning. Like chaebols, zaibatus were also family controlled conglomerates that dominated the Japanese economy until they were finally extinguished by the United States during its occupation of Japan post World War II.

Country after country has had to deal with these oligarchies and chaebols for ultimately they start influencing the politics of nation in the most pernicious manner possible. The US had to bring the Sherman Anti-Trust Act way back in 1890 to curb concentrations of power that interfere with trade and reduce economic competition. The unsaid part of it was that do not allow corporations to become so powerful so that they start "controlling by influence" the policy frameworks and governance of the state. However, where the government is itself engaged in facilitating the development of these oligarchic chaebol-like struc-

These farm laws are actually intended to give Corporate India a legal licence to muscle in on these small guys who have unequal or no bargaining power

tures it becomes even more sinister to put it mildly.

The US has used its anti-trust laws to reign in various entities, including Standard Oil, AT&T, Kodak and Microsoft in the twentieth century, to name a few.

Way back in 1909, the Department of Justice of the US government filed a federal anti-trust lawsuit against Standard Oil arguing that the company restrained trade through its preferential deals with railroads, its control of pipelines and by engaging in unfair practices like price-cutting to drive smaller competitors out of business.

On May 15, 1911, the Supreme Court ordered the dissolution of Standard Oil Company, ruling it was in violation of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. The court's decision forced Standard to break into 34 independent companies spread across the country and abroad. Many of these companies have since split, folded or merged today. The primary descendants of Standard include ExxonMobil, Chevron and ConocoPhillips. Recently, the US government has gone after Big Tech companies with a wave of anti-trust law suits for it considers their market dominance among other things as dangerous for democracy.

Similarly, South Korea has for long grappled with the malevolent influence of chaebols on their politics. Russia is a typical example where a noxious combination of big business and entrenched political interest are controlling that country since the exit of Boris Yeltsin at the turn of the millennium.

The Supreme Court, therefore, must be mindful of the true intent of these farm laws. It is to further the agenda of further consolidating these oligarchies and chaebols that control a significant part of the Indian economy already and, therefore, are, through their financial, media and other muscle, disproportionately significant players in our democratic and governance ethos.

The author is a lawyer, Member of Parliament and former Union information and broadcasting minister. The views expressed are personal. Twitter handle @manishtewari.

LETTERS

WELL-BEGUN!

India kept its tryst with immunity, with over two lakh health workers getting inoculated on day one. Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the country-wide Covid-19 vaccination drive through video-conferencing. Manish, a sanitation worker, earned the distinction of becoming the first recipient of the Covid vaccine in the country, at AIIMS in New Delhi. Touted as the world's most extensive vaccination drive, an estimated 300 million people in the country will line up for a shot in the arm.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

SHAMEFUL FRAUD

THE SWIFTNESS with which a human being forgets is astonishing, said Dale Carnegie. The same happened on the daily show, "Stock 20 20", where the news anchor recommended all the stocks in which his family invested a day back only to book a huge profit, making almost ₹2.95 crore. Being vigilant, Sebi acted with agility and blacklisted him, his mother and wife from trading. Soon after the news broke out, the TV channel terminated him. Whenever any financial misery takes place, investors bear the maximum brunt. What a shameful fraud!

Rahul Chouhan
Ujjain

KOLAM ENERGY

IT WAS HEART-WARMING to learn that the Kolam, a traditional Indian art of drawing geometric patterns on the floor to welcome guests, formed a part of the virtual kick-off ceremony of the inauguration of US President-elect Joe Biden and his deputy Kamala Harris, who traces her origin to Tamil Nadu where these auspicious designs adorn homes. Over 1,800 individuals from across the United States and many from India participated in the online initiative to create thousands of Kolam designs to celebrate the event. It was in the spirit of 'Presidency for All' and to showcase America's multicultural heritage.

Shovanlal Chakraborty
Kolkata

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to N.J. Ravi Chander (Jan. 11). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Kishwar Desai
London Diary



Long UK lockdown defeats Britons; Spurs' 'shot in arm' for soccer fans

So not only is it very cold but the forecast is also bleak. And the worst is that another lockdown has been announced! As of 2 am on Monday, all travel corridors to the UK will be shut. As they used to say 'Fog in the Channel. Continent isolated. Lockdown in UK. The World isolated!'

Those were the days! But now the tables have turned. It is the UK that has become even more of an island!

Theatres were pleased last November they could open but now they are shut again as are pubs and restaurants. We have vaccinations slowly covering the population but as of now it will be Easter before the over 50s will be covered. That leaves the younger half of the 70 million to come.

However, what is astonishing is that the latest photos show that the stoic Briton is completely fed up and would rather party than live in isolation. So where will this lead — except for more infections and more deaths? One despairs! This was once a disciplined

and well-regulated country. But now as Covid continues to rampage through lives — I am worried about the consequences. With at least 1,000 deaths everyday, in a small nation like this... what terrible impact will Covid have on households, on the economy?

The British may have been great at finding a vaccine that work — coming second, though not first — with AstraZeneca. But technology does not seem to be a strong point. Despite the tough stance of home secretary Priti Patel about fighting crime and immigrants, it turns out the Home Office has managed to wipe out 150,000 (or could be 400,000 no one knows for sure) people's arrest records and with it much sensitive information — their fingerprints, DNA and arrest history. At least that makes those 150,000 happy. No so long ago, a National Health computer lost thousands of names of people who had been infected. We need an abacus urgently.

Meanwhile... Brexit is still causing problems. Now the Atlantic storm

Filomena has ruined the Spanish lettuce crop and we have a serious lettuce shortage.

