


DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | THURSDAY | 21 JANUARY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 33.0°C
Min: 18.0°C
RH: 73%
Rainfall: NIL

Forecast: Clear.
Max/Min temp.
30/18 °C

COVID-19
COUNT

CASES

DEATHS

(+14,366)

(+143)

1,06,10,473

1,52,743

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+267)

(+2)

TS: 2,92,395

1,583

(+173)

(+0)

AP: 8,86,418

7,142

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

9,68,87,732

DEATHS

20,73,167

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES

219

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Pushya Shuddha Ashtami till 3.50 pm
Star: Ashwini till 3.35 pm
Variyam: 11.06 am to 12.54 pm; 2.24 am to 4.13 am (Friday)
Durmuhurtam: 10.36 am to 11.20 am; 3.03 pm to 3.47 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
HIJRI CALENDAR
Jamadi- ul- Akhir 7,1442 AH
PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)
Fajar: 5.40 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 4.30 pm
Maghrib: 5.48 pm
Isha: 8.30 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.35 AM
SUNSET TODAY 5.52 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 12.06 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 00.54 AM

COUNTER POINT



Welcome to your office, Mr President!

SHORT TAKES

CBI's DSP held for corruption

FIR filed against Tandav makers

New Delhi: The CBI has arrested one of its deputy superintendents of police R.K. Rishi and inspector Kapil Dhankad along with an advocate in connection with an alleged bribery ring run by them within the agency to help companies accused of siphoning off bank loan funds worth ₹4,300 crore, officials said.

Mumbai: Police on Wednesday registered an FIR against the makers and cast of Amazon Prime's web series *Tandav*, based on a complaint lodged by a BJP MLA in the city.

HC halts SIT probe into Waltair Club

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 20

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on Wednesday stalled inquiry by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) into the prestigious Waltair Club.

Advocates N. Ashwini Kumar and D. V. Sitharam Murthy, who filed a writ peti-

NATION | 4

Gujarat renames dragon fruit Kamalam

WORLD | 5

Trump pardons Bannon, 73 others in last minute

SPORTS | 8

Rajasthan Royals release captain Smith

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Joe Biden is sworn in as US President by US Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts during his inauguration on the West Front of the US Capitol on Wednesday in Washington. Biden took the oath of office by placing his left hand on his large 127-year-old family Bible, which was held by his wife Jill. Kamala Harris (who looks on at Biden on the right) was sworn in as Vice-President,

becoming the first woman, the first woman of Indian origin and the first person of colour to occupy the second-most important position in the US. Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Biden and Harris and said he was committed to working with them to take the India-US partnership to greater heights. — AFP

■ More reports on Page 5

It's a new day in America

Biden to end country cap on H1B visas with his first orders

Washington, Jan. 20: In his first hours as US President, Joe Biden will aim to strike at the heart of President Donald Trump's policy legacy, signing a series of executive actions that will reverse his predecessor's orders on immigration, climate change and handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

Biden, who began his day by tweeting, "It's a new day in America", will send a comprehensive immigration Bill to Congress which among other things proposes to eliminate the per country cap for employment-based green cards, a move that would benefit hundreds and thousands of Indian IT professionals in the US.

● **THE NEW BILL** provides an immediate pathway to green cards for individuals who meet certain criteria as they were dreamers or have been recipients of the Temporary Protected Status and meet certain criteria.

Called the US Citizenship Act of 2021, the legislation modernises the immigration system, according to an incoming White House official.

It prioritises keeping families together, grows the country's economy, responsibly manages the border with smart invest-

ments, addresses the root causes of migration from Central America, and also ensures that the US remains a refuge for those fleeing persecution, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Describing this as a common-sense approach to solving immigration challenges, focusing on what works, the US Citizenship Act 2021 creates a roadmap to citizenship for a population that lives and works in the United States.

January 1, 2021 is the cut-off date for those undocumented workers. Two-thirds of undocumented immigrants have been in the US for 10 years or longer. It provides an immediate pathway to

green cards for individuals who meet certain criteria as they were dreamers or have been recipients of the Temporary Protected Status, or are farm workers and meet certain criteria. They can apply for citizenship three years later. For those who don't meet those qualifications, there will be another path to citizenship, where they would be in an interim status for five years. Afterwards they would be eligible to apply for citizenship within three years after becoming green card holders.

According to the incoming White House official, the Bill reforms the family-based immigration system. — PTI

AP to start door delivery of PDS ration from today

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 20

In a first of its kind programme in AP, YSR Congress government is starting on Thursday door delivery of rations made available under the Public Distribution System.

Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy will formally launch 2,500 door delivery vehicles in Krishna, Guntur and West

Godavari districts at a function being held at the iconic Benz Circle in Vijayawada on the day.

The scheme will benefit 26,39,363 cardholders throughout the state.

Door delivery of rations is part of Jagan's promise during his 3,648-km-long padayatra as then opposition leader, when he witnessed the plight of elderly and differently-abled people who had to wait in long

queues to get their supplies.

The Chief Minister also promised that quality rice will be delivered to cardholders, thereby removing irregularities within the PDS system.

The door-delivery system will cost the state government an additional ₹830 crore per annum.

■ Page 2: Swarna variety rice being supplied: Nani

HIDDEN | DANGER 29 people lost consciousness, turned dizzy

Pesticide hand in mystery illness

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 20

Pesticide residues in vegetables are suspected to be one of the major causes for the mystery illness that affected 29 persons, who lost consciousness, suffered dizziness and convulsions at Pulla village in West Godavari's Bhimadole mandal. The incidents were reported from January 17 to 19, although no fresh case was reported on Wednesday.

A majority of people of all ages living in several localities in the village suffered from loss of consciousness for two to three minutes or giddiness while a few suffered seizures.

● **HORTICULTURE** authorities say that local farmers raise paddy at Pulla village and vegetables are being brought from other places.

● **WATER SAMPLES** from an overhead water tank in the village have been sent for analysis.

● **A MAJORITY** of people of all ages living in several localities in the village suffered from loss of consciousness for two to three minutes

Local health authorities maintain that unlike the mystery illness that affected over 600 people in Eluru

located nearly 30 km away from Pulla in December where a majority of them suffered seizures, in Pulla case only a few of them showed such symptoms. Of the total affected persons, four are undergoing treatment at the government hospital in Eluru while the rest were discharged. Pulla primary health centre medical officer Dr Leela Prasad said, "Though both Eluru and Pulla cases of mystery illness are having some similarities but in Pulla only a few affected suffered seizures while in Eluru, a majority of them exhibited such a symptom. "We suspect that pesticide residues in vegetables

might be affecting the brains gradually. Even though all the family members eat the same cooked vegetables, only those who are weak might be vulnerable. However, we are awaiting analysis reports of the samples to find out the exact cause for such illness."

Samples of rice, vegetables, water, milk and pulses have been sent to IIC, Hyderabad and to other labs for analysis.

Director of health Dr T. Geetha Prasadini said, "No fresh case of illness is reported at Pulla on Wednesday. We are awaiting test reports of food and water samples to ascertain the reasons."

Centre offers to freeze farm laws

Farmer leaders to respond to the offer on Friday after their internal consultations

SANJAY KAW | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 20

The Centre on Wednesday proposed to suspend the three contentious farm laws for one or one-and-a-half years and set up a joint committee to discuss the laws to end the stalemate, but the farmers leaders did not immediately accept the proposal and said they will respond only after they hold internal consultations, possibly on Thursday. The two sides will meet again on Friday for the eleventh round of negotiations.

The government made this offer during the tenth round of talks with the representatives of 41 farmers' unions at Vigyan Bhavan here. After the meeting, agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar said: "During the discussions, we said the government was ready to put on hold the farm laws for one year or one and a half years. I am happy the farmers' unions have taken this very seriously and said they would consider it tomorrow (Thursday) and convey their decision on January 22."

SC won't restrain kisan tractor rally

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 20

The Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to entertain the Centre's plea seeking to restrain the agitating farmers from taking out a *kisan* tractor rally on the Republic Day in Delhi and regretted that the "reputation" of the four members of the expert committee set up by it to end the deadlock was being "torn to shreds".

However, it issued notice on the Bharatiya Kisan Union (Lokshakti) plea for reconstitution of the expert committee formed to hear all parties to the dispute and submit a report with its recommendations.

Telling attorney-general K.K. Venugopal and solicitor-general Tushar Mehta that it was for the police to take a call on allowing or

not allowing the rally, Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde, heading a three-judge bench that included Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian, asked them to withdraw the application the seeking restraint order, which they did.

The court also turned down a plea by the attorney-general and solicitor-general to keep the application pending and consider it on January 25 depending on the situation.

"No, no. This is not a matter for the court to decide. You have the powers under the law", CJ Bobde said, reiterating: "We have told you it is for the police to decide. We won't pass orders. We will allow you to withdraw this application. You are the authority. You decide."

agriculture ministry officials and advised them to put the three laws on hold till the matter was sorted out between the two sides.

The Supreme Court has already put on hold till further orders all the

three farm laws. While staying the three farm laws, the Supreme Court appointed a four-member panel to talk to farmers to end the stalemate. But the farmers union objected to the make-up of the panel.

House site patta plan extended: CM

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 20

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has directed the officials to create awareness, give training, and conduct tests to improve the efficiency of village/ward secretariat staff on Comprehensive Land Survey.

During a review meeting on the YSR Jagananna Saswatha Bhoomi Hakku-Bhoomi Rakshana scheme held here on Wednesday, the Chief Minister said tests should be conducted at regular intervals to improve knowledge and efficiency among the staff on issues related to comprehensive survey so that they can serve the people better.

CM Jagan said the new colonies to be built for the

poor should be included in the survey and taken into account in the preparation of maps. Every house in the colonies should be given a unique ID. Employees of village secretariats participating in land survey should set apart two hours daily for listening to grievances and solving them.

The CM directed officials to prepare standard operation procedures (SOPs) for the survey process from surveyor to joint collector, and said they should be responsible for the work. Prepare SOPs on mobile tribunals, he said. Jagan said the house site patta distribution programme has been extended till January 30.

■ Page 2: Ensure pattas to eligible in 90 days: CM

MANTRI BALINENI DONATES ₹3 LAKH FOR RAM TEMPLE

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, JAN. 20

AP energy and forests minister Balineni Srinivasa Reddy contributed ₹3 lakh on Wednesday for construction of the Ram mandir in Ayodhya.

A team of senior RSS members met the minister at his home in Ongole and urged him to be a part of the mega exercise to build a shrine for Lord Ram. Reddy said this was a great opportunity for his family to make a donation and urged all people to make the endeavour a success. He appreciated the RSS for seeking donations from everyone.

HC QUASHES PART OF FIR AGAINST THREE DALIT FARMERS

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 20

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on Wednesday quashed a part of the first information report (FIR) registered against three farmers, belonging to Scheduled Caste hailing from Krishnayapalem in Guntur district.

The single-judge bench headed by Justice M. Satyanarayana Murthy observed that registration of crime by the police on the basis of a complaint lodged by Ravi Babu against the petitioners belonging to SC was a serious illegality.

The court said that in the absence of any allegation to constitute criminal conspiracy, the proceedings against the petitioners for the offence punishable under Section 120 B were liable to be quashed.

So was the case with offences booked under sections 3(1) (r)(s) and 3 (2) of the SC/ST Act as the accused belonging to SC, the high court observed.

The court also did not accept the offences like unlawful assembly punishable under Section 143 of IPC and also wrongful restraint punishable under Section 340 of IPC and others as the petitioners were booked for such offences.

However, the court observed that the plea was partly allowed and permitted the police to proceed against the petitioners to investigate the crime for the offence punishable under Section 506 (2) of IPC.

■ Page 2: Registering crime was illegal: Counsel

SHORT TAKES

EX-INTELLIGENCE CHIEF GETS RELIEF ON ARREST

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 20

The AP High Court issued an order, directing the police not to take any hasty decision to arrest former intelligence chief A.B. Venkateswara Rao for three weeks.

Single bench judge Justice K. Lalitha continued the hearing on the petition filed by Rao on Wednesday and issued an order extending the interim order issued earlier, directing the police not to arrest Rao, by three more weeks.

Earlier, Rao who was allegedly involved in a scam in purchase of security equipment, had filed a petition in the court alleging that the state government was trying to arrest him and pleaded the court to issue directions not to arrest him.

As the public prosecutor asked for two weeks time to file a reply on the issue, the judge accepted it and posted the next hearing in the case after two weeks.

REGISTERING CRIME WAS ILLEGAL: COUNSEL

FROM PAGE 1

Earlier, Epuri Ravi Babu had lodged a complaint with the police alleging that when he tried to settle a quarrel as some people parked a tractor across the Krishnayapalem bridge disrupting passage of vehicles on October 23, 2020, he was abused by caste and even threatened to be trodden with the tractor.

He named 11 persons in the complaint. Based on it, police booked them under Sections 120 (B), 143, 341, 506 read with 149 IPC and other sections of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

Subsequently, three farmers filed a petition in the High Court seeking quashing of the FIR registered against them. Their main grievance was that though they belonged to SC, they were booked under SC/ST Act, 1989.

Petitioners' counsel Karumanchi Indraneel Babu argued that registration of a crime against a SC based on a complaint lodged by another SC, was a grave illegality.

GALLA TO RAISE AMARAVATI ISSUE IN LOK SABHA

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 20

Guntur MP Galla Jayadev of Telugu Desam said he will raise the issue of Amaravati being the only capital of the AP state in the forthcoming session of the Parliament. He was speaking after participating in the Amaravati Sankalpa Rally organised to coincide with 400 days of continuous protests by people of the city for retaining Amaravati as the sole capital.

Activists of Telugu Yuva, Communist parties and farmers joined the procession taken out on the occasion in which the TD Lok Sabha member drove a tractor in support of Amaravati farmers. Recalling the High Court verdict on alleged insider trading in Amaravati lands, Jaydev pointed out that YSRC government's campaign alleging such trading is totally false. He observed that judges can be changed but justice cannot change. He expressed confidence that Amaravati farmers will get justice from courts.

COURT RULED OUT PROPAGANDA BY RULERS: TD

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JAN. 20

Reddeppagari Srinivasa Reddy, TD politburo member, wanted to know what the government had to say in response to the High Court verdict that there was no insider trading in the capital.

Welcoming the High Court single bench verdict on the issue of panchayat elections, he said ministers and YSR Congress MLAs should welcome the verdict.

The court ruled that all the propaganda made by the rulers that insider trading was taking place in the capital Amaravati was fabricated. He said that Jagan Mohan Reddy was using his powers to make false allegations against opposition leaders.

He said that if the Chief Minister had any respect for the High Court, he would have to resign from his post immediately.

