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WEATHER

Max: 32°C
Min: 17°C
RH: 81%
Rainfall: Nil
Forecast: Cloudy sky.
Misty morning. Max/Min
temp. 32/18 °C

**COVID-19
COUNT**
CASES (+11,354)
DEATHS (+112)
1,06,36,056 1,53,140
STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS
(+214) (+2)
TS: 2,92,835 1,586
(+137) (+4)
AP: 8,86,694 7,146
CASES AROUND THE WORLD
9,83,53,744
DEATHS
21,06,818
COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES 219
worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE
Savari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Pushya Shuddha Dasami till 8.53 pm
Star: Kritika till 9.29 pm
Varjyam: 8.04 am to 9.51 am
Durmuhurtam: 6.53 am to 8.22 am
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am
HURI CALENDAR
Jamadi- ul- Akhri 9,1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.46 am
Zohar: 12.36 pm
Asar: 4.30 pm
Maghrib: 6.12 pm
Isha: 7.23 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.05 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.49 PM
MOONSET 1.08 AM
MOONRISE 12.55 PM

COUNTER POINT

Don't worry, our vaccine is not just 98% or 110% but 200% effective!

SHORT TAKES
Petrol crosses ₹92 per litre
New Delhi: Petrol price on Friday crossed ₹92 a litre mark in Mumbai, while diesel touched an all-time high after rates were raised for the third time this week. Fuel prices were hiked by 25 paise per litre each, according to a price notification from oil marketing firms. This took the petrol price in Delhi to ₹85.45 per litre and ₹92.04 in Mumbai.

Heroin worth ₹1,000 cr seized
New Delhi: Two Sri Lankan nationals have been arrested and about 100 kg of heroin worth an estimated ₹1,000 crore seized as part of a probe involving a trans-border drugs-trafficking racket, the NCB said on Friday.
MMM Nawas and Mohamed Afnas were nabbed from Chennai, where they were living by hiding their real identities.

UPSC won't make good lost year
New Delhi: The Centre Friday told the Supreme Court that it was not in favour of granting one extra opportunity to those civil services aspirants who could not appear in their last attempt in the UPSC exams last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
Full report on Page 4

KTR as CM upsets BJP

Rama Rao at helm could force BJP redesign its plan

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC HYDERABAD, JAN. 22

Amidst the growing clamour in the Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) and now seemingly inevitable rise of party supremo K. Chandrashekhra Rao's son and minister K.T. Rama Rao as next Chief Minister, the Opposition parties, in particular the challenger BJP, seem to be ill at ease over any change of guard at the helm of state affairs. The game plan of the Opposition for the next Assembly polls, particularly that of the BJP, drawn over the past several months, was finalised keeping KCR as the prime target, which will go awry if Rama Rao takes charge. For one, he may prove to be a contrasting kind of adminis-

GenNext leaders to take charge in state

IREDDY SRINIVAS REDDY | DC HYDERABAD, JAN. 22

With changes imminent in the political scenario, an interesting feature emerges from the three main political parties in Telangana state: it is inevitably time for the generation next to lead their respective parties for the battle royale.

trator to his father and current Chief Minister on several criteria. In fact, as CMs, they could prove to be as different chalk

If the TRS supremo K. Chandrashekhra Rao does indeed anoint son K.T. Rama Rao as CM, the young leader will lead his party to fight the 2023 elections. He is already in control of the party as its working president and did lead the charge in the GHMC polls.

Page 2: Cong is missing block in youth politics

and cheese, which will push the BJP back to the drawing board. For starters, the suave KTR, brimming with you-

thful dynamism, is expected to completely transform the image of the TRS government, which will render irrelevant the big charge of the Opposition that KCR was restricting himself to either Pragati Bhavan, the CM's house, or his farmhouse," a senior TRS leader said, who is in the forefront of "make KTR CM" campaign.

Much to the surprise of his own partymen, state BJP president Bandi Sanjay has been repeatedly professing doom for the TRS government.

Page 2: TRS leaders don't see any revolt

CONGRESS TO ELECT NEW PREZ BY JUNE

ASHHAR KHAN | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 22

The Congress will have an elected president by June 2021, with the party's working committee on Friday approving holding the internal election after Assembly polls in five states. The CWC authorised incumbent party chief Sonia Gandhi to schedule the internal elections.

Full report on Page 4

Another WB minister quits Mamata Cabinet

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, JAN. 22

A day before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's brief Kolkata visit, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee received yet another blow as one more rebel Trinamul Congress minister: Rajib Banerjee quit her government, fuelling speculations of his defection to the BJP.

Within hours of Mr

Banerjee's move, the TMC expelled his loyalist and the daughter of former ICC chief Jagmohan Dalmiya: Baishali Dalmiya from the party, accusing her of "anti-party activities".

He has become the third TMC heavyweight minister in a row to leave Ms Banerjee's cabinet in less than two months.

Mr Modi and Ms Banerjee, however, are all set to face each other on Satur-day in Kolkata in

what is supposed to be their last official public appearance together before the assembly polls to celebrate Para-kram Diwas — marking iconic freedom fighter Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's 125th birth anniversary.

The PM's brief visit to Kolkata has already been dubbed by the Trinamul as a political stunt to reach out to the people of Bengal ahead of the polls.

Full report on Page 4

Farmers likely to protest seeking turmeric board

NARENDER PULLOOR | DC NIZAMABAD, JAN. 22

The issue of establishing Turmeric Board in Nizamabad has once again come to the fore as farmers are preparing to intensify their agitation with regard to this two-decade-old demand.

Farmers of undivided Nizamabad and Karimnagar districts had participated in a series of agitations demanding establishment of Turmeric Board in Nizamabad.

It may be mentioned that both Nizamabad and Karimnagar MP seats had been won by BJP after their candidates intensely campaigned about the failure of then incumbent Nizamabad MP Kalvakuntla Kavitha of the TRS failing to get the Turmeric Board

established in the town. About 178 farmers had even filed their nomination papers to contest from the Nizamabad Lok Sabha to make matters difficult for Kavitha, daughter of Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao.

The farmers are now targeting Nizamabad MP Dharmapuri Arvind of BJP on his failure in getting the turmeric board to the town. Now MP, Arvind had as a contestant promised on a bond paper that he would ensure that a Turmeric Board is established in Nizamabad if he wins.

Farmers of two districts have been demanding since the past two decades that a separate Turmeric Board be established in Nizamabad.

Page 2: Revanth plan to cash in on protest

CENTRE TO TALK ONLY ON FARM LAW FREEZE

SANJAY KAW | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 22

The government's negotiations with the protesting farmers' unions hit a roadblock on Friday as the farmer leaders once again stuck to their demands for repeal of the three agriculture laws and a legal guarantee for MSP, even as the Centre asked them to reconsider its proposal for putting the laws on hold for 12 to 18 months.

Unlike the last 10 rounds of talks, at Friday's meeting the two sides could not even reach a decision on the next date as the government also hardened its position saying it is ready to meet once the unions agree to discuss the suspension proposal.

On Thursday, the government offered to put on hold the three laws and set up a joint committee to find solutions.