A cheerful event did happen the other day. It was rather like a battle between the elephant and the mouse. The mouse did not win but it did get to ride on the elephant's back for a bit. The FA Cup is a contest where all the football teams — the best ones from Premier League down to local village teams playing in a small league — can contest with each other. Rather like the Mumbai Indians of the IPL playing with a team from a village in Bihar. This year Marine, a village team established back in 1884, and playing in the Northern Premier League Division One, North West, was drawn against the mighty Premier League North London side, Tottenham Hotspurs, in the Third Round. This was on the Marine's home grounds rather than in London on Spurs' home turf. Anyway no spectators are allowed due to Covid. Anyone would expect the mighty

Spurs to send their third reserve side to play the minnows 160 places below them in national ranking. But Jose Mourinho, the Spurs Spanish manager, selected their regular top side with a few stars and promising youngsters hoping to show he took the fixture seriously.

The result, alas, was not the unexpected victory of the mouse. The elephant won. But Marines were able to sell 30,000 tickets for watching on Zoom at £10 each. Their ground facility only accommodates 3,185 in all with 389 seats and rest standing. But thanks to Covid and the Big team bringing all the stars, the Marines cleaned up. Their game was shown on BBC. They lost 5-0 but who is counting the goals. Their good luck continued. After a match, players often exchange their shirts as a gesture of friendship. In Covid Times, this is forbidden. But the Spurs promised to send the Marine team a freshly washed set of shirts which then the entire team wore on the day. It is the gesture that made the day.

Good news at last about Noor Inayat Khan. This famous daughter of a Sufi music master fought in the Second World War with the spy code name Madeleine on the British side. She was sent to France where she worked as a radio operator. She was captured but refused to say anything about her associates because, being a Sufi, she would not tell a lie. She was sent to the Dachau concentration camp where she died. Now there will at last be a TV series with Freida Pinto. This is good news for me as well. Long ago, my husband and I had spotted this as excellent story to make a film, and bought the rights for a book on it and even lobbied for it for a long time. But we found the process of filmmaking very daunting, and so am thrilled that 15 years later — something is happening on the OTT platform.

Kishwar Desai is an award-winning author. The Longest Kiss: The Life and Times of Devika Rani is her new book.

SHORT TAKES

BANKING HEIR
BENJAMIN DE
ROTHSCHILD DIES

New York, Jan. 17: Benjamin de Rothschild, who oversaw the banking empire started by his father in 1953, has died. He was 57. The Edmond de Rothschild Group, the company he was chairman of, said that de Rothschild died of a heart attack Friday afternoon at his home in Pregny, Switzerland.

Since 1997, Benjamin de Rothschild headed the banking group, which was named after his father. Today, Edmond de Rothschild Group says it manages assets worth 160 billion euros, or \$190 billion. Forbes magazine estimates de Rothschild's net worth at \$1.5 billion. He is a descendant of the Rothschild family, which has a nearly 300-year history running European banks.

In a press release announcing his death, the Edmond de Rothschild Group said de Rothschild was passionate about finance, sailing, cars and wine. He was also a philanthropist, involved in the Adolphe de Rothschild Foundation Hospital, the company said. He is survived by his wife, Ariane de Rothschild, and their four adult daughters.

PALESTINIAN
VOTE: EU ASKS
ISRAEL TO HELP

Brussels, Jan. 17: The European Union on Saturday welcomed a promise by Palestinian leaders to hold their first elections in 15 years, urging Israel to facilitate the ballots.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said elections would be held in May and July, as part of a warming of ties between his Fatah party and its Islamist rival Hamas.

"This is a welcome development," said a spokesman for EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell. He said the bloc "stands ready to cooperate with relevant actors to support the electoral process" and urged Israel to "facilitate the holding of these elections throughout the Palestinian territory".

The statement from Abbas said he expected polls to be held "in all governorates of Palestine, including east Jerusalem", which was annexed by Israel following the 1967 Six-Day War but is considered occupied territory by much of the international community.

Israel bans all Palestinian Authority activity in east Jerusalem, and there was no indication the Jewish state would allow a Palestinian vote within the city.

The 2005 Palestinian presidential vote saw Abbas elected with 62 percent support to replace the late Yasser Arafat.

In the last Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006, Hamas won an unexpected landslide.

The polls resulted in a brief unity government but it soon collapsed and in 2007, bloody clashes erupted in the Gaza Strip between the two principal Palestinian factions, with Hamas ultimately seizing control of Gaza.

ANTI-NETANYAHU
PROTESTS ON
IN ISRAEL

Jerusalem, Jan. 17: Hundreds of protesters braved a cold night in Jerusalem on Saturday to press on with their calls for Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu to step down over corruption charges against him.

Demonstrators gathered at a Jerusalem square near Netanyahu's official residence. The weekly protests have been taking place for over seven months. Netanyahu is charged with fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three cases involving billionaire associates and media moguls, charges that he denies.

The protesters insist Netanyahu cannot properly lead the country while under indictment for corruption. His trial is set to begin evidentiary hearings next month. Israel will hold its fourth national elections in two years in March, in what will likely be another referendum on Netanyahu as he faces a challenge from defectors within his Likud party. The protesters also say Netanyahu and his government have bungled the Coronavirus response.

The country has seen its economy hit hard by virus curbs and is again under a nationwide if partial lockdown. Netanyahu has used vaccination drive, in which more than a tenth of its population has been immunised, to try to belittle the protesters and their cause. They say the PM is working to end the outbreak while they hold demonstrations.