TD leaders trying to fan communal feelings: Min

Appalaraju says Naidu hatching conspiracy against Jagan govt

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 20

Minister for animal husbandry Dr Seediri Appalaraju alleged on Wednesday that the opposition Telugu Desam was trying to fan communal feelings by indulging in a series of attacks on temples.

"TD leaders were involved in the desecration of the Nandeeshwar (Nandi) idol," the minister said, adding there was evidence about a political conspiracy to defame the YSRC government, including video footage of TD leaders forcibly shifting the Nandi idol from the temple to the nearby road.

The minister said this was part of a conspiracy hatched by TD leader Chandrababu Naidu against the Jagan government. A case should be filed against Naidu under section 153A for sensationalizing religious matters, and under sections 499, 500 for defaming a political party or individual, just as it was done during the Gujarat riots, he said.

Appalaraju asked as to why the TD leaders remained silent on the Santhabommali incident, while they created a huge ruckus over the Ramatheertham issue. "The desecration of the Nandeeshwar idol was clearly recorded by CCTV cameras. TD AP state president Atchannaidu's men, including some TD activists and a journalist from their favoured media

Govt appoints nodal officer to reconstruct demolished temples

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 20

Minister for endowments Vellampalli Srinivas Rao said the government has appointed a nodal officer to start reconstruction of nine temples in Vijayawada which were demolished during the term of the Telugu Desam government. The government has sanctioned funds for the reconstruction and works would start very soon.

Srinivas Rao said endowments additional commissioner-2, K Ramachandra Mohan, has been appointed as nodal officer for the temples' reconstruction project. The CM recently laid foundation for reconstruction of the demolished temples and the endowment department took measures to resume the reconstruction process.

He said the demolished Rahu-Kethu temple would be reconstructed at a cost of ₹70 lakh, the Seethamma Padalu with

house, were involved in the act."

The minister said all these incidents hinted that Naidu himself gave the orders to incite religious feelings and hatred in the state. "The police s filed cases against 22 per-

₹9.50 lakh, the Dakshin-amukha Anjaneya temple with ₹31.50 lakh, the Saniswara temple with ₹2 crore, the Anjaneya temple below the Durga temple with ₹20 lakh, the Seetarama Lakshmana Dasanjaneya temple with ₹10 lakh, the Veerababu temple with ₹10 lakh and the Gosala Venugopalakrishna Mandiram with ₹20 lakh.

Srinivas Rao recalled that Naidu "mercilessly demolished temples during TD government's term but the BJP did not object to such heinous action though its leader was minister for endowment."

Naidu, he said, was staging dramas to gain votes for his party in the byelection via resort to the Hindutva agenda. "But, the people are seeing through such games."

The minister affirmed that the YSRC government would complete the reconstruction of all demolished temples without any bias.

sons in relation to the Santhabommali incident, including men of Atchannaidu and some other TD activists. TD is fully responsible for the incident.

Appalaraju said Naidu has been evolving strate-

● A case should be filed against Naidu under section 153A for sensationalizing religious matters, and under sections 499, 500 for defaming a political party or individual, just as it was done during the Gujarat riots, he said.

● Appalaraju asked as to why the TD leaders remained silent on the Santhabommali incident, while they created a huge ruckus over the Ramatheertham issue.

● Appalaraju said Naidu has been evolving strategies to divert the people's attention every time the government undertook some activity for public welfare.

gies to divert the people's attention every time the government undertook some activity for public welfare. "As CM Jagan Mohan Reddy is launching a scheme on Thursday for door-to-door delivery of ration supplies, TD leaders are getting impatient and hatching conspiracies to divert people's attention, he said.

The minister said Chandrababu Naidu's only ambition is to make his son Lokesh the CM. "This is highly impossible, considering his (lack of) abilities," he said and added that Lokesh had no locus standi to comment on the CM's visit to Delhi this week.

COPS DEPLOYED AFTER RAO'S ARREST

FROM PAGE 1

A large number of police personnel were deployed at Kala Venkata Rao's residence after his arrest. After the news spread like a wildfire, a large number of TDP leaders rushed to his house and demanded his immediate release. They also raised slogans against the government.

It may be recalled that TD activists and few leaders allegedly attacked the convoy of Vijaya Sai Reddy while he was returning from Sri Kodandarama Swamy Temple in Ramateertham. The incident took place after Vijay Sai Reddy inspected the beheaded idol of Lord Rama at the temple and performed pujas along with some YSRC leaders.

Reddy said in his complaint that one of his bodyguards Hari sustained injuries in the assault launched by Venkata Rao and his henchmen as per the directions of TD chief N Chandrababu Naidu and TD leader K Atchannaidu, who also had visited Ramateertham on that day.

Give pattas to eligible within 90 days: CM

FROM PAGE 1

He directed officials to ensure house site pattas are allotted to the eligible within 90 days.

Officials told the CM that the distribution programme is delayed because they are showing the house site to the beneficiary besides giving the patta.

The officials explained to the CM about the workflow of the registration process of land in village secretariats.

The CM said registration services should start in village secretariats once the comprehensive land survey is completed. Officials must prepare an action plan for village secretariat staff to enable them learn the registration process directly from registration offices.

He said a call centre must be set up with experts and senior officials to clear the doubts of employees of village secretariats once they start the registration process at village / ward secretariats so that there won't be any disturbance to the registration process.

State tried to take club in 2013: Advocates

FROM PAGE 1

The advocates pointed out that in 2013, an attempt was made by the then state government to take over the Waltair Club land. But the High Court in W.P. No. 13227 of 2013 vide an order dated April 13, 2013 stayed it. After that, till date, no AP government filed any counter affidavit setting out its claim. Ashwani Kumar, supplementing submissions of his senior Sitharam Murthy, submitted that the term of SIT had ended. Moreover, the SIT lacked jurisdiction to enquire into properties of

Waltair Club. This is because the alleged original lessees – the Perla family – claim to have filed a civil suit for resumption of the land. As such, SIT has no jurisdiction to entertain any petition in a private civil dispute, the advocate contended.

Thus, the whole process of SIT undertaking an enquiry is unlawful, without jurisdiction, and without power. It is thus liable to be interdicted by the High Court, the advocates maintained.

Additional advocate general P. Sudhakar Reddy, appearing for SIT, argued

that the Special Investigation Team is within its term and has the power to examine any dispute.

The High Court, however, expressed displeasure with these submissions. It passed an order that the High Court is prima facie satisfied that interests of petitioner Waltair Club are to be protected.

It thus granted a stay on all further proceedings before SIT. The court further directed SIT not to interfere with the title, possession, occupation and affairs of Waltair Club.

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 20

Calling the forthcoming Tirupati parliamentary by-election a battle between good and evil, justice and injustice; Telugu Desam state president Kinjarapu Atchannaidu exhorted party workers to work towards TDP's victory for teaching AP Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy a lesson on performing well.

Addressing a meeting after inaugurating TD's Tirupati by-poll office near Renigunta on Wednesday, Atchannaidu said, "Keep aside politics for some time. Let us teach the Andhra CM a lesson to

perform well for rest of his time. If we make Telugu Desam win this by-election, Jagan will be forced to behave well, whether he rules for three or six months. But eventually, he will have to face jail," he observed. TD state president alleged that AP CM is desperately trying to divert people's attention

Housing scheme



TTD chairman Y. V. Subbareddy distributes House site pattas to Beneficiaries under Navaratnalu-Pedalandariki Illu programme at Nemam near Kakinada on Wednesday. — DECCAN CHRONICLE

SWARNA VARIETY RICE BEING SUPPLIED: NANI

FROM PAGE 1

Civil supplies minister Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao alias Nani said under the Chandrababu Naidu regime, percentage of husk and coloured grains was high in ration supplied to cardholders. But now, they are supplying Swarna variety of rice with zero percent stones and less than one percent of coloured or damaged grains.

Nani said quality rice will be distributed in reusable bags at doorsteps by taking the cardholders' fingerprints. Every bag of rice will be sealed and tagged with a unique code, giving zero scope for adulteration.

All mobile vehicles will have a GPS system fitted to track PDS deliveries in real-time. Each vehicle will deliver goods for an average of 18 days per month.

For purpose of door delivery, the state government has distributed 9,260 subsidised vehicles to eligible unemployed youth, incurring a cost of Rs. 539 crore. The quantum of subsidy is as much as 60 percent subsidy under the Employment Guarantee Scheme of various corporations.

The value of each vehicle is ₹5.81 lakh of which ₹3.48 lakh is government subsidy. ST corporation has subsidised approximately 700 vehicles, SC corporation 2,300, BC corporation 3,800, Minorities corporation 660, and EWEBC corporation 1,800 vehicles.

Jagan Mohan Reddy government has also started offering ration cards to all eligible people across the state in just 10 days from the date of filing their applications under five categories – issuing of new ration card, division of a ration card, adding members to a rice card, removing members from a rice card and surrendering the rice card.

In the process, 4,93,422 new ration cards have been issued from June 2020 till date.

₹1,000 cr for road repairs in AP: Min

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 20

The Andhra Pradesh government will spend ₹1,000 crore for road repairs, Roads and Buildings minister M. Sankara Narayana has said. He and principal secretary M.T. Krishnababu held a regional review meeting here on Wednesday and said three more such meetings would be held in the state — in East Godavari, Vizianagaram and Srikakulam.

The minister told the media that the meetings would take stock of the prevailing road conditions. A total of ₹1,000 crore would need be spent for repairs before the end of the current financial year, meaning March 31. Recently, ₹200 crore had been sanctioned for repair of roads destroyed in Cyclone Nivar.

The AP Road Development Corporation would spend ₹2,200 crore in the next three years. It would collect a cess of ₹1 per litre of diesel and petrol and this fund would be used for road development.

Similarly, the New Development Bank (NDB) is set to sanction ₹6,000 crore for the state, which would be used for developing double lane roads from district headquarters.

IT MINISTER GAUTAM INAUGURATES SKILL VIGNAN CENTRE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 20

Minister for industries and IT Mekapati Gautam Reddy inaugurated Skill Vignan Centre at APMediTech Zone in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday. Skills, based on biotechnology, would be imparted in this Centre. Addressing a small gathering, the minister said Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy



M. Sankara Narayana

ters to mandal headquarters. As part of this project, 450 bridges would be rebuilt.

Tenders have already been invited for projects using NDB fund. About ₹85 crore could be saved from these works due to the reverse tendering process. This apart, NABARD would be sanctioning ₹1,150 crore for road development under the Infrastructure Development Assistance (NIDA) programme.

"Chief Minister Jagan prevailed on Union road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari for sanction of ₹12,500 crore for development of national highways in the state," Sankar Narayan said.

Principal secretary MT Krishnababu said land acquisition was a key requisite in roads development and widening. With the coordination of district officials, the process was being taken up.

MINISTER SEEKS COOPERATION OF STAFF TO COMPLETE POLAVARAM

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 20

State water sources minister P. Anil Kumar Yadav has said the Polavaram project should be completed by 2022 and called for full cooperation from employees to achieve this objective.

The minister released the 2021 diary of the irrigation department NGOs association at the water resource department office here on Wednesday. He said Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy was giving top priority to the Polavaram project. "The government is taking all steps to complete Polavaram."

Praising the efforts of irrigation employees in implementation of the irrigation schemes, the

minister appealed to them to help the government in a time-bound completion of projects including Polavaram. He promised to resolve their issues sympathetically.

Irrigation department NGOs association state president Bandi Srinivas Rao lamented that the previous government wasted crores of funds by sending people on visit to project sites and put huge work burden on the employees. The employees are ready to render their cooperation for timely completion of the Polavaram project, he said.

APNGOs association state president N. Chandrasekhar Reddy, irrigation department officials and other leaders participated in the programme.

parties only to cover up its failures in stopping attacks on Hindu temples in the state," he charged.

Reminding people that Tirupati is the holy abode of Lord Venkateswara, the state TD president alleged that the Jagan government is converting the spiritual place into a commercial city.



SHORT TAKES

NTR VARSITY
INVITES ONLINE
APPLICATIONSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 20

NTR university of health sciences invited common application form and uploading of documents for admission into several under-graduate courses under competent authority quota for the academic year 2020-21 from 6 pm on Jan. 21 to 4 pm on Feb. 5 in AP.

In a release issued by the registrar here on Wednesday, common online application form for admission into several courses in the colleges affiliated to Dr NTR university of health sciences, Vijayawada, is invited from the eligible candidates. The courses being offered include: BSc nursing four years degree course, BPT, BSc paramedical, Post Basic BSc (nursing) two years degree course.

Eligible candidates are asked to apply online at the university website: <https://apparamed.apntruh.in>.

PROTECTING
CONSUMERS:
APERC CHAIRMANDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 20

Andhra Pradesh Electricity Regulatory Commission chairman Nagarajuna Reddy said the commission was protecting the interests of the consumers. He was speaking at the public hearing on Aggregate Revenue Requirement & Tariff filing for financial year 2021-22 which concluded in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

A total 68 persons participated in the video conference and 20 persons objected on tariff issues. Most of them opined that optimum utilization of renewable source of energy was necessary and many objected to installation of meters to agriculture sector.

APEPDCL CMD Nagalakshmi Selvarajan said policies will be implemented to provide financial benefit to the farmers.

CMD/APSPDCL H. Haranatha Rao, said that distribution company was thankful to the APERC for the approvals on true-ups collection of DTR cost and vigorous pursuance with Government of Andhra Pradesh on realisation of Government arrears.

APCPDCL CMD J. Padmajanardhana Reddy said that compensation for electrical accidents is being paid as per Regulation 2 of 2017.

Energy deputy secretary B.A.V.P. Kumar Reddy said that the State Government is committed to provide uninterrupted 24/7 electricity at affordable prices to the home, commercial and industrial sectors and 9 hours of quality free electricity to the agricultural sector.

GROUNDWATER
LEVELS IMPROVE
IN ANANTAPURDC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, JAN. 20

Anantapur, severely drought hit and known as second lowest rainfall district in the country, is now looking up with availability of groundwater showing significant improvement.

Of particular mention is Avulatheppayapalli in Tadipatri mandal of the district where, groundwater is available at just 10 centimetres of depth, indicating that groundwater levels have improved in the district after many decades.

Anantapur area has a history of groundwater table not being available even after drilling up to 1,000-feet depth. This is mainly due to rain deficit conditions during the past 100 years.

In fact, there was not even a single village, which had water level availability at three metres depth since last year. But this year, a few pockets have recorded availability of water at low levels due to improved groundwater tables in all parts of the district due to heavy rains.

“Presently, five mandals have water level available within three metres of depth. More than 22 mandals have water available in between 3-8 metres depth,” collector Gandham Chandrudu told *Deccan Chronicle*.