Full report on Page 4

Congress leaders spar over Warangal MLC candidate

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, JAN. 22

The finalisation of nominees for the Warangal-Khammam-Nalgonda Graduates Legislative Council constituency generated a lot of heat during a meeting of the Congress here on Friday.

AICC in-charge Manickam Tagore along with TPCC chief Uttam Kumar Reddy and other key leaders held a meeting at Gandhi Bhavan.

Several leaders from the three districts objected to the senior leaders who are sending mediators to Telanjana Jana Samiti chief Prof. Kodandaram for taking support of the Congress in the upcoming MLC elections. They demanded that the Congress should field its own candidate. They

KHAMMAM BEATS WARANGAL, NALGONDA IN WOMEN GRADS

DC CORRESPONDENT KHAMMAM, JAN. 22

There are more women graduate voters in Khammam district when compared to the other districts of Nalgonda-Warangal-Khammam graduate constituency. There are 30,525 male graduate voters in Khammam district followed by 16,829 in

Bhadradri, 25,415 in Warangal Urban, 9720 in Warangal rural, 10891 in Mahabubabad, 3790 in Bhupalapalli and 3055 in Mulugu district. There are 4,91,396 graduate voters in the graduate constituency. There are 29,097 women voters in Nalgonda, 18,558 in Suryapet and 12,972 in Yadradri.

opposed giving support to Prof. Kodandaram and Cheruku Sudhakar. Ramreddy Dhamodhar Reddy wondered why the meeting was being held when one section had spread news that names

were finalised. Former PCC chief Ponnala Lakshmaiah said that they should prefer youth. Tagore said Congress president Sonia Gandhi will take the final call from the short list.

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SHORT TAKES

MLC NOMINATIONS
SPARK STIR IN
CONG MEETDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 22

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Ramreddy Dhamodhar Reddy wondered why the meeting was being held when one section had spread news that names were finalised.

Former PCC chief Ponnala Lakshmaiah said that they should prefer youth and those who are loyal to the party since long.

Tagore stated the leaders had finalised the candidates and AICC president Sonia Gandhi will take the final call from the short list. Tagore instructed the party leaders to form booth committees for Warangal and Khammam municipal elections.

LEADERS DON'T
SEE REVOLT
AGAINST KTR

From Page 1

According to Sanjay, the TRS government would fall rather quickly after Rama Rao's coronation. "(Bandi) Sanjay should have instead tried to project a public narrative that change of guard in the TRS is immaterial to the BJP's fortunes because it is set to bring down political stalwart KCR itself, so how would KTR matter," a BJP leader argued.

The TRS camp, for its part, is partly elated and partly confused about the revival of talk of Chandrashekar Rao stepping down to facilitate his son's elevation. The political scuttlebutt amongst several senior leaders is that a change could happen anytime after the completion of Chandrashekar Rao's dream project and legacy, Yadadri, the creation of a temple city at what was formerly Yadagirigutta.

TRS leaders are upbeat because Rama Rao has already built a brand for himself, particularly among urban voters, and will undoubtedly tour the state extensively to connect with rural masses soon after his elevation. "Ram anna is extremely articulate and multi-lingual. He can charm a variety of audiences with his macaronic capabilities, and can act as a bridge between India and Bharat, or Hyderabad and rest of Telangana," said an MLA, adding that Rama Rao was expected to be more accessible and rejuvenate the party morale and fighting spirit. TRS leaders also do not see any cause célèbre or anticipate any trouble or rebellion from grassroots leader and minister T. Harish Rao during this transition for a plethora of political reasons. "What will he get in the BJP that he has not received in the TRS? He would stick to TRS and continue to work for the party and government, unless an attempt was made to marginalise him completely, which won't be the case," he said.

"Contrary to the perception of the opposition, Ram anna and Harish anna enjoy a good working relationship," the MLA added.

Meanwhile, the BJP is hoping that Rama Rao does not become CM also because he can largely ward off anti-incumbency and seek a renewed mandate on the narrative that he needs a little more than three years to create a Bangaru Telangana.

● **WHAT WILL** he get in the BJP that he has not received in the TRS? He would stick to TRS and continue to work for the party and government, unless an attempt was made to marginalise him completely, which won't be the case, Contrary to the perception of the opposition, Ram anna and Harish anna enjoy a good working relationship," the MLA added.

● **RAM ANNA** is extremely articulate and multi-lingual.



Union minister of state for home G. Kishan Reddy, national president OBC Morcha Dr K. Laxman and BJP corporator Sunita Prakashgoud visit Nagamaiahkunta slum in Musheerabad during the 'BJP Basti' meeting on Friday.

—By Arrangement

Home loans for
flood-hit: KishanInhabitants of the slum should avoid
throwing waste in nala, advises ministerDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 22

Union minister of state for home G. Kishan Reddy said on Friday that all those who are eligible under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana would be given loans depending on their income and location.

The minister was participating in the 'BJP Basti' meeting along with OBC Morcha national president Dr K. Laxman at Nagamaiahkunta in Musheerabad constituency. He said he visited the basti every time there was a flood, and this time he came in to offer homes to the people homes under the PMAY.

He promised new pattas to those who lost them in the floods and appealed to all residents to support the Swachh Bharath Abhiyan. He advised the inhabitants to avoid throwing waste in the nala as this would clog it and flood the area in times of rain.

The minister said the Coronavirus threat still loomed and proper safety steps should continue. Those who get vaccinated too should continue with the previous alert levels for more time. Scientists worked hard for a year to make the vaccine, and of the four companies doing this, two are from India.

OBC Morcha leader Dr Laxman said the high tension power line was the main problem for this basti and he was fighting for remedial measures for the past 30 years. Kishan Reddy would now be adopting the Basti, he said, and recalled that he developed the area as an MLA in recent years.

He expressed happiness that the housing problem will also be solved soon with the initiatives from Kishan Reddy. He praised the Centre for giving low-interest loans to those who want to build their own houses while "our state government took no interest."

CONG SLAMS
EFLU FOR
IGNORING OBC
QUOTADC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 22

AICC spokesperson Dr Sravan Dasoju on Friday took potshots at English and Foreign Languages University (Eflu) and other institutions, which have been deliberately violating OBC reservation system in recruitment of faculty rendering injustice to the other backward classes (OBCs). Sravan lamented that despite Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself belonging to OBC, it is unfortunate that the Central Universities were making a mockery of constitutional rights. He warned the Vice-Chancellor of Eflu that the Congress won't spare any such irregularities going forward and will fight at any level to protect the interests of OBC candidates who have been deprived of their due share in the roster system.

Union min. reviews
power plant in TSDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 22

Union minister of state for home G. Kishan Reddy on Friday reviewed progress of the power plant "promised" to Telangana after the state was separated from united Andhra Pradesh.

Reviewing the stage of the project being constructed at Ramagundam with officials of National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) in Hyderabad, he offered all help from the centre in speeding up the two units of 800 mega watt (MW), which got stalled in aftermath of Covid-19 pandemic. The MoS further inquired about the process for obtaining requisite permits for commissioning the remaining three units of 800 MW each at the Ramagundam site.

He asked NTPC authorities to efficiently utilise the coal being extracted by the Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) while implementing the project. He sought details of contracts that have so far been signed with regard to coal linkages.