National Guards
in Washington

Step taken to keep eye on possible protests

Man arrested with
gun at checkpoint

Washington, Jan. 17: By the busload and plane-load, National Guard troops were pouring into the US capital on Saturday, as governors answered the urgent pleas of defence officials for more troops to help safeguard Washington even as they keep anxious eyes on possible violent protests in their own states.

Military leaders spent chunks of Thursday evening and Friday calling states in an unprecedented appeal for more National Guard troops to help lock down much of the city in the days before President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration. In dribs and drabs, governors responded, some agreeing to send an extra dozen, 100 or even 1,000, while others said no.

The calls reflect fears that violent extremist groups are targeting the city in the wake of the deadly insurrection at the US Capitol on Jan. 6. The threats range from armed insurgents to possible attempts to plant explosive devices at so-called soft targets. But as Washington begins to resemble an armed camp, with more than 25,000 Guards due in the city by early next week, concerns about violence at state capitals has grown. Oregon Gov. Kate Brown said she turned down the federal request to send at least 100 more National Guard troops to D.C. "I didn't think that we could safely fill that commitment," Brown said.

Oregon has already agreed to send 30 to Washington, but state leaders are worried about violence at the state capitol in Salem. Others agreed, setting off a dizzying torrent of military flights and convoys into the region. "The peaceful transfer of power is a central tenet of American democracy, and Connecticut stands ready to aid in the protection of our country," said Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont, who had initially approved sending 100 Guard and on Friday agreed to send 200 more. All told, more than 130 US Air Guard flights in the past 72 hours have carried at least 7,000 Guard troops to Joint Base Andrews in Maryland, according to US officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal numbers.

Thousands more are in buses and military trucks, thundering up highways toward Washington. Army Gen. Dan Hokanson, chief of the National Guard Bureau, called adjutants general around the country, and others, such as Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy, called governors to seek help.

— AP

Auspicious Kolam drawings
mark inauguration kickoff

Washington, Jan. 17: Kolam, a traditional Indian art form of drawing geometric patterns on the floors as a sign of welcome, was part of the virtual kick-off ceremony of the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden and his deputy Kamala Harris, who traces her origin to Tamil Nadu where these auspicious designs adorn almost every household. In Tamil Nadu, where

Harris has roots, women draw Kolams on the ground to invite health and prosperity into houses where they are displayed.

Pictures of thousands of Kolam tiles were on Saturday woven into a video to welcome Biden and Harris in the spirit of 'Presidency for All' and to showcase the multi-cultural heritage of America.

More than 1,800 individuals from across the US

place in the world," Klain added. As he inherits the White House from Donald Trump, Biden's plate is overflowing with acute challenges.

The US is fast approaching 400,000 dead from the Covid-19 crisis and logging well over a million new cases a week as the Coronavirus spreads out of control. The economy is ailing, with 10 million fewer jobs available compared to the start of the pandemic. And millions of Americans who back Trump refuse to recognise Biden as the legitimate president.

Biden this week unveiled plans to seek \$1.9 trillion to revive the economy through new stimulus payments and other aid, and plans a blitz to accelerate America's stumbling Covid vaccine rollout effort.

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SHORT TAKES

CYCLONE KIMI FORMS OFF AUSTRALIA

Brisbane, Jan. 17: A tropical cyclone formed off the north-eastern coast of Australia on Sunday, threatening the tourist hotspot of Cairns with destructive 130 kilometres (80 miles) per hour winds.

Tropical Cyclone Kimi is a Category One storm with sustained winds of 65 kph but meteorologists said it may strengthen to a Category Two when it crosses the coast late Monday. The Bureau of Meteorology forecast it was likely to hit between the towns of Cooktown and Port Douglas, with gale-force winds extending south of Cairns.

Heavy rainfall is also expected in the area, with residents warned of possible flooding.

Queensland Fire and Emergency Services urged people to take advantage of a "limited window of opportunity" to prepare emergency kits for the coming storm.

2 DIE AS CARGO SHIP SINKS IN THE BLACK SEA

Istanbul, Jan. 17: A cargo ship sank off Turkey's Black Sea coast on Sunday, leaving at least two people dead, an official said.

The governor of Bartın province, Sinan Guner, announced the shipwreck off Inkumu in northern Turkey and said emergency workers had saved at least six crew members and reached the bodies of two others. He spoke to the official Anadolu news agency. The Turkish coast guard said the ship was called ARVIN and the ship's crew were on lifeboats, according to Anadolu. The navy sent a frigate to assist rescue efforts.

The transport ministry said the ship had 12 crew members, including two Russians and 10 Ukrainians. The cargo ship was en route to Bulgaria from Georgia but tried to reach the Turkish port of Bartın due to bad weather. The area has been buffeted by heavy rains, snow and strong winds.

FIVE SHOT DEAD IN RARE MEXICO CITY ATTACK

Mexico City, Jan. 17: Five people were shot dead in central Mexico City, the local security secretariat said Saturday, a rare attack in the capital and likely linked to organised crime, according to local media. The attack occurred late Friday at the town hall in Miguel Hidalgo, one of the most prosperous districts of Mexico City.

Police responding to an alert found "five people on the ground with gunshot wounds," according to a statement.

Medical services certified three men dead at the scene while the other two were transferred to a nearby hospital where they later died due to the seriousness of their injuries, the security secretariat said. Local media reports said one of the victims was a member of the local Union Tepito cartel but city authorities have not confirmed this.

Despite growing drug cartel violence in Mexico over the last decade, shootings and multiple killings are rare in the capital.