Previously, only 15 mandals located adjacent to water bodies, such as High Level Main Canal and sources of other rivers had water levels at 8 metres depth. But water level improved from 3-8 metres within the span of a year in 22 mandals of Anantapur.

AP records 173 cases
of Covid-19, no deaths

Chittoor registers 46, followed by 27 in Visakhapatnam

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 20

Andhra Pradesh registered 173 fresh cases of Covid-19 and no death in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities issued Covid-19 bulletin here on Wednesday reporting that out of 46,852 samples tested, 173 were found infected with Coronavirus. Out of a total number of 1,26,90,165 samples tested so far in the state, 8,86,418 persons were found infected with the virus and of them, 8,77,639 were recovered while 1,637 are still active with the virus.

Among daily cases of confirmed Coronavirus, Chittoor registered the

COVID-19 VACCINATION DRIVE
STARTS IN ANDHRA HOSPITALSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 20

Krishna district Collector AMD Imtiaz asserted on the need of administering Covid-19 vaccine to staff by the hospitals to restrain the pandemic. The Collector inaugurated administering of Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin in the Andhra Hospitals at Vijayawada which is the first private hospital in the city to start vaccination to its staff.

highest 46 followed by 27 in Visakhapatnam, 19 each in Krishna and

Guntur, 12 in East Godavari, 11 in Kadapa, eight in Anantapur,

seven each in Kurnool, Prakasam and Vizianagaram, four in Nellore and three each in Srikakulam and West Godavari.

Krishna district registered the highest number of cumulative active cases of Coronavirus with 259 followed by 248 in Guntur, 201 in East Godavari, 192 in Kadapa, 143 in Chittoor, 137 in Visakhapatnam, 131 in Nellore, 74 in Prakasam, 58 each in West Godavari and Kurnool, 45 in Anantapur, 54 in Srikakulam and 37 in Vizianagaram.

No case of death of Coronavirus infected patient reported throughout the state keeping the death toll constant at 7,142.

CHINNA JEEYAR
SWAMY VISITS
ANCIENT TEMPLEDC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JAN. 20

Hindu monk Chinna Jeeyar Swamy visited ancient temples in kadapa district on Wednesday. He visited Nandalur Soumyanatha Swamy, Ontimitta Kodanda Ramalayam and Siddavatam Ranganatha Swamy temples.

The temple priests and officers welcomed him with purna Kumbham. Swamy performed special pujas in the respective temples. He said that temples are our ancient treasure and it is everyone's responsibility to protect them. Swamy's visit comes in the wake of attacks on temples across the state.

₹70 lakh offered to
Red Cross: BalineniDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 20

Forests and energy minister Balineni Srinivasa Reddy promised ₹70 lakh from District Mineral Fund to Red Cross Society in Ongole to buy important medical equipment.

He was reacting to an appeal made by the chairman of Red Cross Society in Prakasam District, Prakash Babu during a programme held at the Society premises on the occasion of the launch of week-long service activities on Wednesday.

The minister praised

the Red Cross for outstanding services when Covid brought all activities in the country to a grinding halt last year. He reminded that the Society had distributed 1.50 lakh food packets to the migrant workers then.

Speaking on the occasion, District Collector Pola Bhaskar said they would organise two blood donation camps per month in each constituency from April this year to overcome the shortage of blood in Prakasam district. He said they are also preparing an action plan to create awareness.

PORT MANAGEMENT REBUKED FOR
RETRENCHING 500 WORKERSDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 20

CITU state president Ch Narsinga Rao came down heavily against the management of Krishnapatnam Port for removing 500 workers from the job illegally during a protest before the Collectorate in Nellore on Wednesday.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr Narasimha Rao alleged that the administration of the Port is violating the labour rights while demanding to implement the labour Acts in the organisation. CITU District functionaries K. Ajay Babu, T.V.V. Prasad, former Deputy Mayor of Nellore Madala Venkateswarlu took part.

ATTACK ON STONE CRUSHING
UNIT BY YSRC MLA CLOSE AIDESDC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, JAN. 20

A tense situation prevailed at Chadam village in Rayadurgam mandal where some 50 aides of YSRC MLA Kapu Ramachandra Reddy attacked workers of a stone crusher unit on Wednesday.

At least six workers and four others were seriously injured in the attack and two of them were in critical condition in a hospital.

According to Lakshmi Devi running the stone crusher unit in

Rayaduregam area for the past 9 years, a group of men close to the MLA were threatening her and workers to exit from the site. “The MLA's close aides and his son wanted to grab the unit,” she said.

The woman said she refused to hand over the unit and continued with the activities.

These men also continued threatening her and her workers for the past few months.

“Some 50 men came and ransacked the crusher unit and attacked the workers,” she said.

BOY WHO
STABBED GIRL
FOUND DEADDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 20

Dilli Babu, the 19-year-old who was at large after stabbing his 20-year-old girlfriend to death was found dead in the forest area near Thurpu palli village in Penumuru mandal of Chittoor district on Wednesday morning.

He ended his life by hanging himself to a tree inside the forest area, police said.

Dilli Babu is the lone accused in the sensational murder case of G. Gayatri, reported from Thurpu Palli in Penumuru mandal on Tuesday. The accused and the victim, who fell in love with each other some time ago, had eloped from home and got married on December 11 last year.

However, their parents traced the couple in Tirupati and brought them back to their native place. They were later counselled by the police and were separated. Following the unexpected development, Dilli Babu who developed a grudge on Gayatri after she started avoiding him has waylaid her and killed her in a fit of rage on Tuesday.

The local police booked cases against Dilli Babu under the Nirbhaya and Disha Acts and launched a search operation to nab the accused. However, he was found to have ended his life by hanging himself to a tree in the forest area near Thurpu palli forests on Wednesday. Police shifted the dead body of Dilli Babu to the government hospital for autopsy and further investigation is on.

● The two were in love and got married on December 11 last year after elopement

● Dilli Babu who developed a grudge on Gayatri after she started avoiding him has waylaid her and killed her in a fit of rage on Tuesday.

● Police booked cases against Dilli Babu under the Nirbhaya and Disha Acts and launched a search operation

No adverse reactions to
vaccine, says collectorDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, JAN. 20

Claiming that there are no adverse effects because of vaccination among 6,000 people who took the vaccine in Nellore district, District Collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu has appealed to the public to join the mega exercise without any apprehensions.

He was addressing a large gathering during the distribution of house sites at Gummalladibba village in Kovur mandal on Wednesday.

The collector said that they are planning to generate employment to 2 to 3 lakh people every day under National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme by allotting Rs 100 Cr more to the scheme.

The amount will be used for building Rythu Bharosa Centres, Village

TTD EO INSPECTS SV AYURVEDA
PHARMACY AT NARASINGAPURAMDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 20

TTD executive officer Dr K.S. Jawahar Reddy along with Tirupati JEO P. Basanth Kumar inspected the SV Ayurveda Pharmacy at Narasingapuram near Tirupati on Wednesday.

As part of it, he went through the exhibition stalls and nursery set up

for spreading awareness among students on raw materials, examined research halls, formulation units etc. Dr Narappa Reddy, in charge of the Ayurveda Pharmacy explained the process and systems of Ayurveda medicine to the TTD EO and JEOs. Later they also visited the Pharmacy Bhavan and godowns.

Secretariats, Health Clinics and Tanks apart from CC Roads and Drainages in the villages, the collector noted.

He claimed that they are distributing 1,73,850 house site pattas in 177 layouts in Nellore district while advising the eligible to apply for house sites before

January 26 if their names are not found in the list. He assured house pattas to such people within 90 days.

Speaking on the occasion, Kovur legislator Nallapareddy Prasannakumar Reddy said that they have sanctioned funds to build 7,444 permanent houses in Kovur segment.

NGT takes up DC
impact on KMC issueD. SIVA RAMI REDDI |
DC
KURNOOL, JAN. 20

The National Green Tribunal's south zone bench in Chennai took up suo motu a news report in *Deccan Chronicle* on December 10 last titled, ‘Kurnool shocked by the quality of KMC water’, and heard the matter via video conference on Wednesday.

About 22 respondents have been arrayed including secretary to the Union environment-forest-climate change ministry (MoEF). Notices will be issued to the respondents.

The failure of Kurnool Municipal Corporation (KMC) in providing safe drinking water to its citizens was highlighted in

the DC report. KMC primarily depends on the Tungabhadra river which is polluted, but this has been glossed over by successive special officers, the report had noted.

Elected representatives, government officials and prominent citizens of Kurnool city thanked *Deccan Chronicle* for highlighting civic issues.

Pollution in Handri and Tungabhadra, the two rivers that flow across Kurnool city, has been causing health risks to people residing on the river bank. The river needs to be cleared of plastic waste and other non-degradable material, as also lead and cadmium. Regional pollution control board

officials say Tungabhadra waters showed marginally higher toxins after Pushkarams.

The RPCB has conducted a test on the quality of water in Tungabhadra at start of December after completion of the Tungabhadra Pushkarams and found that two parameters, namely biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) and total coliform bacteria, were exceeding the standard limits.

Citizens of Kurnool hoped that the NGT order would help in supply of safe drinking water.

“I think Kurnool may get a sewerage treatment plant with the latest amenities, said a senior citizen.

Shortage of carry
bags at templeDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JAN. 20

Devotees on a visit to the world-renowned Srikalahastheeswara temple, located in Srika-lahasti town of Chittoor district, are facing inconvenience due to the shortage of prasadam carry bags at the prasadam distribution counters.

The devotees are complaining about the temple administration's inaction in preventing the shortage in the first place at the most prominent Shaivite temple, which is famous for the Rahu-Ketu poojas performed here and is being thronged by more than 25,000 devotees a day.

The temple administration cooks various prasadam including Laddu, Vada, Jilebi and Pulihora and offers them to the presiding deities inside the temple.

The prasadam were later sold to the devotees and the sales procedures have been outsourced to a private contractor.

The issue of shortage of carry bags was there for more than a week now.

The devasthanam officials, however, realised the issue only after a few devotees, who faced inconvenience with the shortage of carry bags, took the issue to the notice of the temple administration.

Voice of the people



Representatives from various Human Rights organisations stage protest the UAPA Act by the government, near GVMC Gandhi Statue junction in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

— DC

3 Janashakti associates among
six held in TD leader's murderDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JAN. 20

The Guntur police has cracked the mystery behind the murder of former Telugu Desam sarpanch P Ankulu and arrested six persons including three members of the Janashakti leaving out.

Guntur rural SP Vishal Gunni said on Wednesday that there was no political involvement in the murder.

The six were Karpurapu Venkata Kotaiah, Gurram Venkateswara Reddy, Pottasiri China Sankara Rao from Sivaram, Mekala China Koteswara Rao, Pottasiri Anka Rao and Addanki Ramesh.

The SP said Koteswara Rao, China Sankara Rao and Anka Rao were associ-

ated with Janashakti, a banned organisation. They took the help of three others to commit the murder. TD leaders had suspected involvement of some YSRC leaders in the murder. “Four teams had been formed for the investigation. It was found that an old rivalry led to the murder,” the SP said.

“There was no political conspiracy. In the afternoon on January 3, Chinna Koteswara Rao informed Ankulu that some party leaders had come to meet him. Chinna Shankara Rao and Chinna Koteswara Rao went to an apartment by auto-rickshaw, while Anka Rao and Ramesh reached there by a motorcycle. Ankulu came by car and entered the apart-

ment,” the SP said about the incident.

“They served food mixed with powdered sleeping pills to Ankulu. He felt drowsy and tried to call his driver. Ramesh put a towel around Ankulu's neck while Chinna Shankar grabbed his legs. Anka Rao slit the throat of Ankulu with a knife. All the accused left the scene after ascertaining he was dead. The gang hid the knife in a ditch near the Mother Theresa's school next to the Muthyalampadu village road.”

The SP said police teams using latest technology nabbed all the assailants in a short span of time.

He congratulated the police team for its excellent work.

COPS RECOVER
STOLEN GOLD
WORTH ₹30 LAKHDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JAN. 20

The Visakhapatnam police cracked a major gold theft that took place at a beach side resort and recovered 530 grams of gold worth ₹30 lakh. One burglar was arrested in this connection. The arrested person was identified as 29-year-old Pokathota Gangadhar. Commissioner of police Manish Kumar Sinha told reporters that soon after being released from prison, Gangadhar had planned to scale the resort wall and steal ornaments and valuables during the marriage ceremony in the resort.

A clue left by the thief helped the police.

SHORT TAKES

MUMBAI POLICE FILE FIR AGAINST ‘TANDAV’ TEAM

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, JAN. 20

Mumbai police on Wednesday registered an FIR based on a complaint filed by BJP MLA Ram Kadam about web series *Tandav*. Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh said that action will be taken in the case as per law. Meanwhile, a four-member team of Uttar Pradesh Police arrived in Mumbai to conduct a probe into a case registered in Lucknow against the web series.

In a related development, the Bombay high court granted transit anticipatory bail for three weeks to Ali Abbas Zafar, the director of *Tandav*. He has been granted bail in connection with the FIR registered in the UP. The transit pre-arrest bail has been granted to enable him to approach the appropriate court for regular anticipatory bail.

The said FIR was registered at Hazratganj Police Station in Lucknow. Several people are named in the FIR and the team of cops from Lucknow intend to interrogate all those who were named in the FIR, before taking any action.

The UP police team, which has already reached the city, will first approach the Mumbai police for local assistance.

While several FIRs were filed across the country against the makers, Amazon Prime Video and the actors, the makers had also issued an unconditional apology on Tuesday for unintentionally hurting anyone’s religious sentiments.

Despite that, a group of BJP supporters led by BJP MLA Ram Kadam held protests in Mumbai’s BKC against the show.

OVER 7 LAKH BENEFICIARIES GET VACCINATED

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 20

In a significant achievement in India’s Covid-19 trajectory, the active caseload slipped below two lakhs (1.97 lakh) after six months and 24 days. On Wednesday, India also registered one of the lowest daily new confirmed Covid-19 cases per million population in the last seven days. There were 13,823 new positive cases and 162 deaths in the last one day. This decline in daily new cases has also contributed to the shrinkage in active caseload.

On the other hand, 7,86,842 beneficiaries have been vaccinated for Covid-19 in the last five days, out of which 1,12,007 persons were vaccinated on Wednesday. Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra are the few states where high number of vaccinations took place. On Wednesday, 82 cases of Adverse Effect From immunization (AEFI) were reported following the vaccination.

Ten people were hospitalised due to AEFI out of which three are under observation — one each in Delhi, Murshidabad (West Bengal) and Chitradurga (Karnataka) while others were discharged. So far four deaths of beneficiaries who took the jab have taken place ever since the vaccination drive began on Saturday. While the post mortem of a healthcare worker from Telangana is going on, officials said three others died due to other reasons not related to vaccination.