Kishan Reddy said: "We are planning to soon invite Prime Minister Narendra Modi for inauguration of the Ramagundam Fertilisers and Chemicals Limited (RFCL). Please complete all preparations for PM to lay the foundation stone for second phase of the Telangana Power Plant around the same time Narendra Modi opens the RFCL plant."

NTPC officials informed the MoS that the country's largest solar power plant on a water body, with a capacity of 100 MW, is being constructed in Telangana. The minister

● **KISHAN REDDY** asked NTPC authorities to efficiently utilise the coal being extracted by the Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) while implementing the project. He sought details of contracts that have so far been signed with regard to coal linkages.

was also briefed about tasks that NTPC had taken up as part of its corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities across the Telangana state.

Later, during a review meeting with Hyderabad district collector Sweta Mohanty, Kishan Reddy inquired about details of houses being allotted to the poor. He suggested that estimates for construction of schools be prepared by utilising CSR funds of various corporate bodies in the state.

Further, the MoS inquired about details of Covid vaccine being administered in Hyderabad city. Officials briefed him about the problems in "Covin" software. Following this, Kishan Reddy spoke to Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan over phone to know about the issue. At the time, the central minister was informed about a special camp that will be organised soon for vaccinating the elderly and disabled.

Later, along with GHMC commissioner Lokesh Kumar, Kishan Reddy reviewed construction of the Amberpet flyover with officials of National Highways Authority of India. The minister instructed officials to start works on Amberpet flyover immediately.

Jeevan: CM unable to run admin

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 22

Senior Congress leader and MLC T. Jeevan Reddy on Friday said that Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao was running out of steam and unable to run the administration and was therefore keen on making K.T. Rama Rao the

next Chief Minister.

Addressing a press conference, Jeevan Reddy said that Chandrashekar Rao was contemplating the transition because of age issues.

Reddy slammed Chandrashekar Rao for his flip-flop on the new agricultural laws and Ayushman Bharat. He said

implementation of the reservation for economically weaker sections among the upper castes had been delayed by two years and results of the recent elections could be the reason for implementing it now. The Congress leader said even 10 per cent of tribal reservations were not being implemented.

● **JEEVAN REDDY** said implementation of the reservation for economically weaker sections among the upper castes had been delayed by two years and results of the recent elections could be the reason for implementing it now.

Industrialists
contribute for
Ram MandirDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 22

Several industrialists have donated funds for the construction of the Ram mandir in Ayodhya.

On Friday, My Home Industries chairman Jupally Rameswar Rao contributed ₹5 crore and Megha Engineering & Infrastructures Limited managing director Krishna Reddy donated ₹6 crore.

Aparna Construction contributed ₹2 crore and Reddy's Labs ₹1 crore through the Chinna Jeeyar Swamy for the construction of the temple. The industrialists handed over the cheques to RSS central secretary Suresh Bhayyaji Jhoshi at the Muchintal ashram.

A.P. Jithender Reddy, BJP senior leader and former MP also donated ₹1 crore for the Ram mandir construction.

MLA apologises
for commentsDC CORRESPONDENT
JAGTIAL, JAN. 22

TRS MLA Kalvakuntla Vidyasagar Rao of Korutla denied that he had made any remarks insulting Lord Rama. "I am ready to collect donations (for the Ram mandir at Ayodhya) if I am given a receipt book by the Ram Janbhoomi Trust," the ruling party legislator clarified on Friday.

Incidentally, at a meeting held in a private function hall on occasion of launching the second phase of sheep distribution scheme, Vidyasagar Rao had urged people not to donate money for construction the Ram mandir. The appeal was made in the presence of ministers Talasani Srinivas Yadav and Koppula Eshwar on Thursday.

The comments led to a storm in political circles of Karimnagar district, whose Lok Sabha member is Bandi Sanjay Kumar, the state chief of the Bharatiya Janata Party.

BJP leaders immediately took out protest rallies, staged dharnas and burnt effigies of the ruling party legislator and demanded that he forthwith apologise for his comments. TRS and BJP activists even clashed with each other in Metpally and Korutla towns. Following these protests, the Korutla MLA spoke to media persons and declared

that he had not made any comments insulting Hindus or Lord Rama. "I am also a true Hindu. I fast every Saturday and pray to Lord Rama. In my 66 years of life, I have never insulted any Hindu, leave alone God," Vidyasagar Rao said.

He observed: "When BJP is collecting donations from people for construction of the Ram Mandir, why has it not sent receipt books to TRS leaders and MLAs for mobilising donations. Are we not devotees of Lord Rama? Does this not amount to BJP trying to gain political mileage in the name of God," Vidyasagar Rao asked.

On the protests, he remarked that BJP leaders are enacting a political drama in an attempt to reach out to people, who are with TRS.

The ruling party legislator said he is ready to apologise for his statement but under the condition that BJP leaders cease using the name of Lord Rama for gaining political mileage. "They should involve all sections of people in collecting donations for the Ayodhya Temple irrespective of political parties. God belongs to everyone. I will also collect donations and will go to Ayodhya to have darshan of Lord Sri Rama," the ruling party legislator declared.

Revanth plan to
cash in on protest

FROM PAGE 1

They have repeatedly expressed displeasure over the Spices Board having only a regional office in the town.

In this context, farmers who are sympathisers of the TRS on Friday demanded the resignation of BJP's Arvind as MP.

Speaking to newsmen at the Velpur market yard, they accused the saffron party parliament members from Nizamabad and Karimnagar of betraying turmeric farmers. "MP Arvind signed on a bond paper promising that he will bring the Turmeric Board within five days after his victory in Parliament elections," recalled one of the farmers demanding the resignation of MP from the Lok Sabha.

However, sympathisers of the BJP within the farmers are holding a meeting at Chowtpally village in Kammarapally mandal on Saturday. MP Arvind and select BJP leaders will participate in this meeting.

Surprisingly, BJP leaders are now seeking a letter from the TRS government promising minimum support price (MSP) for turmeric. This has left a vocal section of farmers dumbfounded. They are further flabbergasted that BJP leaders are now justifying the existence of the regional office of Spices Board in Nizamabad, instead of demanding a separate Turmeric Board.

Meanwhile, TPCC working president and Congress Lok Sabha member A. Revanth Reddy will observe a Rythu Deeksha in Armoor on January 30 in support of turmeric farmers. Even a joint action committee (JAC) consisting of Congress, Telugu Desam and Communist parties has been formed demanding that a Turmeric Board is finally established in Nizamabad and ₹10,000 per quintal is declared as the minimum price for turmeric. Farmers are currently getting below ₹5,000 per quintal of turmeric.

Cong is only missing
piece in block to make
TS politics younger

From Page 1

While the former was a highlight and a highpoint of his career so far, the latter must have given him a good sense of the kind of fight to expect from the Opposition, in particular from the BJP.

The dominant national party, the Bharatiya Janata Party has appointed an aggressive young leader, Karimnagar MP Bandi Sanjay Kumar, as president of its state unit. This has shown immediate results and a successful narrative has been set that the BJP has replaced the Congress as the principal opposition.

The BJP has further consolidated the perception that there is a strong anti-incumbency against the TRS, in particular against the Kalvakuntla family and in favour of the saffron party which as the unifying fulcrum of such an anti-TRS force will form government.