EGYPT UNVEILS FUNERARY TEMPLE

Cairo, Jan. 17: Egypt's former antiquities minister and noted archaeologist Zahi Hawass on Sunday revealed details of an ancient funerary temple in a vast necropolis south of Cairo. Hawass told reporters at the Saqqara necropolis that archaeologists unearthed the temple of Queen Neit, wife of King Teti, the first king of the Sixth Dynasty that ruled Egypt from 2323 B.C. till 2150 B.C. Archaeologists also found a 4-metre (13-foot) long papyrus that includes texts of the Book of the Dead, which is a collection of spells aimed at directing the dead through the underworld in ancient Egypt, he said. Hawass said archaeologists also unearthed burial wells, coffins and mummies dating back to the New Kingdom that ruled Egypt between about 1570 B.C. and 1069 B.C. They unveiled at least 22 burial shafts up to 12 metres (40 feet) deep, with more than 50 wooden coffins dating back to the New Kingdom, said Hawass, who is Egypt's best known archaeologist. Hawass, known for his Indiana Jones hat and TV specials on Egypt's ancient sites, said work has been done at the site.

2 Afghan SC women judges shot

US envoy blames Taliban as new trend of killings target high profile figures

Kabul, Jan. 17: Gunmen shot dead two Afghan women judges working for the Supreme Court in an ambush in the country's capital on Sunday, officials said, an attack the top US envoy in Kabul blamed on the Taliban.

Violence has surged across Afghanistan in recent months despite ongoing peace talks between the Taliban and government — especially in Kabul, where a new trend of targeted killings aimed at high-profile figures has sown fear in the restive city.

The latest attack, which US Charge D'Affaires Ross Wilson blamed on the Taliban, comes just two days after the Pentagon announced it had cut troop levels in Afghanistan to 2,500, the fewest in nearly two decades.

The attack on the judges happened as they were driving to their office in a court vehicle, said Ahmad Fahim Qaweem, a spokesman for the Supreme Court. "Unfortunately, we have lost two women judges in today's attack. Their driver is wounded," Qaweem said.



A woman walks at the site where gunmen shot dead two Afghan women judges working for the Supreme Court, in Kabul on Sunday.

— AFP

There are more than 200 female judges working for the country's top court, the spokesman added.

Kabul police confirmed the attack, which no group has claimed so far.

Afghanistan's Supreme Court was a target in February 2017 when a suicide bomb ripped through a crowd of court employees, killing at least 20 and wounding 41.

The latest attack drew widespread condemnation,

with Wilson blaming the Taliban directly as he called for an investigation.

"The Taliban should understand that such actions for which it bears responsibility outrage the world and must cease if peace is to come to Afghanistan," wrote Wilson on Twitter.

The shooting came just hours after a high-level meeting between the Taliban negotiation team and US special envoy for

Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad, along with the head of US forces in Afghanistan, General Scott Miller, according to tweets by a Taliban spokesman.

During the sit-down, spokesman Mohammad Naeem said the insurgents called again for the release of the group's remaining jailed fighters, along with the removal of the Taliban from the UN blacklist.

The Afghan government

has already released almost 5,000 Taliban inmates despite widespread concern that the fighters would be used to reinforce the insurgents' ranks.

President Ashraf Ghani also accused the Taliban of launching an "illegitimate war and hostility".

"The government once again reiterates its call on the Taliban that violence, terror, brutality and crimes... will only prolong the war in the country," he said in a statement issued by the presidential palace.

The head of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission also condemned the murders, calling the ongoing killings a "systematic massacre".

"Afghanistan is losing one of its most important gains, its educated & professional cadre, in what seems to be a systematic massacre & the world seems to be just watching. This must stop," tweeted Shaharazad Akbar.

The killing also spurred a rare statement from the Chinese embassy in Kabul, offering condolences to the victims' families. — AFP

Bobi Wine under 'house arrest'

Ugandan Oppn leader held after disputed elections

Kampala, Jan. 17: Ugandan opposition leader Bobi Wine remains under "house arrest", his party said on Sunday, after a disputed election returned President Yoweri Museveni to office for a sixth term.

The former ragga singer turned lawmaker came second in the presidential election, and has said the process was marred by widespread fraud and violence.

He has not left his home since he went out to vote in the election on Thursday, and on Friday said he was under "siege" as soldiers and police surrounded his home, preventing anyone from entering or leaving. "Our leader ... is effectively under house

arrest," National Unity Platform spokesman Joel Ssenyonyi told a press conference, adding no one was being allowed access.

"His home is not a detention facility. We are very concerned about the state in which he is in, and his wife."

A Twitter update under Wine's account, written by an administrator as Uganda remains under an internet blackout for a fifth day, said the couple had "run out of food supplies."

The party said prominent MP, Francis Zaake, who had been arrested during an attempted visit to Wine's house on Friday, had been admitted to hospital "badly beaten and brutalised" by security forces. — AFP

PIO picked for State Dept post

Washington, Jan. 17: US President-elect Joe Biden on Saturday nominated an Indian American diplomat, who had quit the foreign service in 2018 in protest against the policies of President Donald Trump, to a key State Department position.

Uzra Zeya has been nominated to be Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, according to key nominations for the Department of State announced by Biden.

Wendy R. Sherman has been nominated to be Deputy Secretary of State, Brian McKeon as Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources, Bonnie Jenkins to be Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security Affairs and Victoria Nuland to be Under Sec-

etary for Political Affairs. "This diverse and accomplished team, led by Secretary of State-designate Tony Blinken, embodies my core belief that America is strongest when it works with our allies," Biden said. "Collectively, they have secured some of the most defining national security and diplomatic achievements in recent memory," he said. — PTI

HEADED | FOR U.S.