The 42-year-old Telangana healthcare worker was inoculated on Tuesday. He later complained of chest pain and died early on Wednesday. Out of the four deaths, three have suffered cardiac arrest while one died due to cardio-pulmonary disease.

Final checks



Indian Air Force Rafale jet and Jaguar aircraft fly past Rajpath during the rehearsals for Republic Day Parade 2021 in New Delhi on Monday.

— PTI

MP rocked by 4 rapes in 10 days

Cong slams Shivraj govt for having failed to check growing incidents of rape in state

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, JAN. 20

Madhya Pradesh has witnessed barbaric rape of four girls in the last 10 days, triggering public outcry.

In a shocking incident, a 13-year-old girl was raped in her family’s farmland in Jangda village under Ghodadangar police limits in Betul district by a local villager late on Monday evening. The victim had gone to the farm to switch off the motor.

On finding her alone, the accused Sushil Verma (45) raped her and then buried her under a heap of stones, Betul district superintendent of police Shimla Prasad said on Wednesday. The victim’s sisters who came to the farm while searching her late on Monday night, had found her buried in a pit and alerted their father, who carried her to Ghodadangar hospital. She was later referred to Nagpur Medical College hospital. The accused has been arrested.

In another incident, a 13-year-old girl, resident of Umaria, had been raped for three days by nine people.

On January 11, the girl

- IN A SHOCKING incident, a 13-year-old girl, resident of Umaria, had been raped for three days by nine people.

was abducted and taken to Chhatan jungle in Umaria district by two youths, identified as Rahul Kushwaha and Akash Singh, where they allegedly raped her.

She was later taken to a nearby eatery where she was allegedly raped by the ‘dhaba’ owner Paras Soni and four of his associates, according to a complaint lodged by the victim in the local police station.

She was later taken to Chhatan jungle by them where she was gang-raped, she alleged.

According to her complaint, she was then bundled in a Katni-bound truck on January 12 by the accused.

The truck driver had raped her and then dropped her at Kala Badbara check gate. Later, she got a lift in a Umaria-bound truck in which she was raped by the truck driver.

The victim along with her family members filed FIR in the Umaria police station on January 15. While 7 accused were arrested, 2

others were absconding, police said.

On January 10, a widow was raped by three youths in the village of Umilia in Sidhi district. The three accused had then inserted an iron rod in her private parts.

She was battling for life in a hospital in Rewa. Two accused, Lalu kol and Bhailal Patel were arrested, while another accused was absconding, police said.

On Tuesday night, a girl was waylaid by two motorcycle-borne youths in Indore and then taken to nearby railway track where she was allegedly raped by them. Three other people who were waiting there also allegedly raped her.

They then bundled her in a jute sack and threw her on the railway track, police said. She managed to free herself and called her friend who took her to the hospital. The girl has identified one of the accused as Akshaya. All the five accused were absconding, police said.

Senior Congress leader and former chief minister Kamal Nath slammed the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government for having failed to check growing incidents of rape in the state.

Leaking secrets of military ops is treason: Cong

New Delhi, Jan. 20:

Leaking of official secrets of military operations is treason and those involved in it must be punished, the Congress said on Wednesday on the purported WhatsApp chats of *Republic TV* editor-in-chief Arnab Goswami and demanded that action be taken against them and ascertain who leaked the sensitive information.

“Leaking of official secrets is a criminal act. Leaking official secrets about military operation, national security matters, sensitive military operations especially military strike is treason, anti-national. They have to be punished for anti-national activities, for treason. They deserve no mercy,” Antony said.

Referring to the WhatsApp chats between Goswami and ex-BARC CEO Partho Dasgupta, he said India’s national security has never been compromised in such a way and never have the high offices of the prime minister, home minister and others been “brazenly compromised”.

“Does the PM, Union home minister, in fact the entire government have any moral, political, Constitutional right to continue in office after such damning revelations? We demand that the PM should come clean on these accusations immediately in order to restore the severely damaged credibility of the highest office of the country,” a joint statement by the leaders said.

The Congress said it would raise the issue in a big way in Parliament during the budget session starting January 29 and garner support of other parties for a joint offensive against the government including a joint parliamentary committee probe.

It also accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi and top ministers who

SP TO HOLD JOINT RALLY WITH SENA, NCP IN MUMBAI

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, JAN. 20

In a bid to stop the BJP from coming to power in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), the Samajwadi Party (SP) is planning to organise a grand public rally of north Indians in alliance with the Shiv Sena and NCP. SP leader Ram Charitra Nishad met Shiv Sena president and Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray in this regard.

The proposed meeting will be addressed by NCP chief Sharad Pawar, Thackeray and SP national president Akhilesh Yadav. Nishad said that the mega rally is likely to be held in Mumbai after Holi in March.

The BMC polls will be held along with UP Assembly elections in early 2022. Around 24 lakhs voters are north Indian in Mumbai.

are members of the Cabinet Committee on Security of violating the Official Secrets Act and demanded that action be taken against them and ascertain who leaked the sensitive information.

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India, EU hold online talks on maritime security

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 20

India and the European Union (EU) held their first-ever maritime security dialogue in a virtual format on Wednesday during which “developments in maritime security environment, regional cooperation activities, developments of mutual interest and opportunities for cooperation between India and the EU” were discussed.

It may be recalled that India and the EU had — during their 15th bilateral Summit in July last year — agreed to strengthen military-to-military relations and naval cooperation and establish a maritime security dialogue to preserve safety and stability in the Indian Ocean, in what was seen as a veiled but clear signal to China.

In a statement on Wednesday, the ministry of external affairs said, “India and the EU held their first maritime security dialogue in a virtual format on 20 January 2021. The consultations involved exchanges on developments in maritime security environment,

regional cooperation activities, developments of mutual interest and opportunities for cooperation between India and the EU.”

The ministry of external affairs added, “The EU-India Maritime Dialogue was chaired by Director Joanneke Balfourt on the EEAS side and Joint Secretary Sandeep Arya on the Indian side. The dialogue seeks to develop mutual understanding and cooperation opportunities between India and the EU in the maritime security domain as another factor of the strategic partnership between the two sides consistent with the India-EU Roadmap to 2025.”

It may be recalled that India, along with the United States, Japan and Australia, is a member of the four nation Quad, an arrangement that aims to preserve a “rules-based order” in the Indo-Pacific region. In a major move, EU-member nation France had on Tuesday announced that there would be a “strategic triangle” along with India and Japan “committed to a rules-based Indo-Pacific” region.

BARC ex-CEO’s bail rejected in TRP scam

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, JAN. 20

A Sessions court in Mumbai on Wednesday dismissed a bail application filed by Parto Dasgupta, former CEO of Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC), who has been arrested in connection with the alleged Television Rating Points (TRP) scam case in December last year.

A graduate from IIM Calcutta, Partho Dasgupta was the CEO of Broadcast Audience Research Council (“BARC”) between June 2013 and November 2019. He had moved the bail application after he was remanded to judicial custody. The Crime Branch has charged him under sections 409 (criminal breach of trust by a public servant), 420 (cheating) of the Indian Penal Code.

He had filed the bail application through advocate Shardul Singh and Arjun Singh on the grounds that there was nothing more left to be recovered from him. The chats were not authenticated by a 65B certificate under the Indian Evidence Act hence it could not be considered as evidence. Moreover, an Oversight Committee has certified by their own report that TRPs cannot be tampered with

manually. Special public prosecutor Shishir Hire had vehemently opposed the bail application filed by Dasgupta on behalf of police.

He had read out several WhasApp chats between Republic TV editor-in-chief Arnab Goswami and the applicant to show their proximity. He had also contended that as an ex-BARC CEO the accused has good resources and if released on bail he could influence witnesses in the case. He had pointed out that in one of the chats, which are part of the supplementary charge sheet, Goswami allegedly offered to mediate with the PMO’s office on behalf of Dasgupta, while in another chat they speak about manipulating the TRPs of Republic to surpass Times Now.

Advocate Hirey argued that Dasgupta, in his capacity as the CEO of BARC, was supposed to be a neutral party and that the rise in TRPs of a channel was directly proportional to its ad-revenue.

Dasgupta’s lawyer Singh had also sought bail on the ground of parity. He had argued that the co-accused who was allegedly directly involved in manipulation, according to the report, is already on bail.

India to despatch 20L vaccine doses to B’desh

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 20

After delivering one lakh doses of the Indian-manufactured Covishield (Oxford-AstraZeneca) vaccine to the Maldives and 1.5 lakh Covishield doses to Bhutan on Wednesday, India will step up its powerful display of neighbourhood vaccine diplomacy by despatching a massive 20 lakh doses of Covishield vaccine to Bangladesh and 10 lakh doses of the Covishield vaccine to Nepal on Thursday. The vaccines supplied have been manufactured by the Serum Institute of India at Pune. All four nations lie in India’s immediate neighbourhood and the consignments are being seen as India’s “gift” to these nations.

A consignment containing 20 lakh doses of the Covishield vaccine will reach Bangladesh’s Capital Dhaka on Thursday. The vaccine delivery fulfils the assurance given by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Bangladesh

- THE VACCINE delivery fulfils the assurance given by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina during the bilateral Virtual Summit last month that India would facilitate supply of vaccines as and when ready.

- 10 LAKH doses of the Covishield vaccine will be despatched to Nepal.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina during the bilateral Virtual Summit last month that India would facilitate supply of vaccines as and when ready.

It is also being seen as reflective of India’s strong commitment to “Neighbourhood First” Policy and Bangladesh’s special place in it. A consignment of 10 lakh doses of the Covishield vaccine will also reach Nepalese Capital Kathmandu on Thursday.

The Nepalese Government had earlier requested for supply of Indian manufactured Covid vaccines and the request was reiterated during the recent visit to India by the Nepalese Foreign Minister.

Meanwhile, a consignment containing

1.5 lakh doses of the Covishield vaccine reached Bhutan’s Thimphu on Wednesday. “#VaccineMaitri begins. Consignment arrives in Bhutan. Another example of #NeighbourhoodFirst,” External Affairs Minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar tweeted. Also, a consignment containing one lakh doses of the Covishield vaccine reached the Maldivian Capital Male on Wednesday.

“Indian vaccines reach Maldives, reflects our special friendship,” External Affairs Minister Jaishankar tweeted. Bhutan and the Maldives were the first two foreign countries to receive the Covishield vaccines, highlighting their close strategic proximity to India.

NAME | CHANGE

Gujarat govt applies for a patent to change nomenclature of dragon fruit

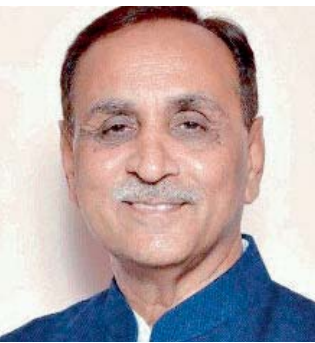
Guj to rename dragon fruit as ‘Kamalam’

Gandhinagar, Jan. 20: The Gujarat government has decided to rename dragon fruit as ‘Kamalam’, Chief Minister Vijay Rupani has said.

The state government has applied for a patent to change the nomenclature of dragon fruit, which is largely grown in Kutch, Navsari and different parts of Saurashtra, to ‘Kamalam’, Rupani told reporters on Tuesday.

“The name dragon fruit is not proper, and due to its name one thinks of China. So we have given it the name ‘Kamalam’,” he said.

Asked why the name ‘Kamalam’ has been given to the fruit, Rupani said, “Farmers say it looks like lotus and that is the reason we



Vijay Rupani

have named it ‘Kamalam’.”

Notably, ‘Kamala’, or lotus, is the poll symbol of the BJP and Gujarat party unit headquarters is named Shri Kamalam. There is nothing political

- CHIEF MINISTER Vijay Rupani said, “the name dragon fruit is not proper, and due to its name one thinks of China. So we have given it the name ‘Kamalam’.”

- THE FRUIT is found in arid areas of the state and it is known for its nutritional value, like it also helps in increasing the hemoglobin, Rupani said in reply to question on the need to rename it.

behind renaming of the fruit, Rupani said.

The fruit is found in arid areas of the state and it is known for its nutritional value, like it also helps in

for the Assam elections made this announcement after several rounds of consultation with all the partners.

Among others present on the occasion were Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president Ripun Bora, AICC general secretary in-charge for Assam Jitendra Singh, AICC general secretary and former Union minister Mukul Wasnik, senior Congress leader and AICC observer Shakeel Ahmed

United Democratic Front (AIUDF), the Communist Party of India (CPI), the CPI(M), the Communist Party of India (Marxist Leninist) Liberation, and the Anchalik Gana Morcha (AGM) led by Rajya Sabha MP Ajit Kumar Bhuyan are the part of the grand alliance.

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel, who is the senior observer of the All India Congress Committee

Gujarat govt applies for a patent to change nomenclature of dragon fruit

increasing the hemoglobin, Rupani said in reply to question on the need to rename it.

The CM also said it is the most expensive fruit available in the market at this time. The change in nomenclature of the fruit is yet to find its way among the masses and farmers.

Ahmedabad-based housewife Gayatri Vyas, who regularly eats the fruit for its nutritional value, said she is not aware that it has been changed as it is available as ‘dragon fruit’ only in markets.

The fruit comes from several different cactus species and is recommended to be eaten as it can boost immunity. Lately, cultivators from some of the state’s arid regions like

Kutch have largely taken up farming of this fruit.

The NCP on Wednesday targeted the BJP over the Gujarat government’s decision to rename dragon fruit as ‘Kamalam’, saying the time may not be far when the saffron party would start calling the country as “Kamalastan”.

The BJP has now started “branding itself on fruits also,” NCP chief spokesperson Mahesh Tapase said in a statement.

Tapase said, “The BJP has now started branding itself on fruits also. We fear that the time may be not far when they would start addressing Hindustan as Kamalastan.” — PTI

SHORT TAKES

2 SECURITY MEN
KILLED IN PAK
TERROR ATTACK

Peshawar, Jan. 20: At least two security personnel were killed and one injured when unknown terrorists riding a bike opened fire at a Security Forces Road Protection team in northwest Pakistan late on Tuesday night, local police said.

The incident occurred in the jurisdiction of Gomal police station in Tank district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering the South Waziristan tribal district. The policemen who died in the firing were identified as Sepoy Khalid and Sepoy Ayaz. The injured cop was identified as Sepoy Muhammad Ramazan.

Security forces rushed to the site, cordoned off the entire area and started a search operation to nab the fleeing culprits. No group claimed responsibility for the attack till the filing of this report.