In particular, after Sanjay took over the mantle of leadership of his dormant if not moribund party, he surprised everyone by leading it to victory in the Dubbak Assembly bypoll. It also delivered a stunning performance and became the second largest party in the GHMC, and pushed the TRS into a corner over the election of the Mayor by denying it the simple majority in the municipal council.

The BJP's top leadership was highly impressed by the turnaround in the party's fortunes led by Sanjay's aggressive attacks on the TRS government. The central leadership backed him strongly, including putting up a roster of top notch speakers for the GHMC campaign. It is, therefore, moot to even discuss under whose leadership the BJP will fight the state polls, in which it hopes to dismantle the TRS.

Incidentally, the MIM has been led by a youthful leader for a long time, Asaduddin Owaisi, who has emerged as a national leader, especially since 2014, where he is increasingly being seen as someone who has expanded his party and increasingly become the most important voice and representative of Muslims across the country.

The final piece on the board is the shrinking national party and the instrumental force in creation of separate Telangana – the Congress. The principal Opposition party when last Assembly poll results came out, the Congress is vacillating on the leader who will replace Uttam Kumar Reddy at its Telangana unit chief.

However, after several rounds of consultation under

● **THE BJP'S** top leadership was highly impressed by the turnaround in the party's fortunes led by Sanjay's aggressive attacks on the TRS government.

high public glare, it looks like the two most enthusiastic aspirants and Lok Sabha MPs – A. Revanth Reddy and Komatireddy Venkat Reddy — have been ruled out as PCC president by the high command.

In the process, the general secretary in-charge Manickam Tagore was reportedly admonished by party president Sonia Gandhi for bungling the exercise and for not having been above board and strictly neutral in the process. He was purportedly seen as biased and favouring Revanth Reddy, for which he was given an earful by the supreme.

With the ruling out of several other leaders, old and young, from Mallu Viskarmarka Bhatti to Ponnamm Prabhakar to Sridhar Babu, the race is now largely limited to two seniors without ruling out a dark horse – MLC Jeevan Reddy and Marri Shashidhar Reddy. Between the two, while the former has age and health working against him, besides the fact that he was formerly in the Telugu Desam, whereas Shashidhar Reddy, with a clean image, strong intellectual prowess and strategic sense, has an edge.

Either way, whoever the leader, the new PCC president will complete the local quad along with Rama Rao, Bandi Sanjay and Owaisi as the other three.

With new leaders at the helm, a more aggressive brand of politics will play out, with greater stakes. A generational change in surely underway. Chandrashekar Rao belonged to a different league, being more contemporary with the likes of N. Chandrababu Naidu and late Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy.

As of today, Rama Rao has crossed 44 years of age while Sanjay is 49.

Owaisi is 51 years, his younger brother and leader of MIM in state Assembly Akbaruddin Owaisi is just a year younger.

Had MPs Revanth Reddy or Komatireddy been in the race, they would have been in the pack at 51 and 56 years respectively, but current favourite Jeevan Reddy and Shashidhar Reddy are in their sixties.

But once Indian National Congress appoints Rahul Gandhi as its president, as is expected, he will, at 51, make it a fight to remember of generation next of politics.



BJP state president Bandi Sanjay Kumar addresses the media in Warangal on Friday.

— By Arrangement

before making Rama Rao the Chief Minister, Sanjay said.

He said the Chief Minister had finally opened his eyes to implement the reservation for the economically weaker sections (EWS) among the upper castes, which was first proposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He said that people belonging to

the forward castes were meted out injustice with the TRS government failing to implement the quota for them so far.

On other issues, Sanjay said, "It's unfortunate to see the state government dragging the implementation of the Pay Revision Commission (PRC) to the employees." He accused the Chief Minister of widening

differences among the people by encouraging caste groups.

Demanding that the TRS government apologise for hurting the sentiments of Hindus, especially with regard to a party MLA questioning the donations for the Ram mandir, an effigy of Chandrashekar Rao was burnt by the BJP activists.

OTHER STORIES

RALLY TO CREATE AWARENESS ON ROAD SAFETY

DC CORRESPONDENT
KOMARAM BHEEM
ASIFABAD, JAN. 22

A large number of women took out a rally to create awareness about the importance of the wearing helmet and road safety as part of ongoing National Road Safety month-2021 in the Komaram Bheem Asifabad district headquarters on Friday. Women from various walks of life took part in the rally.

Addressing the occasion after flagging off the rally, district transport officer Kistaiah said majority of the road accident and deaths are due to human errors and appealed to the women to create road traffic rules and the importance of wearing a helmet to their children.

The 'Rakshana Road Safety Foundation' representative and retired degree college principal Neelam Sampath Kumar took part in the rally.

Road transport and police officials appreciated Neelam Sampath Kumar for printing posters and pamphlets with his personal money ₹6,000 to create awareness among the people about the road safety, accidents, and rules.

Road transport and police officials appreciated Neelam Sampath Kumar for printing posters and pamphlets with his personal money Rs 6,000 to create awareness among the people about the road safety, accidents, and rules.

Asifabad DSP Acheshwar Rao, RTC Depot Manager Murthy, DWVO Savitri, NGO members Santosh Kumar, Soujanya, Prathyusha, and Anganwadi members took part in the event.

UNABLE TO REPAY LOAN, DRIVER SETS AUTO ON FIRE

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, JAN. 22

A driver protested by setting his auto on fire in front of the Parkal police station on Friday. He alleged that the police are not helping him despite his complaint regarding the financiers who are pressuring him to pay the loan he took for purchasing a new auto. He was unable to pay due to the coronavirus lockdown and lack of fares for several months.

According to Parkal, Inspector P. Mahender Reddy, the auto driver was identified as S. Praveen, a resident of Parkal town. They said that the private financier personnel came to the auto driver house in the early morning on Friday and demanded and argued with the auto driver to clear the pending monthly instalments. Praveen was depressed and frustrated, he consumed alcohol, came to the police station, set ablaze his vehicle, said the police.

He said that the auto driver was making a false allegation that police are not taking any action on his complaint. "We did not receive any complaint from him about the financiers harassing to pay instalments. No case was registered regarding the incident as we are waiting for a petition from the complainant," said Reddy.

● **A PRIVATE** financier personnel came to the auto driver house and demanded and argued with the auto driver to clear the pending monthly instalments. The driver was depressed and frustrated, consumed alcohol, came to the police station and set ablaze to his vehicle in front of the Parkal police station, said the police.

₹1.26 crore sanctioned to restore Quilashapur fort

Swift decision taken to release funds for restoration

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, JAN. 22

The state government has sanctioned ₹1.26 crore for the restoration of the Quilashapur fort built by Sardar Sarvai Papanna in Raghunathapally mandal of Jangaon district, said Station Ghanpur MLA Thatikonda Rajaya here on Friday. The south west corner bastion of the fort collapsed due to heavy rains in October last year.

"After taking the issue to the notice of Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao and TRS Working President and IT Minister K.T. Rama Rao, the state government had sanctioned ₹1.26 crore for the restoration of the fort. I thank both of them for a swift decision in releasing



Station Ghanpur MLA T. Rajaiiah addressing the media in Jagoan on Friday.

funds for the restoration of a historic structure," he said.