Group seeks to escape poverty, unemployment, gang and drug violence

Migrant caravan in Guatemala swells to 9K

Camotan, Guatemala, Jan. 17: At least 9,000 Honduran migrants have entered Guatemala after a first group pushed past border police late Friday and others soon followed on the first step of a journey north they hope will take them to the United States, officials said Saturday.

Seeking to escape poverty, unemployment, gang and drug violence and the aftermath of two devastating hurricanes, the migrants, most of them travelling on foot, planned to

head first to Mexico and then on to the US, a journey of thousands of kilometers.

A first group of men, women and children — many wearing masks due to the Covid-19 pandemic — pushed their way Friday past police at the Guatemalan border town of El Florido, 220 kilometres (132 miles) east of Guatemala City, an AFP correspondent said.

Guatemalan officials said the initial group numbered roughly 6,000; an additional 3,000 crossed

● A FIRST group pushed past border police Friday and others soon followed on the first step of a journey.

● Border agents asked the migrants for their papers — and demanded proof of negative Coronavirus tests — but appeared to let many through who did not meet those requirements.

● As the migrants moved northward, workers with the International Committee of the Red Cross and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees provided assistance.

into the country on Saturday, they said.

A Guatemalan government statement denounced what it said was a violation of its national sov-

eighty and called on Honduras to "contain the massive departure of its inhabitants, through permanent preventive actions." A police official

said the migrants were allowed to cross into Guatemala because there were many families with children. They said officers, who were unarmed, feared tear gas could cause casualties.

Border agents asked the migrants for their papers — and demanded proof of negative Coronavirus tests — but appeared to let many through who did not meet those requirements.

As the migrants moved northward in small groups, workers with the International Committee

of the Red Cross and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees provided some with assistance.

Most of the migrants, many in sandals, carried backpacks with their few belongings.

Olga Ramirez, 28, trudged along with her husband, four children ages 3 to 8, and her brother. She carried the smallest child in her arms and the middle kids rode in a decrepit stroller that looked like it was about to collapse.

— AFP

Chief Kremlin critic Navalny takes off to Russia despite threat

Moscow, Jan. 17: Chief Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny returns to Russia from Germany on Sunday, facing imminent arrest after authorities warned they would detain him.

The 44-year-old opposition leader is flying back to Moscow after spending several months in Germany recovering from a poisoning attack that he said was carried out on the orders of President Vladimir Putin.

Navalny fell violently ill on a flight over Siberia in August and was flown out to Berlin by medical aircraft in an induced coma.

Western experts concluded he was poisoned with a Soviet-designed nerve toxin Novichok.

The Kremlin denied involvement and Russian investigators said there were no grounds to launch a probe into the attack.

Berlin said Saturday it had responded to requests for legal assistance from Moscow and handed over transcripts of an interview conducted by German police with

Navalny.

On the eve of his departure Navalny thanked the people in Germany, including doctors, police and politicians, whom he met during his five-month stay.

"Thank you, friends!" he wrote in German in a post on Instagram.

Russia's prison service (FSIN) is now saying Navalny may face jail time on arrival to Moscow for violating the terms of a 2014 suspended sentence he was handed on fraud charges.

FSIN said it would be "obliged" to detain Navalny. The anti-graft campaigner may also face criminal charges under a probe launched by Russian investigators late last year who say he misappropriated over \$4 million worth of donations.

Navalny and his allies view these moves as attempts to prevent his return and encouraged supporters to come meet the opposition leader on Sunday evening when he lands in Moscow's Vnukovo airport. — AFP

IRAN ASKS U.N. NOT TO PUBLISH 'UNNECESSARY' NUKE DETAILS

Tehran, Jan. 17: Iran urged the United Nations' nuclear watchdog to avoid publishing "unnecessary" details on Tehran's nuclear program, state TV reported on Sunday, a day after Germany, France and Britain said Tehran has "no credible civilian use" for its development of uranium metal.

The report quoted a statement from Iran's nuclear department that asked the International Atomic Energy Agency to avoid publishing details on Iran's nuclear program that may cause confusion.

"It is expected the international atomic energy agency avoid providing unnecessary details and prevent paving ground for misunderstanding" in the international community, the statement said. It did not elaborate.

On Saturday, Germany, France and Britain pressed Iran to back off its plan to develop uranium metal, calling it "the latest planned violation" of its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. The goal of the deal is to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear bomb, something Iran insists it does not want to do. "Iran has no credible civilian use for uranium metal," they said in a joint statement. — AP

RAINS HAMPER HUNT FOR QUAKE SURVIVORS IN INDONESIA

Mamuju, JAN. 17: Torrential monsoon rains hampered the hunt Sunday for anyone still buried alive under buildings flattened by a powerful earthquake on Indonesia's Sulawesi island, after the huge tremor killed at least 81 and left thousands homeless.

Excavators and cranes were deployed across the devastated seaside city of Mamuju, where buildings were reduced to a tangled mass of twisted metal and chunks of concrete, including a hospital and the regional governor's office.

It was unclear how many people — dead or alive — could still be under mountains of debris in the aftermath of Friday's 6.2-magnitude quake. "The rain poses risks because damaged buildings could collapse if it gets too heavy... and aftershocks could move them too," said rescuer Octaviano.