LIBYA AMMO
WAREHOUSE
BLAST KILLS 3

Cairo, Jan. 20: A fire, followed by an explosion at an ammunition warehouse at a naval academy in western Libya killed three people, including two officers, a Libyan spokesman said Wednesday.

It was not clear what caused the overnight blaze at the academy in the town of Janzur, about 24 kilometres (14 miles) west of the capital of Tripoli, said Masoud Abdal Samad, the spokesman of the Libyan navy.

Four people were also wounded in the incident. Samad said the dead included Brig. Gen. Ahmed Ayoub, the head of the academy, and Brig. Gen. Salem Abu Salah, who ran the naval college.

The third person who died was not identified. Video footage that circulated online following the incident shows firefighters and ambulances rushing to the site where a building is engulfed in a huge fire.

2 BRITISH SIKHS
CHARGED FOR
STREET FIGHT

London, Jan. 20: Two British Sikh men have been charged following what Scotland Yard described as a large altercation involving swords and knives in Southall, west London. Sukwir Singh, 22, and Lakha Singh, 29, both residents of Southall here, appeared at the Willesden Magistrates' Court on Monday charged with affray and threatening a person with a blade/sharply pointed article in a public place.

"Police were called at around 00:20hrs on Sunday, 17 January, to reports of a large group of around 30 men fighting with various weapons, including knives and swords, in the area of King Street," the Metropolitan Police said in a statement. "Officers attended and arrested two males, both aged in their 20s, on suspicion of violent disorder and affray. There were no reported injuries," the statement added.

INDIAN JAILED
FOR MOLESTING
S'PORE WOMAN

Singapore, Jan. 20: A 26-year-old Indian painter in Singapore was sentenced to nine months in prison on Wednesday for molesting a pregnant woman after following her to a lift lobby, according to a media report.

Kota Durga Prasad molested the three-month pregnant woman who was visiting her husband in Singapore on the night of September 5 last year, reported the *Channel News Asia*.

DEMOCRACY HAS PREVAILED: BIDEN

Newly inaugurated US Prez, in maiden speech, calls on Americans 'to defend the truth and defeat the lies'

Washington, Jan. 20: "Democracy has prevailed," newly inaugurated US President Joe Biden said on Wednesday in his maiden speech as he called on Americans "to defend the truth and defeat the lies". Speaking shortly after taking oath as the 46th President of the United States, 78-year-old Biden also pledged to repair America's global allies, which suffered during his predecessor Donald Trump's four-year regime. "This is America's day. democracy has prevailed," Biden said, apparently referring to his Trump's efforts to deny him victory in the November 3 election won by him.

"With unity we can do great things," he said referring to the challenges ahead of him from fighting the Coronavirus to addressing racial injustice. "Unity is the path forward," he asserted, laying out his vision to defeat the pandemic, build back better, and unify and heal the nation. Biden asserted that he will be the president for all Americans, all those who voted for him and those who did not vote for him. In his speech that lasted for 21 minutes, Biden praised Americans for rising to the challenge and reclaiming democracy. He mentioned the attempt to undo it at that exact location two weeks ago, and renewed his campaign goals of overcoming the pandemic, bringing racial justice and fighting climate change.

Biden also criticised those who have stoked anger and division, and asked those who opposed him to "hear me out." He called out those who lie for political power and profit. "There is truth, and there are lies," he added. In a message to the international community, Biden said that he would rebuild the alliances frayed over the past four years. "We can make America once again the leading force of good in the world." "We will repair our alliances and engage with the world once again, not to meet yesterday's challenges but today's and tomorrow's challenges," he said. "We will lead by the power of our example," he said in his message to the international community.

The 78-year-old veteran Democratic leader said: "We'll be a strong and trusted partner for peace, progress and security". "America has been tested, and we have come out stronger for it. We will repair our alliances and engage with the world once again. "We'll lead, not merely by the exam-

READY TO SERVE,
SAYS KAMALA IN
1ST TWEET AFTER
TAKING OATH

Washington, Jan. 20: Kamala Harris was on Wednesday sworn in as America's first woman Vice President during a historic inauguration at the West Front of the Capitol. Harris, 56, the 49th US Vice President, will serve as the deputy of President Joe Biden, 78, who also took the oath of office, becoming the 46th US President.

Harris took over the office of the US Vice President from 61-year-old Mike Pence. Biden succeeded President Donald Trump, 74. In her first tweet as Vice President from her official Twitter handle, she said: "Ready to serve."

Harris, the daughter of an Indian immigrant from Chennai, scripted history by becoming the first-ever woman Vice President of the United States. She is also the first female, first Black and first South Asian American vice president. Her husband Douglas Emhoff, 56, is the first 'Second Gentleman' — the first male spouse of a vice president in the US. Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the first Latina member of the Supreme Court, administered the oath of office to Harris. She was sworn in on two Bibles — one that belonged to a close family friend named Regina Shelton and another that belonged to Thurgood Marshall — the country's first African American Supreme Court justice. — PTI

ple of our power, but by the power of our example. We'll be a strong and trusted partner for peace, progress and security," Biden said. Many world leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have tweeted their congratulations to the new administration and expressed their optimism at working together. "My warmest congratulations to Joe Biden on his assumption of office as President of the United States of America. I look forward to working with him to strengthen India-US strategic partnership," Modi said. "My best wishes for a successful term in leading USA as we stand united and resilient in addressing common challenges and advancing global peace and security," he said. — PTI

Kamala brings in new dressing style

Washington, Jan. 20: Vice President-elect Kamala Harris' understated and elegant signature style of blazers combined with sneakers signals a new way of power dressing. Harris, 56, made history as the first female, first Person of Colour and first South Asian American vice president on Wednesday.

Emerging as a woman of conviction and dedicated towards her work, Harris makes sure her approachable personality is reflected through her attire, several US media outlets reported. Her non-nonsense wardrobe often features sharp blazers, skinny

pants, pearls and Converse sneakers. Her style is understated, tailored, elegant, businesslike, with a touch of whimsy, said Susan E. Kelley, who runs the blog What Kamala Wore, in a report in the *New York Post*. The clothes don't wear her; she wears the clothes, Kelley said.

That professional polish mixed with West Coast nonchalance signals a new way of dressing for the corridors of power, it said.

Harris opted to wear a dress designed by two Black designers for her historic inauguration as the US Vice-president. In opting to wear the dress designed by Christopher



Vice President-elect Kamala Harris greets former US President Barack Obama ahead of Joe Biden's inauguration as the 46th President of the United States on the West Front of the US Capitol in Washington, on Wednesday. — AP

12 Guard troops pulled out

Washington, Jan. 20: Twelve US National Guard troops have been pulled from duty protecting the presidential inauguration of Joe Biden, partly due to an investigation of extremist sympathies in the ranks, the Pentagon said Tuesday. Two of the 12 were removed from duty for making "inappropriate comments or texts," said National Guard Commander General Daniel Hokanson.

The two were sent home, he said, declining to explain what was said in the comments. They were pulled from

BIDEN HOMELAND SECURITY PICK TO
REOPEN ASYLUM FOR MIGRANTS

Washington, Jan. 20: President-elect Joe Biden's Homeland Security secretary nominee Alejandro Mayorkas promised Tuesday to apply US asylum laws to undocumented immigrants but did not say how he would deal with a caravan of Hon-

duran migrants now bound for the US. Mayorkas told a Senate committee vetting his nomination that the government would roll back departing President Donald Trump's tough measures to seal the southern US border. — AFP

the force "out of an abundance of caution," he said. The removal of the other 10 troops was also unexpl-

ained, but was "unrelated to the events taking place at the Capitol or to the concerns that many people

Spy chief: 'Aggressive stance'
to deal with China challenges

Washington, Jan. 20: Asserting that China is a "challenge" to the security and prosperity of the US, spy chief nominee Avril Haines has said she supports an "aggressive stance" to deal with the challenges that the country is now facing from Beijing.

America's approach to China has to evolve and essentially meet the reality of the particularly assertive and aggressive China that is being experienced now, Haines told lawmakers during her

confirmation hearing for the post of Director of National Intelligence on Tuesday. US President-elect Joe Biden has nominated Haines, who had served as White House Deputy National Security Advisor in the Obama administration, as his next spymaster.

If confirmed by the Senate, 51-year-old Haines would be the first woman to occupy this position. In this capacity she would oversee as many as 18 American intelligence agencies, including CIA

and FBI. "China is a challenge to our security, to our prosperity, to our values across a range of issues, and I do support an aggressive stance, in a sense, to deal with the challenge that we're facing. So I think that's the place that we are now, and one that is more assertive than where we had been in the Obama/Biden administration. And if I'm confirmed, I think frankly the intelligence community can do a lot to help in that respect," she said. — PTI

● Kamala Harris on Wednesday opted to wear a dress designed by two Black designers for her inauguration. In opting to wear the dress designed by Christopher John Rogers and Sergio Hudson, Harris has sent her own message to the country that Black designers have arrived on the scene.

John Rogers and Sergio Hudson, Harris has sent her own message to the country that Black designers have arrived on the scene. Rogers is a young Black designer, from Baton

Rouge, and lives in New York City. Hudson is a Black designer from South Carolina. Rogers has sold made-to-order designs from his Brooklyn studio since 2016, according to Forbes.

Harris' fashion sense dates back to the days when she was a lawyer in San Francisco. She had a big collection of sharp blazers in neutral tones along with accessories like boldly patterned scarves, colourful Converse or the jangly bangles she wears alongside a Cartier watch, the report said.

Harris has always maintained a simple yet graceful look, whether it is her

debut as the vice presidential candidate or her victory speech when the Democrats won the November 3 presidential election.

"She dressed in her usual work style of dark neutrals and simple lines. In the pictures, she doesn't look stiffly styled or glamorously made-over for her debut as a vice-presidential candidate. Her clothes do not look like they've been pulled fresh from a shopping bag," a report in the *Washington Post* said. She largely eschews the usual red, white and blue accents politicians generally employ to drive home their patriotism, the *New York Post* report said. — PTI

Besides Bannon, other pardon recipients included Elliott Broidy, a former top fundraiser for Trump's campaign who pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy relating to a secret lobbying campaign to influence the Trump administration on behalf of a foreign billionaire in exchange for millions of dollars, and Ken Kurson, a friend of Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner who was charged last October with cyberstalking during a heated divorce. — PTI

GRANTING CLEMENCY

The commutations came in addition to actions Trump took after losing polls

Trump's pardons include Bannon, 73 others

Washington, Jan. 20: Outgoing President Donald Trump has pardoned his former political strategist Steve Bannon, one of the key architects of his 2016 electoral victory, as he issued a wave of pardons using the final hours of his presidency to grant clemency to 143 people.

The record 73 pardons and 70 commutations came in addition to the dozens of similar actions that Trump took after he lost the November 3 presidential elections to Joe Biden of the Democratic Party.

Biden, 78, will be sworn in as the 46th President of the United States on Wednesday. The White House in a statement issued on Wednesday said that Trump granted a full pardon to Bannon, who was in charge of the final months of his 2016 presidential campaign.

Bannon was indicted in August when New York federal prosecutors charged him and three others with defrauding donors of more than a million dollars as part of an online fundrais-

FAREWELL ADDRESS: TRUMP'S 'BEST WISHES' TO NEW ADMIN

Washington, Jan. 20: Extending his "best wishes" and praying for the success of the new administration in keeping America safe and prosperous, outgoing US President Donald Trump has said his farewell address to Americans must unify around their shared values

ing campaign purportedly aimed at supporting Trump's border wall.

and rise above partisan rancour to forge their common destiny.

Trump has still not fully accepted the result of last November's election, which he lost to Democrat Joe Biden. Trump, a Republican, made no mention of Biden in his pre-recorded video address, but

The White House in its statement said Bannon has been an important leader

did allude to the violence at the Capitol earlier this month.

In the video farewell message released by the White House on Tuesday, Trump, 74, said he embarked on a mission to make America great again for all Americans. — PTI

in the conservative movement and is known for his political acumen.

Career Chronicle

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GNM & BSC FEMALE STAFF NURSE
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+ UP & DOWN TICKET FREE + 8 HOUR DUTY + OVER TIME
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DECCAN Chronicle

21 JANUARY 2021

When Team India staged mother of all comebacks

Team India staged the mother of all comebacks to win an away Test series in one of the most difficult terrains to conquer while overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds. This win in Australia will go down in Indian cricket history as the greatest achievement, perhaps outranking the 1971 twin series wins in the West Indies and England and the 2001 win at home against Ricky Ponting's Australians in which too they had come back from a Test down to win the series. The team had similarly beaten Australia in the 2018-19 series Down Under but the home team then were without Steve Smith and David Warner.

This is indeed the dawn of a new era as the touring India squad laid to rest many conservative theories about experienced players and a settled XI being the key to success. The remarkable story of this triumph was shaped by fringe players who were pushed on to centrestage and who flourished beyond imagination in the limelight. Only Ajinkya Rahane and Cheteshwar Pujara played all four Tests. And when India went into the decider at the Woolloongabba arena in Brisbane, India's combined bowling attack had fewer Test wickets in their bag than Australia's occasional leg spinner Marnus Labuschagne. It is the deeds of such unlikely heroes that makes folklore of sport.

Rahane at the helm was as if Buddha were put in charge of a cricket team as opposed to the demonstrative Kohli, which just goes to show there are many ways to play the great game

The saga of raw physical courage starring Pujara at the Gabba and before him that of Hanuma Vihari and Ashwin who salvaged the draw in Sydney will be spoken of for a long time to come. But nothing made all this seem like a fairytale than the transformation of young Rishabh Pant who went from impulsive striker to matchwinner in the space of two Tests, his 97 in Sydney turning the series on its head as it gave a glimpse of victory from counterattacking cricket before his decisive 89 not out in Brisbane which cemented the balletic 91 of opener Shubman Gill who had shown that the Australian pace bowlers could be taken on even in their Gabba.

Who would have imagined that the mother of all turnarounds would come from the very depths of despair of 36 all out in Adelaide and that the matchwinners would come from diverse backgrounds as the son of autorickshaw driver, Siraj being the only Indian bowler with a five-for in the series, the son of street vendor, Natarajan who went from net bowler to Test performer and Test benchwarmers Washington Sundar and Shardul Thakur would star with bat and ball. It was cheeky of netizens to suggest that the series verdict means Virat Kohli is free to seek more paternal leave because he as the skipper had assiduously built not only this team but also instilled in it this positive attitude.

It is time then for Indian cricket to bury old shibboleths and reshape the future with an open and all-inclusive approach recognising the fact that today's youngsters, exposed to big team atmosphere and subject to expert international coaching and conditioning in the IPL, are equally adept at playing to win. Rahane at the helm was as if Buddha were put in charge of a cricket team as opposed to the demonstrative Kohli, which just goes to show there are many ways to play the cricket.