Rajaiiah also informed that KTR would be visiting Station Ghanpur on January 25 to address a constituency level meeting. State Panchayat Raj

Minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao and MLCs Palla Rajeshwar Reddy and Pochampally Srinivas Reddy and Jangaon district ZP chairman Pagala Sampath Reddy would also take part in the event, he said.

● **MLA RAJAIIAH** informed that K.T. Rama Rao would be visiting Station Ghanpur on January 25 to address a constituency level meeting. State Panchayat Raj Minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao will also take part in the event.

He urged the village party president, secretaries and members of the affiliated unions to attend and make it a success.

Sarpanchula Forum Jangaon District President Pokala Siva Kumar, TRS Women's Section Mandal President Madlapally Sunita, District Leaders Namala Butchayya, Varala Ramesh were present among others.



Minister for Education Sabitha Indra Reddy along with minister P. Ajay Kumar inaugurating KGBV school in Raghunathapalem mandal on Friday.

Govt to gear up for 10th, inter exams: Min. Sabitha

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, JAN. 22

Minister for Education Sabitha Indra Reddy said that the government will complete the tenth class exam process by the end of May 31. She said that the Covid-19 pandemic effected agriculture and education sectors.

A plan is evolved pertaining to the completion of academic year to all the classes including conducting of classes, exams and results, she said, adding that nine and tenth classes, intermediate and degree classes will be commenced from February 1.

She said that the officials of the education department were asked to conduct classes with the prior consent of the farmers. The health of stu-

dents is more important and there is no important to attendance in the present context. She said that the officials informed that the parents asked to reopen the schools.

She said that the sanitation and cleaning of the schools already started and all schools will be ready by January 25. She said that a healthy and clean environment will be created in the schools. Health of 80 lakh students in the state is most important thing to the government. She said that the online classes are being continued and it will be on along with direct classes. She said that 92 per cent of students are attending online classes in Khammam district.

On commencement of classes of the other categories, she said that class-

es to the section like 6, 7 and 8th standard will be organised after the success of 9 and 10 classes. She said that the students need not worry about their academic year and it will not be hit.

Referring to the hostel rice that was rotten, she said that the government will replace new rice with the old one. She said that the quality food will be served to the kids in the hostels. She said that the EAMCET and inter classes of 2019 were conducted successfully. She said that the government has 15 KGBV schools in the district with Rs 22 crore. She inaugurated the JGBV schools in Lachagudem in Chintakani, Lingadudem in Konigerla, Raghunathapalem, Bonakal, Mudigonda and Kusumanchi.

FISH TRANSPORT FROM POND TO MARKET MADE EASY

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, JAN. 22

Fisheries department assistant director G. Satish said that the government sanctioned four vehicle units to the district to transport the fish from ponds to market.

He said that the fishermen are eligible to get the units and they should form as groups and apply for it. He said that the government will give 60 per cent as subsidy in each unit. The cost of the vehicle is ₹10 lakh and the fishermen groups were given bank linkage to get the loan for the remaining 40 per cent. The fishermen can use the units to transport their fish to the markets as early as possible.

SBI DONATES ₹25L TO SAINIK WELFARE

Hyderabad: To commemorate Armed Forces Flag Day, State Bank of India, Hyderabad circle, headed by Chief general Manager Om Prakash Mishra, on Friday handed over a cheque of ₹25,19,800 favouring 'Sainik Welfare Telangana' to Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan.

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, JAN. 22

Venkatapuram police, on Friday, foiled Maoist's plot to plant bombs and kill police parties at Chelimela forest area in Mulugu district. Police were acting on a tip off that as per the directions of banned CPI Maoists main leaders like Yapa Narayana alias Haribushan, Bade Chokka Rao alias Damodar, Kankana Raji Reddy alias Venkanna, and Wazeedu Venkatapuram area committee secretary Sudhakar, the militia members of Tadapale, Chelimela, Jella and Pamunuru assembled, armed with firearms and hatched a plan to kill the police party by planting explosives in Chelimela forest area.

Eturnagaram ASP

BJP leaders burn Vidyasagar effigies for Ram mandir remark

DC CORRESPONDENT
NIZAMABAD, JAN. 22:

BJP activists burnt effigy of TRS Korutla MLA Kalvakuntla Vidyasagar Rao across the district on Friday for his alleged comments against Ram Mandir construction in Ayodhya. BJP leaders staged protests in Bodhan, Sirikonda, Dharpally, Nizamabad and other

parts of the district.

In Bodhan, BJP leader Medapati Prakash Reddy and party activists burnt the effigy of MLA. They demanded immediate action against Vidyasagar Rao, who hurt the sentiments of Hindus. Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao should take action in this regard, they said.

The mood and sincerity

of the TRS leaders is exposed in religious sentiments, they said.

Meanwhile in Adilabad BJP leaders and activists on Friday burnt the effigy of the TRS MLA of Korutla.

The district president Payal Shankar said the TRS party has emerged as anti-Hindu and Korutla MLAs comments are any indication to this.

MBA students want fee to be fixed by JNTU

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, JAN. 22

The students of Vaagswari Educational institution who are pursuing Master of Business Administration (MBA) on Thursday demanded the government to issue orders to the college management to take the examination fees fixed by the Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University and allow them to write the examination. As many as 72 MBA stu-

dents went to the collectorate to meet district collector K. Shashanka seeking solution to their problem. But when the collector was not available they submitted the memorandum to the Administrative officer of the collectorate here in Karimnagar.

Speaking on the occasion, the students expressed their concern over their career and for not allowing them to pay the examination fee without the college fees.

They alleged that at the time of admission, the fees structure in provisional allotment order of the Vaagswari Educational institution was fixed to ₹27,000. But the management is now forcing the students to pay ₹16,000 in addition and are linking the college fees with the examination fees. The management is not accepting the examination fees ₹960 even though the last date of examination fee is ended.

Plan to kill cops foiled, 2 Maoists arrested

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, JAN. 22

Venkatapuram police, on Friday, foiled Maoist's plot to plant bombs and kill police parties at Chelimela forest area in Mulugu district. Police were acting on a tip off that as per the directions of banned CPI Maoists main leaders like Yapa Narayana alias Haribushan, Bade Chokka Rao alias Damodar, Kankana Raji Reddy alias Venkanna, and Wazeedu Venkatapuram area committee secretary Sudhakar, the militia members of Tadapale, Chelimela, Jella and Pamunuru assembled, armed with firearms and hatched a plan to kill the police party by planting explosives in Chelimela forest area.

Eturnagaram ASP



Eturnagaram ASP Ghouse Alam gives details of the arrested Maoists and the seized material in a press meet in Mulugu on Friday.

Ghouse Alam said along with the bomb disposal team and CRPF 141 Battalion 'F' coy, combing operation was conducted and several members armed with firearms and deadly weapons like knives, bows and arrows who were planting explosives with intention to kill the

lage of Venkatapuram Mandal who joined the party in 2018.

In this regard, as per the instructions of Wazeedu-Venkatapuram area committee secretary Sudhakar they along with their fellow militia members, came to the Chelimela forest area to plant bombs.

The police seized explosive materials from them including Cordex wire, detonators, electrical wire, integrated chips and semiconductor chips, Batteries, markers, bows, arrows, knives from their possession.