Excavating debris too fast with heavy equipment could crush and kill any buried survivors, he added. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

More players in Oz Open lockdown

Melbourne: An additional 25 players will have to spend two weeks in quarantine before the Australian Open, organisers said Sunday, as Covid-19 continues to disrupt preparations for the Grand Slam tournament. The players were on a flight from Doha to Melbourne on which one passenger, who is not one of the players, tested positive for coronavirus having tested negative before the flight. They will join 47 players already confined to their rooms for 14 days in Melbourne, meaning a total of 72 players are now unable to leave their hotel rooms for two weeks. “There were 58 passengers on the flight, including 25 players. All are already in quarantine hotels,” tournament organisers said in a statement on Twitter. — AFP

NorthEast return to winning ways

Vasco: NorthEast United FC defeated Jamshedpur FC 2-1 to end their seven-game winless streak in the Indian Super League here on Sunday. The win propelled NEUFC to the fifth spot in the standings with 16 points. Ashutosh Mehta (36th minute) put NEUFC ahead with his first ISL goal before substitute Deshorn Brown (61st) doubled the tally for the Highlanders on his debut. Jamshedpur skipper Stephen Hartley (89th) pulled one back for his side late in the game. NEUFC were the better side in the opening half, dominating possession and creating goal-scoring opportunities. They deservedly went into the break with a one-goal cushion which could have been more, but for some fine saves by JFC goal-keeper TP Rehenesh. — PTI

England smell win against Sri Lanka

Galle, Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka rattled England with three quick wickets late on the fourth day of the first Test in Galle on Sunday, but the visitors remained favourites to win the match with just 36 more runs needed and seven wickets in hand. England were expected to comfortably close in on a victory after Jack Leach took 5/122 with Sri Lanka all out for 359 in their second innings, leaving the visitors needing only 74 to win. But Sri Lanka struck early, with Dom Sibley (2) and Zak Crawley (8) falling to left-arm spinner Lasith Embuldeniya. Captain Joe Root was run-out for one after a mix-up with Jonny Bairstow. — AFP
Brief scores: Sri Lanka 135 & 359 (Perera 62, Thirimanne 111, Mathews 71, Leach 5/122, Bess 3/100) vs England 421 & 38/3 (Embuldeniya 2/13).

Moeen back in England bubble

Galle, Sri Lanka: England all-rounder Moeen Ali on Saturday entered the team's bio-secure bubble here after clearing two Covid-19 tests, thus joining his mates after spending 13 days in quarantine. Ali, 33, tested positive for Covid-19 with mild symptoms upon arrival in Sri Lanka and was isolated from the rest of the touring party. He was originally expected to be in quarantine for 10 days, which was later extended by three days following the Sri Lankan government's reservations over the new UK strain of the deadly virus. — AFP

Live on TV

CRICKET

Sri Lanka vs England: First Test, Day 5 from 10 am on Sony Ten 2

Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20

Tournament: Jharkhand vs Hyderabad from 11.55 am; Tamil Nadu vs Bengal from 6.55 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

Australia vs India: Fourth Test Day 5 from 5.30 am (Tuesday) on Sony Six, Ten 1, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Chennaiyin vs East Bengal from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

English Premier League: Arsenal vs Newcastle from 1.30 am (Tuesday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

Italian League: Cagliari vs AC Milan from 1.15 am (Tuesday) on Sony Ten 2

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FAIRYTAIL!

Magical stand between tailenders Shardul, Sundar keeps India afloat

Brisbane, Jan. 17: Debutant Washington Sundar and Shardul Thakur punched above their weight with splendid half-centuries to keep Australia at bay and India bullish after an engrossing third day's play in the series-deciding fourth Test here on Sunday. Australia's openers — David Warner (20) and Marcus Harris (1) — saw out six overs, and extended the home team's lead to 54 by stumps after India's first innings ended at 336. However, Australia's lead could have been much more had it not been for a delightful 123-run partnership for the seventh wicket between Washington (62) and Shardul (67), who defied and then attacked the rival bowling attack with gusto. “We knew their bowlers were tiring out a bit so it was a matter of hanging in there for one hour. We knew we probably would be on top if we hung in,” said Shardul at the post-play press conference. Pacer Josh Hazlewood finished with a well-deserved 5/57 for Australia, a reward for consistently bowling with an impeccable line and length at a brisk pace. Symbolising the courage shown by the visitors, now rendered almost second-string owing to a plethora of injuries suffered by their top players through the four-match series, Washington and Shardul mixed caution with aggression to bail their team out of a precarious 186 for six. First, they turned unlikely saviours after three soft dismissals pushed India on the back foot, and in the final session, the two opened up and went after the world-class Australian attack. If his nine fours were not enough, Shardul bludgeoned off-spinner Nathan Lyon, holder of 397 wickets, for a maximum over long-on to reach his maiden Test fifty in style in only his second match. In fact, Shardul opened his account with a hooked six off the world's number one bowler, Pat Cummins. Playing in his first Test,



Washington Sundar (right) is congratulated by Shardul Thakur after reaching his half century against Australia on Day Three of the fourth Test at the Gabba in Brisbane on Sunday. — AFP

Washington too soon got to his maiden fifty in the traditional format while finding the fence seven times and clearing it once. He became the first visiting cricketer in Australia in 74 years to grab three wickets and smash a half-century on debut. The one before him was also an Indian, Dattu Phadkar, who made 51 while batting at No.8 and took three wickets during a 1947/48 tour. — PTI

INDIA'S FOURTH HIGHEST SEVENTH WICKET STAND AGAINST AUSTRALIA

- Shardul Thakur and Washington Sundar added 123 runs for the seventh wicket in India's first innings on the third day.
- It was India's fourth best stand for this wicket position against Australia. Ravindra Jadeja and Rishabh Pant are the only Indian pair to add more than 200 runs for the seventh wicket against Australia. They added 204 at Sydney in 2018-19.
- Overall, it was eighth century stand for the seventh wicket for India against Australia.
- Washington Sundar became only the sixth Indian batsman to score a fifty on debut against Australia.