Vaccine aid for neighbours

India has long called itself the pharmacy of the world and has now decided to live up to the claim. By the time these lines are printed, lakhs of doses of made-in-India vaccines against the novel coronavirus would have landed in our neighbouring countries, and more will do so in the coming days. While six nations — Bhutan, the Maldives, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and Seychelles — will get the Indian vaccines in the first tranche, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Mauritius will get them once "necessary regulatory clearances" are given. It is noteworthy that the Indian vaccines would be the first to arrive in most of these nations.

Vaccine, all said and done, is a knowledge product: it calls for the use of the knowledge humankind has created and every single tool it has made till now for its successful rollout. India's soft move, peppered with diplomatic quotients, will earn a lot of goodwill for the country.

Vaccine, all said and done, is a knowledge product: it calls for the use of the knowledge humankind has created and every single tool it has made till now for its successful rollout. India's soft move, peppered with diplomatic quotients, will earn a lot of goodwill for the country. It will also prove to the neighbours, and the world at large, that India becoming a superpower will benefit all.

The only exception as of now is Pakistan. The Drugs Regulatory Authority of Pakistan has cleared the use of Covishield, manufactured by Serum Institute of India, and the government there is reportedly exploring ways to get it through Covax, an alliance set up by the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation, Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations and World Health Organisation or directly. Both the routes are fine but India should positively decide should a request come from the western neighbour. It will have no dramatic consequences but will be the stating of the obvious — the real challenges the two now-estranged nations face are similar, and the ways to overcome them will be more successful if they are adopted together. Should it happen, the vaccine could produce some antibodies against ultra-nationalism and religious bigotry, too. The government should seize this chance.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

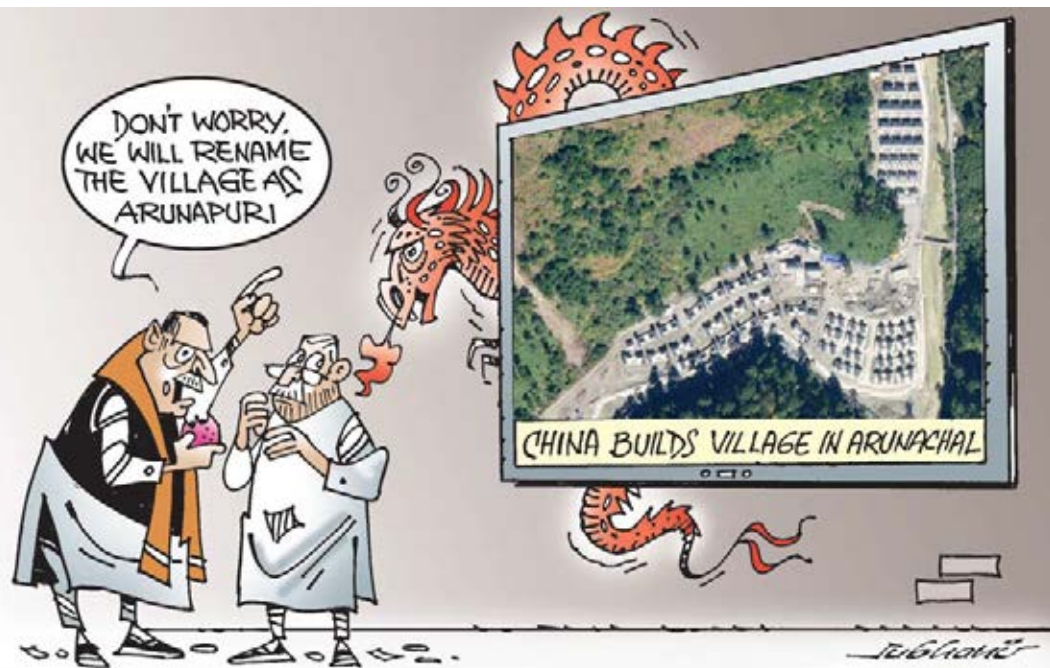
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Subhani



India, world must gear up as Biden era begins

K.C. Singh

President Joe Biden takes over America's presidency under unprecedented circumstances. It is only the fourth time in US history that the outgoing leader refused to attend his successor's inauguration, all earlier examples being from the nineteenth century. The transition has been disorderly, to say the least, despite the US facing a serious spike in Covid-19 cases, with over 400,000 dead and the economy slowing down. Domestic challenges are rivalled by those abroad as the Trumpian foreign policy legacy is equally fractious.

While Mr Biden's nominees to head the state and defence departments and the CIA are all well-known individuals, their depositions before Senate committees a day before the inauguration give an insight into the new administration's thinking. Antony Blinken, the incoming secretary of state, began with his personal story as the descendant of those who either fled Soviet pogroms or Nazi concentration camps. He ended with the touching tale about his late stepfather, hiding in a bush as disarray descended with Allied troops advancing into Germany in 1945, stepped out on seeing a tank with a five-pointed white star and told the African-American GI emerging from its turret the only three English words his mother taught him: "God bless America".

These anecdotes bolstered Mr Blinken's argument that the US must lead the world "not only by the example of our power, but by the power of our example". He listed the most pressing challenges as rising nationalism, receding democracy, growing rivalry from "China, and Russia and other authoritarian states, mounting a threat to a stable and open international system". He also noted "a technological

revolution" was reshaping our lives. If the US doesn't lead, he said, "there can be only two outcomes: another nation will step in or none will, and chaos shall ensue". On specifics, Mr Blinken argued the US must defeat Covid-19, out-compete China and take the lead in tackling climate change. President Biden is likely to take action on all three fronts the very first day. The US will rejoin the Paris climate agreement, return to the World Health Organisation, reverse travel bans on select Muslim nations and reach out to alienated allies. But he singled out China as the most significant challenge.

Therefore, President Trump was right in the direction of his China policy, but wrong in the means he chose. The defence secretary-designate, Gen. Lloyd Austin (Retd), talked about India's near western neighbourhood. While he reiterated the US resolve to withdraw troops from Afghanistan, he qualified it, as Mr Trump avoided doing, by saying safeguarding the gains in women's rights, etc, must be a precondition to a final settlement. On Pakistan, he seemed to regress to old formulations like underscoring its importance to Afghan peace and regional stability.

Mr Blinken also singled out democracy and human rights as central to the Biden administration's global outreach. Thus overall, while India would be happy with the tone and tenor on China, though what the new China containment strategy will be is still unclear, it would be cautious about Pakistan again getting more wriggle room. But New Delhi can't take the talk about human rights lightly. It was speculated whether the sudden early retirement of a bureaucrat close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his induction into Uttar Pradesh politics is

not a first step in curbing the zeal of UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath in pursuing a majoritarian agenda and intolerance towards anyone criticising him. A comedian's being detained for perceived insult raises questions about freedom of speech being curbed. The four-year free pass the government got on this count is now over. This is happening as the BJP prepares for a no-holds-barred electoral fight in West Bengal, and when the farmers' protests at Delhi's main entry points is nearing two months.

In Britain, the farmers' protests led to 100 MPs, across party lines, raising concern. A similar move can't be ruled out in Washington, with Democrats now controlling both Houses. External affairs minister S. Jaishankar had earlier drawn the ire of a congressional committee by illogically seeking the exclusion of Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal from a meeting he was to attend as she had been critical of the government's actions in Kashmir, including Article 370's abrogation. She has been re-elected and may revisit that issue and now new ones like the farmers' protests.

President Donald Trump's administration poisoned US foreign policy well before departure by ramping up sanctions against Iran, raising the level of ties with Taiwan, declaring China's actions against Uighurs as genocide, etc. The aim was possibly to reduce Mr Biden's strategic space to re-balance ties with those nations, or if he did so make him vulnerable to attacks over being soft on perceived antagonists. Interestingly, like the debate over Mr Modi having gone overboard with his Houston rally with

The key question is whether Mr Biden can return the US and the world to its pre-pandemic, pre-Trump order. That seems unlikely because of China's rise and also as Mr Biden has a domestic right-wing insurgency on his hands.

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambksingh.

LETTERS

MP'S SUBSIDY

The Speaker of Lok Sabha has finally taken the decision on subsidised food in Parliament (*No subsidised food for MPs now, Jan. 20*). Like the food, there are many more superfluous subsidies enjoyed by them and resented by the people. The two unpopular ones are LPG/fuel, unlimited free air/rail travel. The Speaker should look into them as well.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

HC'S DECISION

Justice was delayed but those who bought lands in Amaravati are now facing cases filed by the YSRC government for insider trading (*HC quashes FIR in Amaravati land deal case, DC, Jan. 20*). Indeed, the AP HC has taken a righteous decision in this case and it is hoped that the same logic will be applied in respect of the SEC's decision to hold the Panchayat Elections.

Someswar
Visakhapatnam

WHATSAPP PRIVACY

The Centre asking WhatsApp to withdraw its proposed privacy policy to safeguard stakeholders is a right move. WhatsApp is applying different policies in different countries. Data sharing is strictly prohibited in Europe. Instead of making appeals to companies, India should bring a stringent law to protect privacy.

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao
Vizianagaram

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Mrs. Gandhi inaugurates Vizag Steel Plant work

VISAKHAPATNAM,

JANUARY. 20 Prime Minister Indira Gandhi today said that it was not only important to have development but also to see that it was diversified and spread all over the country. Unless this happened, she warned there would only be social tension.

Prime Minister who was inaugurating work on two million tonnes capacity Visakhapatnam Steel Plant at Balacheruvu, 27 km from here pointed out that special efforts had to be made to pay special attention to backward areas and those sections of people who are so far underprivileged like Harijans and Girijans and minorities. Only then these people would be able to enjoy the fruits of freedom and become responsible citizens and give their strength to nation.

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Free to air views, ex-babus square up in 'letters war' on 'love jihad' law

Perhaps service rules stopped them from airing their views but after retirement bureaucrats are not bound anymore and can voice their thoughts freely. This has led to the formation of pro and anti-government groups among retired babus who jump into the fray at the behest of their conscience (or political leaning).

In the most recent instance, the "love jihad" law legislated by the Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh has triggered a "letter war" between former bureaucrats, those who criticise the law and those who have rallied behind the state government. The ranks of the ex-babus have been joined by retired Army officers, members of the judiciary and others.

Earlier, a group of 104 retired bureaucrats wrote to Yogi Adityanath, expressing "deep disapproval" and concern at the use of the "love jihad" law. Noted signatories included retired bureaucrats

like former NSA Shiv Shankar Menon, former chief of R&AW A.S. Dulat, former Chief Information Commissioner Wajahat Habibullah, former principal secretary in PMO, T.K.A. Nair and former Union health secretary K. Sujatha Rao among other notables.

Now, a Forum of Concerned Citizens, comprising of over 250 retired officers has written to the chief minister endorsing the 'Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance 2020' and the motive behind it. In their letter, the group of former babus and ex-Army officers said that the legislation rightly provides that marriages done for sole purpose of unlawful conversion can be declared unlawful by family courts. They termed the letter by anti-love jihad babus a "politically motivated pressure group" and said that they don't represent thousands of civil servants who believe in New India emerging as the greatest democra-

cies of the world.

One may be tempted to believe that this is an instance of political battles being fought by proxy!

CADRE MERGER

More than a year after the Centre abrogated Jammu & Kashmir's special status under Article 370 and bifurcated the state into Union territories, the J&K cadre of IAS, IPS and IFOs has been merged with the Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Mizoram and Union Territory (AGMUT) cadre. This allows officers posted in these states and UTs to work in J&K and vice-versa.

Necessary modifications may be made in the corresponding cadre allocation rules by the Centre. The notification issued by the government states that officers allocated to AGMUT cadre shall function following the rules framed by the Centre.

Observers see in the move a message of total integration of J&K with the Centre. It also solves the

Centre's problem of the reluctance of J&K cadre officers to serve in Ladakh, as it now creates a larger pool of UT cadre officers. Ladakh, they say, suffers from a paucity of officers. Due to its harsh climate officers are reluctant to serve there. But with the Chinese threat looming, the Centre wishes to focus on Ladakh's development. So, clearly, it is as much a political move as an administrative one.

MAMATA'S BIG PROMOTION PUSH IN BENGAL

Political or administrative compulsion? West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee has promoted 31 IAS officers as secretary and additional secretary in one big push to bolster the state government's administration ahead of the Assembly elections.

With the BJP making a determined effort to breach her stronghold, the Trinamul leader is taking steps to strengthen the administra-

tive machinery, which has come under fire from various quarters. Among the 19 officers promoted as secretaries are additional secretaries Smita Pandey, Vijay Bharti, Shubhanjan Das, Samir Kumar Bhattacharya, C.C. Guha, Rajat Bose, Kaushik Halder, N.C. Sarar and T.K. Rudra.

The new additional secretaries include V. Lalithalakshmi, Sourav Pahari, Mukta Arya, Devi Prasad Karanam, Shakeel Ahmed, Uttam Patra, Santanu Saha, Nirmalya Ghosh, Anindya Narayan Biswas and Dipankar Chowdhury.

But this is early in the poll campaigning and chances of further changes in the state administration cannot be ruled out as the CM seeks to stave off the BJP's onslaught to dislodge her party from power. Watch this space for updates.

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@Twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,792.12	0.80
Nifty 50	14,644.70	0.85
S&P 500*	3,840.12	1.08
Dollar (₹)	73.02	0.20
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.92	-0.36
Euro (₹)	88.74	-0.07
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,758	347 0.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	56.42	0.93
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.942	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.101	0.009

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Laurus acquires majority stake in Richcore Life

Laurus Labs said it has acquired majority stake in Bengaluru-based biotech company Richcore Lifesciences, marking its entry into the biotechnology segment. In a regulatory filing in November, Laurus Labs had said that it signed definitive agreements with Eight Roads Ventures and VenturEast Proactive Fund and VenturEast Life Fund III, to acquire 72.55 per cent stake in Richcore Lifesciences Pvt Ltd for Rs 246.67 crore. The firm has now completed the transaction.

Dumping duty on newsprint for 5 yrs recommended



The DGTR has recommended the imposition of antidumping duty on newsprint—used in printing newspapers—from Australia, Canada, EU, Russia, Singapore and the UAE, for five years. Its probe concluded that 'newsprint in rolls or sheets, excluding glazed newsprint' from these countries have been exported at dumped prices into India. The duty suggested is \$5.15-\$98.6 per tonne. FinMin takes the final call on duties.

PayPal's Xoom lets PIOs remit money real time

Xoom, PayPal's international digital money transfer service, announced its integration with NPCI's UPI, a real-time payment system facilitating inter-bank transactions. NRIs and PIOs living in the US, Canada and Europe can now remit money to their family and friends in India. Overseas senders only need to know Indian receivers' UPI identity (ID) to send remittances instantly, 24x7.