The accused were involved in several cases of planting bombs and murder.

The remand report has been prepared and they are being sent to judicial custody, ASP Ghouse Alam said.

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Adivasi staff, youth worried over SC verdict

DC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, JAN. 22

Adivasi employees and unemployed youth of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh are at the receiving end as far as fresh recruitment of teacher jobs, promotions and transfers in the agency, area are concerned following the Supreme Court judgement scrapping the GO: 3 which guaranteed 100 per cent teacher jobs to the local Adivasis in agency areas in the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh.

Adivasi unemployed youth and employees say that they would lose opportunities in recruitment and transfers and promotions if government officials go by the Supreme Court judg-

ment.

The Adivasis unemployed youth and employees under the fear that government departments may fill up fresh jobs and give promotions and transfers in the agency area by taking the supreme court's judgement on GO:3 into consideration though state govt has filed a review petition on the judgement.

The supreme court in its judgement stated that reservations should not be above 50 per cent.

Adivasi MLAs who met the TRS working president and Minister K.T. Ramarao requested him to ensure that the fresh teacher jobs, transfer and promotions be filled up as per the GO: 3 in the state.

Komaram Bheem

Asifabad MLA Atram Sakku who met the Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar, said that he submitted a memorandum to chief secretary requesting him to ensure the filling up fresh teacher jobs, promotions and transfers as per the GO: 3 and to take necessary steps for the same.

On the other hand, Adivasi teachers association leaders submitted a memorandum to the education minister Sabitha Indraredy and requested her to ensure 100 per cent promotions to Adivasi teachers in the agency area.

Meanwhile, Telangana State Adivasi Teachers Federation (TSATF) and Adivasi Employees Welfare and Cultural

Association (AEWCA) members submitting the memorandums to the district collectors and DEOs to fill up fresh jobs and giving promotions as per the GO: 3.

Adivasi government employees argue that the state government has gone for full bench review on the Supreme Court judgement on GO: 3 and neither state government nor the Tribal Welfare Principal Secretary issued any official order cancellation of GO:3 in view of the supreme court judgement.

The Adivasi leaders say that the education department should conduct transfers and promotions separately for teachers working in agency and non-agency areas.

SHORT TAKES

6 GUEST WORKERS DIE AFTER FALLING INTO A PIT

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, JAN. 22

In what has raised serious questions over the unchecked illegal coal mining in Meghalaya, at least six guest workers from Assam died after they fell into a 150-foot pit in the forest of Meghalaya’s East Jaintia Hills on Friday.

The tragic incident took place in the same district where 15 men had disappeared inside an illegal rat-hole mine after it collapsed in December 2018. Locals alleged the guest workers whose bodies were found inside the pit this morning were digging an illegal coal mine.

However, state government sources claimed that they have found no evidence of an active coal mine. Deputy commissioner of East Jaintia Hills E. Kharmalki told reporters, “No coal stock has been found at the accident site, so we cannot ascertain that they were trying to open up an abandoned coal mine, but there was some earth-cutting work happening there.”

Police, however, said that bodies of the six people have been recovered from the abandoned mine. “The Police have registered a case in this regard,” Meghalaya DGP R. Chandranathan told reporters.

Among those killed four have been identified as Moqbul Hussain (45), Ali Hussain (40), Dilwar Hussain (35) and Jalal Uddin (28).

Such accidents in coal mines are not new to Meghalaya. One of the biggest tragedies in the state in recent times occurred on December 13, 2018 when 15 miners were trapped inside an illegal coal mine in East Jaintia Hills. The miners were trapped as rainwater from adjoining areas gushed into the open mines. Despite several days of rescue operations, they could not be saved.

The rescue team included personnel from the Indian Navy and the Army, besides NDRF and local police. The search and rescue operation was abandoned after 60 days of searching for the 15 miners trapped in a 370 feet-deep illegal coal mine.

NCB ARRESTS DAWOOD AIDE IN DRUGS CASE

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, JAN. 22

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) on Friday arrested another gang member of Chin-ku Pathan, a close aide of fugitive underworld don Dawood Ibrahim, in connection to a drug-related case in Mumbai. This is the fourth arrest in this case and he has been arrested from Dongri during a raid. Pathan was the first arrest in Navi Mumbai on Wednesday and since then the NCB is on a crackdown of this gang.

The fourth arrested accused, who is also Pathan’s cousin, is said to be one of the major suppliers of mephedrone also known as ‘MCat’ and ‘Meow Meow’ in Mumbai. According to police, NCB’s Zonal Director Sameer Wankhede raided the accused drug suppliers’ hide-out in Dongri locality of South Mumbai and took him in custody after the seizure of mephedrone from his residence.

The diaries recovered from Arif Bhujwala, an absconding accused, residence reveal that drugs worth ₹80-90 lakh were being sold and circulated by them. The ₹2.18 crore-cash seizure was a collection of over 2-3 days’ sales at the local markets. It is suspected that the money being made through drugs by syndicate could be around ₹500-1,000 crore.

COMPLAINT AGAINST MUNDE WITHDRAWN

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, JAN. 22

A day after a woman withdrew her complaint of sexual exploitation against Maharashtra social justice minister Dhananjay Munde, NCP chief Sharad Pawar said their decision stands vindicated as the party had said there needed to be an investigation before taking any action against the minister. BJP, which was demanding Munde’s scalp, has now sought action against the complainant for making false allegations.

Ten days ago, the woman had alleged that Munde had sexually harassed her in 2006 on the pretext of marriage. Following the allegations, the BJP had demanded the resignation of Munde.

Dalmiya’s daughter expelled from TMC for anti-party moves

Expulsion comes after Rajib Banerjee resigned from the Mamata Banerjee cabinet

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, JAN. 22

A day before Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s brief Kolkata visit, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee received yet another blow as one more rebel Trinamul Congress minister Rajib Banerjee quit her government, fuelling speculations of his defection to the BJP.

Within hours of Rajib Banerjee’s move, the TMC expelled his loyalist and the daughter of former ICC chief Jagmohan Dalmiya Baishali Dalmiya from the party, accusing her of “anti-party activities” after she supported him and slammed the leadership. Incidentally Rajib Banerjee and Dalmiya are MLAs from Howrah district.

Banerjee is a two-time legislator from Dumjura with a clean image. He has become the third TMC heavyweight minister in a row to leave Mamata Banerjee’s cabinet in less than two months after he visited the Trinamul Congress supremo’s residence in Kalighat and Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar at Raj Bhawan respectively on Friday and submitted his resignation letter which stated “I

CENTRE NOT IN FAVOUR OF EXTRA CHANCE TO UPSC ASPIRANTS

New Delhi, Jan. 22:

The Centre on Friday told the Supreme Court that it was not in favour of granting one extra opportunity to those civil services aspirants who could not appear in their last attempt in the exams conducted by the UPSC last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

A bench headed by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar took note of the submissions of Additional Solicitor General S.V. Raju, appearing on behalf of the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT).

“We are not ready to give one more chance. Give me the time to file an affidavit... last night I received instruction that we are not agreeable,” Raju told the bench, which also comprised justices B.R. Gavai and Krishna Murai.