— S. PERVEZ QAISER

SCORECARD	
Australia 1st innings: 369 India 1st Innings (overnight 62/2): Rohit Sharma c Starc b N. Lyon 44, Shubhman Gill c Smith b P. Cummins 7, Cheteshwar Pujara c Paine b J. Hazlewood 25, Ajinkya Rahane c Wade b M. Starc 37, Mayank Agarwal c Smith b J. Hazlewood 38, Rishabh Pant c Green b J. Hazlewood 62, Washington Sundar c Green b M. Starc 62, Shardul Thakur b P Cummins 67, Navdeep Saini c Smith b J. Hazlewood 5, Mohammed Siraj b J. Hazlewood 13, T. Natarajan not out 1. Extras (b-5, lb-7 nb-2) 14.	Total (all out in 111.4 overs) 336. FOW: 1-11, 2-60, 3-105, 4-144, 5-161, 6-186, 7-309, 8-320, 9-328. Bowling: Mitchell Starc 23-3-88-2, Josh Hazlewood 24.4-6-57-5, Pat Cummins 27-5-94-2, Cameron Green 8-1-20-0, Nathan Lyon 28-9-65-1, Marnus Labuschagne 1-1-0-0. Australia 2nd Innings: Marcus Harris batting 1, David Warner batting 20. Total (For no loss in 6 overs) 21. Bowling: Mohammed Siraj 2-1-12-0, T Natarajan 3-0-6-0, Washington Sundar 1-0-3-0.

Winning over Oz crowd was Shardul's inspiration

Brisbane, Jan. 17: When Shardul Thakur stepped out to bat on Sunday, rescuing India from a precarious 186/6 was not the only target on his mind as he was also keen to impress the Australian crowd after being told how “rewarding” it would feel by coach Ravi Shastri. “When I walked in, the situation was difficult I would not deny that. The crowd was cheering for Australian bowlers. But I remembered our coach Ravi Shastri saying right at the start of the One-day series that ‘if you perform in this country, you will be rewarded,’” Thakur talked about the

● **Batting at number eight, Thakur impressed with his stroke-play, his drives coming straight out of coaching manuals.**

inspiration behind the unfazed manner with which he batted. “People will love you for your performances and that one thing was also on my mind that people are going love me.” Batting at number eight, Thakur impressed with his stroke-play, his drives coming straight

out of coaching manuals. At stumps, Australia were 54 ahead after reaching 21 for no loss in their second innings following India's dismissal for 336. “Eventually at the end of the day it would help my team, that was the biggest positive. These two things were on my mind. Crowd would make noise, but If I bat well, the same crowd will cheer for me,” Thakur said. Cheered, he definitely was by not just the crowd but also his teammates, who gave him a standing ovation on his way back to the dressing room. — PTI

HAZLEWOOD RUES LACK OF EXECUTION FROM AUSSIES

Brisbane, Jan. 17: Australia speedster Josh Hazlewood on Sunday credited Washington Sundar and Shardul Thakur for taking India to a safe position with their century stand but rued the execution of home team bowlers in finishing off the visitors tail on the third day of the fourth Test here. “Yes, it is obviously a crucial partnership (between Shardul and Washington), but then we had them. I think, 6/200 around that mark, so we thought we (were) on top there but to be fair the guys batted really well,” Hazlewood, who returned with figures of 5 for 57, said at the virtual post-day press conference. “We didn't probably exe-

cute well as we could have in that period but (we) created a few little half chances. On any other day, hopefully we take those, but credit to those two guys (Shardul and Washington). They batted beautifully and I think it just shows the wicket is pretty good.” Hazlewood conceded that Australia let a few moments slip in the day, which could have eventually made the difference. “I thought the guys did bowl really well again and everyone else backed us up. Just let a few moments slipped, I think, and also a few a half chances there. If we could have grabbed them, it could have made a little difference,” the 30-year-old said. — PTI

Rohit's dismissal underlines lack of judicious shot selection



Hemant Kenkre
Silly Point

When it comes to cricket, especially batting, there is a fine line between (being called) reckless and attacking. After battling out the ‘on spot’ Australian bowlers for 19 overs, Indian opener Rohit Sharma holed out to long-leg off a dipper bowled by Nathan Lyon to walk back to the pavilion after a well compiled 44 runs. Many called the shot irresponsible and reckless while some believe, that's the way the Mumbaikar plays and that he shouldn't

be hauled up for playing such a shot. The shot, once again, drew out the tussle between the old school of cricket and one that pushes modern thoughts into an old sport. Cricket has seen many changes since the inception of the competitive part of the game began in the later part of 19th century. From the red, we now see the game being played in white and pink colour balls and the game is played across three formats — long, short and mini.

While Rohit's shot was severely criticised by many people from the old school of cricketing thought, the protagonist gave himself the leeway by justifying his action. In the post match presser, the opener said he was following a process of dominating the bowling and had no regrets in playing that shot. In his words, Rohit stated: “It is something I like to do. I like to put the pressure on the bowler once I am in, and that is my role in the team. To make sure I keep putting that pressure on the bowlers because we have seen throughout the series how run-scoring has been difficult for both the teams.” As an old schooler who loves the way modern cricket is shaping, particularly from an improvement

in the skill sets and providing entertainment point of view, one feels that neo-processes such as those followed by Rohit, need a major overhaul. For starters, was Rohit being dominated by Lyon to make him play a shot to reverse the situation? The bowler was in his initial sages and had been dispatched by Rohit for a classy boundary and wasn't hemmed in by dot balls or any other pressure. If he were to hark back to his return-to-Test-cricket match at Sydney a week ago, he will see how the team slid to a total of 244 runs after he had given them a start of 70 runs. I'm sure the thought never came into his mind of building his and the team's total with a bit of planning and judicious shot selection. Words like ‘process of