IRFC's ₹4,600-cr IPO subscribed 3.49% times

The Indian Railway Finance Corporation's Rs 4,600-crore IPO got subscribed 3.49 times as per last update on the final day of the bidding process. The qualified institutional buyers portion was subscribed 3.78 times, high network investors category was subscribed 2.67 times and retail individual investors portion was subscribed 3.66 times. Shares reserved for employees were subscribed 43.76 times.



Hiring may surge in new academic year Education sector sheds 6 mn jobs

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JAN. 20

While most services sectors have been recovering in the past two quarters, the education sector has been witnessing a different trend. The sector has rather lost 5.4 million jobs by the end of the December quarter. Inter-estingly, the job losses had started even before the lockdown.

However, a silver lining is that once the schools reopen, Covid-19 restrictions may mandate schools to have fewer students in a classroom and this might raise the need for teachers.

The education sector, which had employed 15 million people in 2018 and 2019, had started showing weakness towards the end of 2019, according to a study by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy. Employment fell to 14.5 million in the March quarter of 2020, even before lockdown hit all sectors. It further fell to 9.7 million in the June-September 2020 quarters. In the December 2020 quarter employment in education was down to 9.1 million.

From the 2019 levels, the sector has lost close to 6 million jobs.

"In 2019-20, the industry has been witnessing a disruption with the adoption of technology. While new edtech start-ups have been emerging on the one hand, regular institutions have been increasingly embracing technology on the other, which led to lesser demand for manpower. Even the job forecasts for the sector had predicted



PANDEMIC TAKES IT ALL

- ▶ Sector bucks the recovery trend in services sector
- ▶ Education sector had employed 15 million in 2018 and 2019
- ▶ This came down to 9.1 million in the

- December 2020 quarter
- ▶ Smaller-sized classes may raise demand for teachers in 2021
- ▶ Tech platforms could also ramp up hiring in new academic year

lesser hiring," said Shantanu Roj, founder & CEO, Schoolguru Eduserve.

According to him, it was perceived that personalised care would increase the requirement of teachers by edtech start-ups. But artificial intelligence tools took care of this requirement. Further, AI-based assessments too reduced the need for manpower.

"The lock-down further legitimised online learning, as a shift in mindsets in favour of online happened among the student community. Educational institutions went online during the lockdown and most of them have not started functioning physically yet. Online reduced the requirement of teachers, leading to the decline in jobs," he said.

According to Rituparna Chakraborty, co-founder and executive vice president, Teamlease Services,

several institutions in smaller cities have not been operating as earlier since the lockdown. This has impacted jobs of both teachers and support staff.

"Even the contract staff in government institutions were out of job," said Aditya Narayan Mishra, director and CEO of CIEL HR Services.

The situation is expected to continue in the March quarter. The ongoing vaccination drive may help education institutions reopen in the next academic year.

"Then we would probably see a surge in hiring. When institutions reopen, they will have to split students into smaller-sized groups. This will increase the requirement of teachers. Hence we expect the jobs in the sector to bounce back to 2019-20 levels by next academic year. Tech platforms also would be ramping up hiring," said Roj.

SUNDARAM FINANCE TO GET NEW MD FROM APRIL

Chennai, Jan. 20: Non-banking finance company Sundaram Finance on Wednesday announced that it has made key changes in its management.

The changes include the appointment of Rajiv Lochan as managing director, succeeding T. T. Srinivasaraghavan with effect from April 1, 2021, the company said.

T. T. Srinivasaraghavan, fondly called as "TT" among close circles, would retire after serving the organisation for over 38 years as of March 31, 2021.

It was during his tenure the balance-sheet of the city-based company grew from Rs 800 crore to over Rs 30,000 crore today.

Srinivasaraghavan, during the last two decades, also led the group's diversification into a multi-product financial services provider, a company statement said.

Lochan, who is the current director (strategy), has over 25 years of experience in financial services and was a partner in the consulting firm McKinsey and Company. Recently, he served Kasturi and Sons as its managing director.

Commenting on the tenure of Srinivasaraghavan, Sundaram Finance chairman S. Viji said, "Under his leadership, the company demonstrated its traditional focus on asset quality and most importantly its adherence to values of prudence and customer focus."

—PTI

Southern states top Niti Innovation Index

New Delhi, Jan. 20: Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Kerala have been ranked as top five states in innovation in the Niti Aayog's second Innovation Index released on Wednesday.

The index, released by Aayog's vice-chairman Rajiv Kumar and CEO Amitabh Kant, has been developed on the lines of the Global Innovation Index.

Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Bihar were ranked at the bottom of the index.

Karnataka topped the index for the second year. Among Union territories Delhi topped the chart, while in the North-Eastern and Hill States category Himachal Pradesh occupied the top spot.

"Amongst major states, the average innovation score is 25.35. Karnataka tops at 42.5, which is attributable to its strong number of venture capital



deals, registered GIs (geographical indications) and ICT (information and communication technology) exports. Karnataka's high FDI inflow has also enhanced the innovation capabilities of the state," the India Innovation Index 2020 said.

Maharashtra was ranked second with an innovation score of 38, while Bihar finished last at 14.5.

Tamil Nadu has a score of 37.91, followed by Telangana at 33.23 and Kerala at 30.58. "The case for the southern states as the top performers has

also become stronger as four of them occupy the top-five spots within the major states," the release said.

According to the index, the North-Eastern and Hill states achieved an average innovation score of 17.89, with Himachal Pradesh as the best performer with a score of 25, followed by Manipur (22.77) and Sikkim (22.28), respectively.

"With 31.9 per cent of its total employment generated being knowledge-intensive, Himachal Pradesh benefits from a high number of knowledge workers," it said.

The index noted that the innovation score of UTs and city states averages at 26.01. Delhi was the best performer among all groups.

The India Innovation Index 2020, ranks the states and UTs based on their relative performance of supporting innovation.

—PTI

Schneider asked to list or give exit option

New Delhi, Jan. 20: Markets regulator Sebi has asked Schneider Electric President Systems to either list on a stock exchange within six months or provide exit to its investors under the delisting norms.

If the company opts for de-listing, the reference date for computing the floor price would be the date on which the company made the public announcement for the exit offer, the regulator said.

Further, the shareholders who had tendered their

shares in exit offer would be given an opportunity by the company for buying back the shares at the exit price, the Sebi said in an order passed on Tuesday.

Schneider Electric President Systems, a designer, manufacturer and supplier of standard and customised enclosure systems in India, was earlier listed on the Banga-lore Stock Exchange (BgSE) and Pune Stock Exchange (PSE).

Following the de-recognition of BgSE and PSE in 2014 and 2015, respectively, the company moved to the

dissemination board (DB) of the NSE in July 2016.

Prior to being moved to the DB, the 2012 and 2014 circulars issued by Sebi had cast an obligation on the company to migrate to a nationwide exchange or provide an exit option to the shareholders in terms of the delisting norms.

Also, exclusively listed companies (ELCs) of de-recognised bourse were required to exercise one of the options prior to the exit of the stock exchanges where they were listed.

—PTI

Don't ignore comorbidities in life or business: Birla

New Delhi, Jan. 20: There is an open question over how much 'froth' is there in the euphoria seen in the financial markets and it will need another quarter or so to confirm that this booming trajectory is here to last, said Aditya Birla Group chairman Kumar Mangalam Birla.

Reflecting on the year gone by, he said the coronavirus pandemic has brought devastation and asked people and companies not to "ignore the comorbidities—whether in life or business", while asking them to build reserves of knowledge, ideas, collaboration and goodwill to emerge stronger from a crisis.

He also presented a contrarian view to the notion that work from home will be the 'mega trend' of the decade, saying office is not just a place where people come to work but is a melting pot of people, ideas, and conversations.

Termining volatility as a 'froth', Birla said it along with uncertainty have been an underlying phenomenon for almost two decades now and financial variables have become even more volatile in these unusual times.

Stating that after the outbreak there were prophets of doom predicting irreversible shifts in consumer demand and the evisceration of sectors but there has been recovery across sectors.

In India too, he said, the initial prognosis and narrative of experts proved to be excessively pessimistic but the country has witnessed strong recovery across manufacturing sectors, cement to paints, and automotive to aluminium.



Kumar Mangalam Birla

"However, how much froth there is in the euphoric financial markets is still an open question. Perhaps, we still need another quarter or so to confirm that this booming trajectory is here to last. The economists, I am told, are now searching for alphabets that will adequately describe this trend of cautious optimism," he said.

Correlating the challenges brought by the pandemic to both individuals and companies, Birla said, "Don't ignore the comorbidities whether in life or business."

Stressing that the comorbidities are self-inflicted for businesses, Birla said, "The excessive financial leverage that provides sugar highs while weakening fundamentals in the long term, lax processes that lead to inventory build-ups clogging supply chain arteries like some pernicious cholesterol, or most devastating, a lack of focus on building consumer and human relationships."

—PTI

BREAKING UP | GIANTS

Firms with dominant market share could face anti-trust action

China to rein in online payment players

Jan. 20: China proposed measures to curb market concentration in its online payment market, potentially dealing another blow to financial technology giant Ant Group Co and its biggest rival Tencent Holdings Ltd.

The central bank said on Wednesday that any non-bank payment company with half of the market in online transactions or two entities with a combined two-thirds share could be subject to anti-trust probes, according to draft rules released by the People's Bank of China.

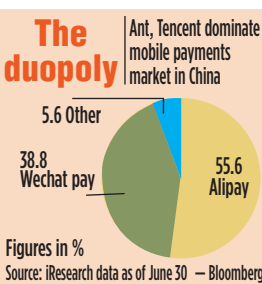
If a monopoly is confirmed, the central bank can suggest the cabinet impose restrictive measures, including breaking up the entity by its business type.

Firms already with payment licences would have a one-year grace period to comply with the new rules, the PBOC said.

The rules present the strongest and most detailed message yet of regulators' plans to curb monopolistic practices in the online payments industry. Ubiquitous in China, Ant and Tencent have transformed how consumers shop through their mobile apps that are used by a combined one billion people.

The regulator also vowed "comprehensive" oversight of companies in the space, and their transactions with affiliated parties.

It will step up supervision of any changes to shareholders or benefi-



aries at payments firms, it said.

"This shows there's no let-up in regulatory tightening on the sprawling fintech businesses," said Dong Xiaomiao, a researcher at Zhongguancun Internet Finance Institute.

Regulators shocked markets in November by suspending billionaire Jack Ma's record initial public

offering of Ant as they stepped up oversight.

Ant has since been ordered to overhaul its business and an antitrust investigation was launched into affiliate Alibaba Group Holding Ltd.

While they've stopped short of directly asking for a breakup of Ant, the central bank has stressed that the company needs to "understand the necessity of overhauling" and come up with a timetable as soon as possible.

Global investors are still seeking clarity on what the future holds for the world's largest fintech firm.

Mobile payments are only part of what contribute to online transactions, but they have become the most impor-

tant platform in the country. Alipay, the app operated by Ant, held 55.6 per cent of the mobile payments market as of the second quarter last year, according to internet consultant iResearch.

Tencent had a 38.8 per cent share. Room for growth in online payments is limited after years of a head-to-head rivalry between Ant and Tencent's Wechat Pay. Total transactions were 59.8 trillion yuan as of June 30 last year, up 8.8 per cent from a year earlier, according to data from iResearch.

That's sharply down from increases of 23 per cent and 65 per cent during the same period in 2019 and 2018, respectively.

—Bloomberg

MKT MOMENTUM MAY TAKE SENSEX TO 50000 ZONE



RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JAN. 20

The Sensex is now poised to hit the 50000 landmark any time given the market momentum and Wednesday's 393 points gain on positive global and domestic cues. The 30-stock index closed at 49792 points after hitting an all-time high of 49874 in intra-day trade, as it gained further after Tuesday's big up-move by 834 points.

The Nifty-50 also closed at a new all-time high of 14644.70 up 123.55 points, or 0.85 per cent, after hitting a new peak of 14666.45.

Foreign portfolio investors were net buyers of equities worth Rs 2,289.05 crore, marking a big jump from the last few sessions' trend of subdued buying.

Analysts expect the Sensex to breach the 50,000 mark given the upward momentum seen in the past two sessions and the earnings season trend.

"Even if the market does not hold at a high level, we can expect a rally in the best case scenario up to 14750/50000 and up to 14850/50500," said Shrikant Chouhan, executive VP, equity technical research, Kotak Securities.

"Global cues were positive ahead of Joe Biden's inauguration as US President on Wednesday. Further comments from US Treasury Secretary nominee Janet Yellen backing for more stimulus to ride out a pandemic-driven slump buoyed global markets," said Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

SHORT TAKES

Nadella, Pichai, MSK hail team

Washington: Top Indian American CEOs Sundar Pichai and Satya Nadella on Tuesday congratulated the Indian cricket team on their historic Test series win in Australia in Brisbane on Tuesday. "One of the greatest test series wins ever. Congrats India and well played Australia, what a series #INDvsAUS," tweeted Pichai, chief executive officer of Google and Alphabet. "Last hour of the last day of the last test. Test series for the ages. Congrats to Team India!", Microsoft CEO Nadella wrote on the microblogging site. Nadella is a former cricketer himself, having played for the Hyderabad Public School (Begumpet) team while growing up in Hyderabad before he moved to the US. Former Test cricketer and BCCI chief selector MSK Prasad too was effusive in his praise for Team India. "It's been an outstanding victory, especially after the humiliating defeat in Adelaide. Added to that the team has played the major part of the series without stars. This shows the mental strength of this new generation of players like Siraj, Vihari, Gill, Shradhul, Washington etc. I am extremely happy and proud to say that me and my colleagues played our part in unearthing this new talent and groomed them to this level," Prasad said.