The bench has now posted the plea of a civil services aspirant Rachna Singh for hearing on January 25 and asked the Centre to file an affidavit during the period and serve it to the parties.

Earlier, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta had told the bench that the government was considering the issue of granting one more opportunity to those civil services aspirants who could not appear in their last attempt to crack the UPSC exam.

The top court, on September 30 last year, had refused to postpone the UPSC civil services preliminary exam, which was held on October 4, because of pandemic and floods in several parts of the country.

However, it had directed the central government and the Union Public Service Commission to consider granting an extra chance to candidates who otherwise have their last attempt in 2020, with corresponding extension of the upper age-limit.

The bench was then told that a formal decision can be taken by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) only.

● THE BENCH has now posted the plea of a civil services aspirant Rachna Singh for hearing on January 25 and asked the Centre to file an affidavit during the period and serve it to the parties.



TMC MLA Rajib Banerjee talks to the media after resigning as West Bengal forest minister, outside Raj Bhawan in Kolkata on Friday. — PTI

regret to inform you that I hereby tender my resignation from my Office as Cabinet Minister being in charge of Forest Department on today, ie, On 22nd of January, 2021. It has been a great honour and privilege to serve the people of West Bengal. I heartily convey my gratitude for getting

this opportunity.”

Rajib Banerjee has neither quit as an MLA nor deserted his party however. After meeting the Governor, he said in tears, “I never imagined I have to take such a tough decision. If I have hurt anyone, I apologise with folded hands. Please do not mis-

understand me. I was hurt within and staying like that for a long time. That is why I had to take this decision with a lot of pain and pent up anger.”

Lashing out at the CM, Rajib Banerjee added, “I had almost taken this decision two and half years ago when I was removed as

the state irrigation minister. Though portfolio allocation is the CM’s prerogative, I had expected minimum courtesy from her as a cabinet colleague. But I did not get that even. I got to know about my removal as the irrigation minister from the breaking news on TV when I was sitting with

Govt-farmers talks hit roadblock

SANJAY KAW | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 22

The government’s negotiations with the protesting farmers’ unions hit a roadblock on Friday as the farmer leaders once again stuck to their demands for repeal of the three agriculture laws and a legal guarantee for MSP, even as the Centre asked them to reconsider its proposal for putting the laws on hold for 12 to 18 months.

Unlike the last 10 rounds of talks, at Friday’s meeting the two sides could not even reach a decision on the next date as the government also hardened its position saying it is ready to meet once the unions agree to discuss the suspension proposal.

On Thursday, the government offered to put on hold the three laws and set up a joint committee to find solutions. After internal consultations, the farmers’ unions decided to reject the offer and stick to their two major demands.

Even though the 11th round of talks lasted for nearly five hours, the two sides sat face to face for less than 25 minutes. The talks were held in two sessions — the morning session lasted for about 15 minutes, after which the Central ministers left the meeting room. After about four hours, the ministers again came and held discussions for less than 10 minutes.

“This is an insult to farmers. When agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar came, he asked us to consider the government’s proposal and said that he is ending the process of meetings,” said S.S. Pandher of Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee, adding that their agitation will continue peacefully. Tomar told kisan unions that the government is ready for another



Farmers take out a rally as part of the preparations for their planned tractor parade in the national capital on the Republic day, during a protest against the new farm laws, in Amritsar on Friday. — PTI

meeting if farmers want to discuss the proposal on suspending agriculture laws for a while. He told the unions that “the government was grateful for their cooperation.”

The minister reiterated that there was nothing wrong in the three laws. “We gave the best proposal but you could not arrive at any decision. If you arrive at any conclusion please let us know, we will discuss again,” he said.

After the meeting, Tomar said: “We should remain hopeful. Let’s wait till tomorrow to hear farmer unions’ final decision.” Asked whether he expects the farmers to agree to the government offer, he said, “I don’t want to speculate, but we are hopeful that farmer unions will consider positively our proposal.”

The minister also said some external forces were definitely trying to ensure that the agitation contin-

ues and that was obviously against the interests of farmers. “No resolution is possible when the sanctity of an agitation is lost,” he added.

Bhartiya Kisan Union spokesperson Rakesh Tikait said that the farmers have decided to once again deliberate upon the government’s proposal to postpone the implementation of the new farm laws. However, he said, the farmers are firm on their demand of complete repeal of the new laws. “If the stalemate continues, the protest will be scaled up, starting with the tractor rally on Republic Day,” he added.

Farmer leader Shiv Kumar Kakkra, who was the first to leave the talks, said there was no headway in the discussions and the government had asked the unions to once again deliberate upon its proposal.

After the meeting, Bharatiya Kisan Union

(Ugrahan) leader Joginder Singh Ugrahan said the discussions have broken down as the unions have outrightly rejected the government’s proposal.

Farmers’ leaders told the Centre that they are firm on their stated stance and have already decided that they would not settle for anything less than the repeal of the three laws.

Some leaders had apprehensions that their agitation would lose momentum once the farmers leave Delhi borders — where protests have been going on for about two months.

Harpal Singh, president, Bhartiya Kisan Union (Asli Arajnitik), said “Even if we accept the government’s offer, our fellow brothers sitting at Delhi borders will not accept anything other than a repeal of the laws. They will not spare us. What achievement will we show to them?... We will

die here but we will not return without getting the laws repealed.”

Farmer leader Balbir Singh Rajewal said the unions will now concentrate on the Republic Day tractor march. “It will be a unique event. We have told the government and the Delhi police that we will march peacefully on the Outer Ring Road on January 26. If there is violence, the government will be responsible,” he added.

During the meeting, the unions also alleged that Delhi Police was trying to harass their leaders. One of the union leaders alleged that the rear windshield of his car was smashed by the police. Another alleged that he had received a threatening call. Farmer leader Hannan Mollah alleged he was mishandled by the police. The government assured these leaders that their complaints would be investigated.

NEW CONGRESS CHIEF TO BE ELECTED BY JUNE

ASHHAR KHAN | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 22

The Congress Party will have an elected president by June 2021, with the party’s working committee on Friday approving holding the internal election after Assembly polls in five states. The Congress Working Committee (CWC), after a three-and-a-half hour meeting, authorised incumbent party chief Sonia Gandhi to schedule the internal election after the conclusion of Assembly polls.

General secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal said, “Congress Working Committee has decided that there will be an elected Congress president by June 2021.”

The party elections will be held in May, after elections in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Kerala and Puducherry. Several Congress leaders were hoping to go to the elections under new leadership, however that failed to happen.

Senior leaders Ghulam Nabi Azad, Anand Sharma, Mukul Wansnik and P. Chidambaram reportedly asked for immediate organisational polls. While leaders like Ashok Gehlot, Amarinder Singh, A.K. Antony, Tariq Anwar and Oommen Chandy said the Congress president’s election should be held after state polls.

The CWC also passed resolutions on three issues of national importance, including farmers’ protest, Covid-19 vaccine and WhatsApp chat leaks of Republic TV chief Arnab Goswami.

BIHAR GOVT TO KEEP WATCH ON SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

NAYAR AZAD | DC PATNA, JAN. 22

The Bihar government has decided to keep a close watch on social media and penalise all those who post offensive and derogatory comments against ministers, MLAs, MPs and officials.