dominating the bowling’ and putting emphasis on the ‘role he is meant to play’ in the team while justifying a terrible shot reeks of an ego, fuelled with false sense of self-appraisal. In the 20 Test matches that Rohit has played abroad, his average of 27.58 belies his total average of 46.18, clearly showing he has struggled in foreign climes. The moniker of being a ‘short format, white ball’ specialist has stuck on his famed shoulders thanks to his performance abroad and this was the best opportunity for him to make up. Coming in to chase a solid Australian total of 369 runs, Rohit had done all the hard work of seeing-off the new ball and looked like he would slap

the doubting Thomases till he gave it all away. From the dug out, Rohit has watched two complete greenhorns take on the might of the Aussies in their stronghold. Debutant Washington Sundar and Shardul Thakur (batting for the second time in Tests) showed awesome resilience by playing according to the situation and nullifying the advantage that the Aussies had gained in the ongoing Test, with a 123 run stand. In the team's scheme, the roles of Thakur and Sundar, who average 16 and 31.29 in first class cricket, were to do with the ball. The duo took the fight right to the Aussies and demystified the ‘Gabba’ factor by their attitude. The defiance shown by Hanuma Vihari and

Ravichandran Ashwin in the Sydney Test is raved about as the duo made the (almost) impossible happen by playing a role which was well above their pay grade. They too followed a ‘process’, one of patience and constraint and weathered nasty deliveries and nastier comments, to ensure that they kept the series alive with a draw, which must have inspired Thakur and Sundar. While Rohit's opinion of playing a certain attacking role in the team's overall strategy is understandable, playing according to the situation and judiciousness when it comes to shot selection is what Test cricket is all about. The sooner the ‘Hit Man’ realises it the better, or he will continue to be called a white ball home tiger.

Mount stands tall for Blues

London, Jan. 17: Mason Mount put Chelsea back on track with the late winner that sealed a vital 1-0 victory at 10-man Fulham, while Leicester moved up to second in the Premier League thanks to a 2-0 win over Southampton. Chelsea boss Frank Lampard was under pressure after just one win and four defeats in their previous six matches that saw the Blues kick-off at Craven Cottage down in 10th. But Chelsea got the break they needed when Fulham defender Antonee Robinson was sent off just before half-time for a rash challenge on Cesar Azpilicueta. Lampard's men laboured to make their numerical advantage count, but England midfielder Mount finally broke the deadlock in the 78th minute when he drilled home from 20 yards. That was enough to seal Chelsea's first league victory since they beat West Ham just before Christmas and climb up to seventh. “Of course it feels good to get a win, it has not been easy with the league form recently and you have to break the duck,” Lampard said. “I trust the quality of the players. There was a feeling we would get a goal because the pressure was

THE RESULTS	
Fulham Chelsea (Mount 78)	0 1
Leeds Brighton (Maupay 17)	0 1
West Ham (Antonio 9) Burnley	1 0
Wolves (Silva 38, Boly 43) West Brom (Pereira 8-pen, 56-pen, Ajayi 52)	2 3
Leicester (Maddison 37, Barnes 90+5) Southampton	2 0

constant. It was about staying patient with our passing and I think we did.” Fulham remain in the relegation zone after their first defeat in six league games. Next up for Chelsea is a trip to Leicester on Tuesday with the Foxes enjoying another successful season under Brendan Rodgers. Leicester closed to within a point of Manchester United at the top ahead of the Red Devils' blockbuster clash with champions Liverpool at Anfield on Sunday. — AFP



Chelsea's Mason Mount (right) celebrates after scoring against Fulham in their English Premier League match at Craven Cottage in London on Saturday. — AP

All-round Andhra hammer Kerala

Mumbai, Jan. 17: Andhra Pradesh dished out an all-round show to beat an inform Kerala by six wickets in an Elite Group E match of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20 tournament here on Sunday. Kerala, who had won their first three matches in the group, managed to score 112/4 after being asked to bat first. Andhra then overhauled the target in 17.1 overs, with opener Ashwin Hebbar top-scoring with a 46-ball 48. Kerala lost both openers, Robin Uthappa (8) and Mohammed Azharuddeen (12) cheaply and were in a spot of bother at 28/2. It soon became 30/3 after skipper Sanju Samson (7) also perished early. Andhra's chase was anchored by right-handed opener Hebbar, who hammered six boundaries and a six, despite losing partners at the other end.

Andhra fetched four points for the win.
BIHAR POST FOURTH STRAIGHT WIN
In Chennai, Bihar thrashed Manipur by nine wickets in a Plate Group match to register their fourth straight win. Bihar opted to field first and restrict Manipur to 105 for eight in 20 overs. Chasing, opener Shasheem Rathour hammered an unbeaten 60 and shared a 61-run second-wicket stand with Babul Kumar to take Bihar home in 17.1 overs. — PTI
BRIEF SCORES
■ Kerala 112/4 in 20 overs (Sachin Baby 51 not out; Manish Golamaru 2/19) lost to Andhra Pradesh 113/4 in 17.1 overs (Ashwin Hebbar 48, Ambati Rayudu 38 not out; Jalaj Saxena 2/9) by six wickets.
■ Mumbai 94 all out in 19 overs (Shivam Dube 28; Santha Moorthy 5/20, A. Aravinddaraj 2/20) lost to Puducherry 95/4 in 19 overs (S. Karthik 26; Shivam Dube 2/8) by six wickets.