More Covid cases linked to Oz Open

Melbourne: Three more people linked to the Australian Open have tested positive for Covid-19 in Melbourne, increasing to 10 those associated with the Grand Slam tennis tournament which begins on February 8. Victoria state Emergency Services Minister Lisa Neville confirmed the new cases had been detected on Wednesday, adding that authorities are "very confident" one of the cases is a tennis player who is shedding the virus and is not infectious. The player is already in hard lockdown as they were on board a flight into Melbourne with another positive case. The other two cases are a player and their support person. Those 10 positive cases mean a total of 72 players remain in hard lockdown after being deemed close contacts of those positives on three charter flights into Melbourne from Abu Dhabi, Doha and Los Angeles. — AP

Leicester City humble Chelsea

Leicester, UK: Leicester moved to the top of the Premier League at the midway point of its campaign after a dominant 2-0 victory over Chelsea. Wilfred Ndidi and James Maddison scored in the first half on Tuesday to lift Leicester above Manchester United and Manchester City into first place. Leicester manager Brendan Rodgers has been happy for his players to go under the radar in the title race, but his bright and energetic team continues to show its credentials and is now unbeaten in six league games. Even with Vardy's goal drought extending to five games, Leicester had enough quality to beat Chelsea that has now lost five of its last eight league games to pile pressure on manager Frank Lampard. — AP

Shakib shines in Bangla win vs WI

Dhaka: Shakib Al Hasan took four wickets for just eight runs in a stunning international comeback Wednesday as Bangladesh beat the West Indies by six wickets in their first one-day international in Dhaka. Shakib, playing his first ODI after a one-year ban, helped Bangladesh bowl out a weakened West Indies for 122 in just 32.2 overs. In reply, the home side reached 125-4 in 33.5 overs, with skipper Tamim Iqbal hitting 44 off 69 balls. Kyle Mayers top-scored for the Windies with 40, while debutant Hasan Mahmud claimed 3-28 for Bangladesh. — AFP

Brief scores: West Indies 122 in 32.2 overs (K. Mayers 40; Shakib Al Hasan 4/8, H. Mahmud 3/28) lost to Bangladesh 125/4 in 33.5 overs (T. Iqbal 44, M. Rahim 19 n.o.; A. Hosen 3/26).

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HEAT'S ON KOHLI

Victory under Rahane puts Virat in focus

New Delhi, Jan. 20: First things first. There is no imminent threat to Virat Kohli's captaincy in any format and neither is BCCI even remotely thinking on those lines.

But that's the news part of the story. When it comes to views, there are many — some are quite open about the theory of split captaincy and some are speaking about it in hushed tones.

Ajinkya Rahane's calm demeanour in India's biggest overseas series win has opened up a debate but to disappoint the fans of the Test vice-captain, there is little chance of a permanent anointment for him in the immediate future.

However, there could be a paradigm shift in how the leadership group in the Indian cricket team works when Kohli re-enters that dressing room after a month-long paternity break.

When Kohli left, it was a team that was down in the dumps — dismissed for its lowest Test score of 36. But a lot has changed since that fateful afternoon in Adelaide.

While head coach Ravi Shastri is absolutely right in saying that this team bears Kohli's "stamp and character" but from December 19 in Adelaide to January 19 in Brisbane, a few senior cricketers will be perceived a bit differently.

Rohit Sharma, Ravichandran Ashwin, Cheteshwar Pujara and certainly Rahane, in their own little way, have created a legacy but post Brisbane, that legacy will need proper acknowledgement.

These four will not ask for it as they have now earned it after quite literally putting their bodies on line.

So when Kohli enters that Indian dressing room, he will remain the "first" but "among equals" in a leadership group that possibly will be more inclusive.

On Friday, when a question was put forth on this to stand-in skipper Rahane after the match got over but expectedly, his tight defence couldn't be breached.

"I don't want to think about all these things. This is a victory that we all need to enjoy and I will think about England series once I am back in India," Rahane dodged the question. — PTI

A second-string Indian team, led by Ajinkya Rahane, braved all odds to defeat a full-strength Australia by three wickets at the Gabba here to win

the four-Test series 2-1 and retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy on Tuesday in Brisbane.

"On behalf of everyone at Cricket Australia, we congratulate Team India for their resilience, courage and skill demonstrated in retaining the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in a series that will be talked about for generations to come," CA wrote in a Thank You note to the BCCI.

The note, written by CA interim CEO Nick Hockley and Chair Earl Eddings, was addressed to "friends in Indian cricket", the BCCI, acknowledging the role played by the Sourav Ganguly-led board in successfully completing the tour amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Australian cricket will forever be grateful to the BCCI for their friendship, trust and commitment in helping to deliver a series that has brought joy to many millions of people around the world at a time they needed it most," the letter read.

"The unique challenges of international touring during a global pandemic are considerable and we thank India's players, coaches and support staff for all they have given.

"Over the past nine weeks, the Indian and Australian men's teams completed outstanding One-Day International and Twenty20 International series, followed by one of the greatest Border-Gavaskar Test series ever completed," it



Indian coach Ravi Shastri (right) talks to players in the dressing room with captain Ajinkya Rahane by his side after India beat Australia to clinch the Border-Gavaskar Test series 2-1 at the Gabba in Brisbane on Tuesday.

Pant is best keeper-batsman

Dubai, Jan. 20: India's Rishabh Pant became the top-ranked wicket-keeper batsman in the world after his sensational series-winning 89-run knock in the Brisbane match pushed him to a career-best 13th spot in the ICC Test batting rankings, issued on Wednesday.

Pant, who won many admirers for his fearless and mature batting, has 691 points in his kitty. South Africa's Quinton de Kock (677) is the next best wicket-keeper batsman in the list in the 15th position.

Australia batsman Marnus Labuschagne's first-innings century in Brisbane took him past India skipper Virat Kohli (862 points) to third position with a career-best 878 rating points. Kohli missed the action as he was on paternity leave.

Young India opener Shubman Gill continued his upward trajectory, moving up from 68th to 47th spot after a crucial 91 in the second innings of the fourth Test, which India won by three wickets on Tuesday.

Middle-order mainstay Cheteshwar Pujara moved up one place to seventh after his dogged effort, while Mohammad Siraj

jumped 32 places to 45th after taking six wickets in the match, including a five-wicket haul in the second innings.

Debutant Washington Sundar and Shardul Thakur too gained in rankings following their useful contributions with both bat and ball.

Washington entered the rankings in 82nd (batting) and 97th (bowling) positions, while Thakur re-entered the batting list in 113th position and bowling list in 65th position.

Australia captain Tim Paine moved up three spots to 42nd after scores of 50 and 27 while fast bowler Josh Hazlewood leapfrogged New Zealand's Tim Southee to the fourth spot after grabbing six wickets in the match, including a haul of five for 57 in the first innings.

England's Joe Root has returned to the top five with his highest rating points tally (738) in two years after scoring a first-innings 228 to help his team win the first Test against Sri Lanka by seven wickets in Galle.

Root has advanced six places, overtaking the likes of Pakistan's Babar Azam and Pujara in the process.

Jonny Bairstow (up five places to 58th in batting) and Sam Curran (up two places to 39th in bowling) also gained.

For Sri Lanka, Lahiru Thirimanne's progressed 12 places to 87th position while left-arm spinner Lasith Embuldeniya (up six places to 47th) and medium pacer Asitha Fernando (up 11 places to 96th) also gained. — PTI



India's Rishabh Pant hits a six during his match winning knock against Australia on the final day of the fourth Test at the Gabba in Brisbane on Tuesday.

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Smith axed, Sanju to lead IPL Royals

New Delhi, Jan. 20: Sanju Samson replaced Steve Smith as Rajasthan Royals captain after the Australian batsman and some other under-performing stars were released by their respective IPL franchises even as Chennai Super Kings retained veteran Suresh Raina for the upcoming 14th edition of the league.

The deadline for the eight franchises to submit the lists of retained and released players for the next season ended on Wednesday.

Samson was appointed to the top job after RR decided against renewing former skipper Steve Smith's contract.

Smith's contract ended in October 2020.

The Australians, smarting from a Test series loss to an injury-plagued India, took a hit as the likes of the explosive Glenn Maxwell and opener Aaron Finch too were released by Kings XI Punjab and Royal Challengers Bangalore respectively.

Also released by KXIP were West Indies all-rounder Sheldon Cottrell, Afghanistan's Mujeeb-ur-Rahman and New



Steve Smith

Zealand's Jimmy Neesham, who underwent a surgery recently to treat an injured finger.

CSK's Harbhajan Singh and Mumbai Indians' Lasith Malinga were among the other big names to be released by their respective sides ahead of next month's auction.

Harbhajan was joined by the likes of Kedar Jadhav, Piyush Chawla and Murali Vijay who were also let go by CSK.

Also released by MI was Sherfane Rutherford, while Delhi Capitals decided to enter the next edition without English batsman Jason Roy, wicketkeeper Alex Carey, leg-spinner Sandeep Lamichhane and seamer Mohit Sharma. — PTI

WHO'S IN & OUT

■ **Chennai Super Kings — Players retained:** MS Dhoni, Ravindra Jadeja, Narayan Jagadeesan, Ruturaj Gaikwad, KM Asif, Josh Hazlewood, Karn Sharma, Ambati Rayudu, Suresh Raina, Imran Tahir, Deepak Chahar, Faf du Plessis, Shardul Thakur, Mitchell Santner, Dwayne Bravo, Lungi Ngidi, Sam Curran, Sai Kishore. **Released (5):** Harbhajan Singh, Shane Watson, Piyush Chawla, Kedar Jadhav, M. Vijay, Monu Kumar Singh.

■ **Delhi Capitals — Players retained:** Ajinkya Rahane, Rishabh Pant, Kagiso Rabada, Anrich Nortje, Marcus Stoinis, Daniel Sams, Shimron Hetmyer, Chris Woakes, Shikhar Dhawan, Prithvi Shaw, Shreyas Iyer, Axar Patel, Amit Mishra, Ishant Sharma, Ravichandran Ashwin, Harshal Patel, Lalit Yadav, Pravin Dubey, Avesh Khan. **Released (6):** Mohit Sharma, Tushar Deshpande, Keemo Paul, Sandeep Lamichhane, Alex Carey, Jason Roy.

■ **Kings XI Punjab — Players retained:** K. L. Rahul, Chris Gayle, Mayank Agarwal, Nicholas Pooran, Mandeep Singh, Sarfaraz Khan, Deepak Hooda, Prabhishran Singh, Mohammed Shami, Chris Jordan, Darshan Naidkande, Ravi Bishnoi, Murugan Ashwin, Arshdeep Singh, Harpreet Brar, Ishan Porel. **Released (9):** Glenn Maxwell, Karun Nair, Hardus Viljoen, Jagadeesha Suchith, Mujeeb ur Rahman, Sheldon Cottrell, Jimmy Neesham, Krishnappa Gowtham, Tajinder Singh.

■ **Kolkata Knight Riders — Players retained:** Eoin Morgan, Dinesh Karthik, Nitish Rana, Shubman Gill, Rinku Singh, Rahul Tripathi, Kamlesh Nagarkoti, Kuldeep Yadav, Lockie Ferguson, Pat Cummins, Prasidh Krishna, Sandeep Warrier, Shivam Mavi, Varun Chakravarthy, Andre Russell, Sunil Narine, Tim Seifert. **Released (3):** Nikhil Naik, Siddhesh Lad, M. Siddharth, Tom Banton, Chris Green, Harry Gurney.

■ **Mumbai Indians — Players retained:** Rohit Sharma, Quinton de Kock, Suryakumar Yadav, Ishan Kishan, Chris Lynn, Anmolpreet Singh, Saurabh Tiwary, Aditya Tare, Kieron Pollard, Hardik Pandya, Krunal Pandya, Anukul Roy, Jasprit Bumrah, Trent Boult, Rahul Chahar, Jayant Yadav, Dhawal Kulkarni, Mohsin Khan. **Released (7):** Lasith Malinga, Mitchell McClenaghan, James Pattinson, Nathan Coulter-Nile, Sherfane Rutherford, Prince Balwant Rai, Digvijay Deshmukh.

■ **Rajasthan Royals — Players retained:** Sanju Samson, Ben Stokes, Jofra Archer, Jos Buttler, Riyan Parag, Shreyas Gopal, Rahul Tewatia, Mahipal Lomror, Kartik Tyagi, Andrew Tye, Jaydev Unadkat, Mayank Markande, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Anuj Rawat, David Miller, Manan Vohra, Robin Uthappa. **Released (8):** Steve Smith, Ankit Rajpoot, Oshane Thomas, Akash Singh, Varun Aaron, Tom Curran, Anirudha Joshi, Shashank Singh.

■ **Royal Challengers Bangalore — Players retained:** Virat Kohli, AB de Villiers, Yuzvendra Chahal, Devdutt Padikkal, Navdeep Saini, Washington Sundar, Mohammed Siraj, Kane Richardson, Adam Zampa, Josh Philippe, Shabbaz Ahmed and Pavan Deshpande. **Released (10):** Aaron Finch, Chris Morris, Isuru Udana, Moeen Ali, Pawan Negi, Gurkeerat Singh Mann, Shivam Dube, Dale Steyn, Parthiv Patel, Umesh Yadav.

■ **Sunrisers Hyderabad — Players retained:** David Warner, Kane Williamson, Rashid Khan, T. Natarajan, Abhishek Sharma, Basil Thampi, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Jonny Bairstow, Manish Pandey, Mohammad Nabi, Sandeep Sharma, Shahbaz Nadeem, Shreyas Goswami, Siddarth Kaul, Khaleel Ahmed, Vijay Shankar, Wriddhiman Saha, Abdul Samad, Mitchell Marsh, Jason Holder, Priyam Garg, Virat Singh. **Released (5):** Sanjay Yadav, B. Sandeep, Bilal Stanlake, Fabian Allen, Yarra Prithvira.

Covid-19 halts Sai, Srikanth Thai run

Bangkok, Jan. 20: Indian shuttler B. Sai Praneeth, one of the frontrunners to represent country at the Tokyo Olympics, has pulled out of the ongoing Thailand Open Super 1000 badminton tournament after testing positive for Covid-19 here.

Former world number one Kidambi Srikanth, who was sharing the room with Praneeth, was also forced to withdraw as per protocols laid down by the Badminton World Federation (BWF). "Badminton World Federation (BWF) can confirm India player Sai Praneeth B has tested positive for COVID-19 and has been withdrawn from the TOYOTA Thailand Open," the governing body said in a statement on Tuesday night.

However, Thai health authorities, Badminton Association of Thailand (BAT) and BWF, restricted "the movement and schedule of the rest of the India team as per tournament protocol," which will be in place for 14 days till February 1.

PRANNEY DIGS IN DEEP TO STUN CHRISTIE

Indian shuttler H S Prannoy battled through pain in his ribcage and a shoulder injury to stun Asian Games champion Jonatan Christie in the opening round of Toyota Thailand Open Super 1000 tournament here on Wednesday.

A former top 10 player, Prannoy showed great resilience in the men's singles competition and didn't let the physical discomfort disturb his focus, outwitting the world number seven Christie 18-21, 21-16, 23-21 in a thrilling contest that clocked an hour and 15 minutes.

It is Prannoy's first win against the sixth seeded Indonesian in last four attempts. Prannoy and Sameer Verma will carry India's charge in the men's singles after the withdrawal of fellow colleagues B Sai Praneeth and Kidambi Srikanth. — PTI



India's H. S. Prannoy reacts after defeating Indonesia's Jonatan Christie 18-21, 21-16, 23-21 in their men's singles first round match at the Thailand Open badminton tournament in Bangkok on Tuesday.

— AFP

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