The state’s Economic Offences Unit (EOU), which is also responsible for cybercrime, has informed all state government departments about the decision and asked them to report any individuals or organisations who have been making such posts on social media.

“It has come to light that some individuals and organisations have been making derogatory and offensive posts on social media against the government, ministers, MLAs, MPs and officials. This is against the law and comes under cybercrime laws,” inspector general of police, EOU, Nayyar Husnain Khan, wrote in a letter to principal secretaries and secretaries of state government departments.

“You are requested to report to the Economic Offences Unit regarding any such post so that matter is investigated and action could be taken against such individuals and organisations,” Khan said.

HEINOUS | CRIME Kin allege that rape victim was treated as criminal; Shivraj orders SIT probe

Hathras replay in MP: Kin denied victim’s body

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, JAN. 22

In a ‘replay’ of Hathras incident, body of a minor ‘rape victim’ who died in a suspicious circumstance here, was not handed over to her kin and was cremated with presence of police on Thursday.

The incident triggered an outcry forcing Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan to order a probe by a special investigation team (SIT) of Madhya Pradesh police on Friday. “We could not save the

girl. This is not a minor incident. It is most unfortunate”. Chouhan said while taking stock of the situation at an official meeting here.

Earlier, the family members of the deceased cried injustice saying that the alleged rape victim was treated like a criminal by the system till her death, even though she was a victim.

“She had been put in a government shelter home since last 6 months (after the incident relating to sexual exploitation of five girls including the

● THE DECEASED was among five girls who were allegedly sexually exploited by Pyare Miyan (68).

deceased by the accused Pyare Miyan came to light in July, 2020). No member of the family had been allowed to visit her in the shelter home. She died in a suspicious circumstances. We wanted her body to be brought home for the last time before her last rites. But, police refused to hand over the body to us and took the body to the cremation ground for last

rites straight from the hospital”, the deceased’s mother said.

She demanded a CBI probe into her death. The deceased was among five girls who were allegedly sexually exploited by Pyare Miyan (68), who runs a local Hindi daily here. Pyare was arrested by police when he was accompanying a group of girls in a car in July 2020. He was booked for running sex racket. Police said the five alleged victims of sexual exploitation were kept in a shelter home for security reasons.

On Wednesday, the deceased had allegedly consumed overdose of sleeping pills. She was rushed to government-run Hamidia hospital where she died during treatment. Police took her body to the cremation ground from the hospital on Thursday for her last rites after postmortem. The deceased’s brother performed the last rites.

“My father and uncle were in the hospital to accept the body. But, police refused to hand over the body to them. A bus was sent to my home to carry

women members of the family to the cremation ground to be present during her last rites”, the deceased’s mother said.

Bhopal deputy inspector general of police Irshad Wali said everything was done with the consent of the family members of the deceased. Police did not allow the body to be taken to her home fearing a law and order situation.

Senior Congress leader and former chief minister Kamal Nath on Thursday decried the incident, describing it “inhuman and shameful”.

SHORT TAKES

SWISS FAVOUR ‘BURQA BAN’, POLL SHOWS

Geneva, Jan. 22: A clear majority of Swiss voters favour introducing a nationwide prohibition against wearing face-covering garments in public spaces, known as a “burqa ban”, a poll showed on Friday.

According to the Tamedia poll of 15,000 eligible voters, a full 63 percent of those questioned said they would vote yes or were considering voting yes in an upcoming popular vote on the ban, the Tages Anzeiger daily reported.

The Swiss are set to vote on whether they want to ban face coverings in public on March 7, when they will also vote on a range of other issues as part of the country’s famous direct democratic system.

The text does not mention Muslim veils explicitly, stating only that “no one shall cover their face in public, nor in areas accessible to the public or in areas where services are ordinarily accessible to all.”

RUSSIA VOWS CRACKDOWN ON NAVALNY RALLY

Moscow, Jan. 22: Aides of jailed Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny faced possible fines and prison time on Friday as police vowed to crack down on opposition protests this weekend.

His allies are planning to hold demonstrations on Saturday in dozens of cities in support of the Kremlin critic, who was arrested and jailed on his return to Russia following a near-fatal poisoning with a nerve agent.

“Attempts to hold unsanctioned public events, as well as any provocative actions on the part of their participants, will be regarded as a threat to public order and immediately suppressed,” Moscow police said on Friday.

Navalny’s associates urged Russians to take to the streets despite official pressure and promised financial help to protesters given fines on Saturday.

GERMANY MOVES TO ERADICATE NAZI-ERA LAWS

Berlin, Jan. 22: Germany is moving to rid itself of a cluster of laws introduced by the Nazis, still lingering on its books 75 years after World War II. There are 29 German legal or regulatory texts that still use wording introduced when Hitler was in power, according to Felix Klein, the government’s point man for fighting anti-Semitism.

Some of them have “a very clear anti-Semitic background”, Klein said.

Now, with the support of several parties in the Bundestag lower house of parliament as well as Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, Klein wants to wipe the slate clean – preferably before the end of the current term in September.

But the question remains whether to introduce a single law to reform all the texts at once, or to approach them one by one.

Germany has already reformed several Nazi-era laws over the years, including the infamous Paragraph 175 that criminalised sex between men and was repealed in 1994.

LANKA TO PROBE INTO WAR CRIME ALLEGATIONS

Colombo, Jan. 22: Sri Lanka will conduct an investigation into allegations its troops committed war crimes during a conflict with Tamil separatists, it said on Friday, a month before the UN Human Rights Council is due to discuss the island’s rights record. At least 1,00,000 people were killed in the decades-long civil war, and there were allegations that 40,000 Tamil civilians were killed in the final onslaught.

The government denies the toll. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who was defence chief when the rebels were crushed in 2009, named a commission of enquiry Friday to look into investigations held by previous governments.

The panel was given six months to look into allegations of “human rights violations, serious violations of international humanitarian law,” his office said.

It would also be tasked with investigating previous “inconclusive investigations” instigated by Colombo following international pressure.

Indian bags prestigious Math honour

Washington, Jan. 22: Nikhil Srivastava, a young Indian mathematician, has been named winner of the prestigious 2021 Michael and Sheila Held Prize along with two others for solving long-standing questions on the Kadison-Singer problem and on Ramanujan graphs. Srivastava from the University of California, Berkeley, Adam Marcus, the Ecole polytechnique

federale de Lausanne (EPFL) and Daniel Alan Spielman from Yale University will receive the 2021 Michael and Sheila Held Prize, the National Academy of Sciences said in the statement.

The prize consists of a medal and \$1,00,000. Srivastava, Marcus and Spielman solved long-standing questions on the Kadison-Singer problem and on Ramanujan graphs,



Nikhil Srivastava

and in the process uncovered a deep new connec-

tion between linear algebra, geometry of polynomials, and graph theory that has inspired the next generation of theoretical computer scientists, it said.

They published new constructions of Ramanujan graphs, that describe sparse, but highly-connected networks, and a solution to what is known as the Kadison-Singer problem, a decades-old problem

that asks whether unique information can be gleaned from a system in which only some of the features can be observed or measured, according to the Yale news.

Srivastava is currently Associate Professor of Mathematics at the University of California. Their groundbreaking papers on the questions, both published in 2015, solved problems that

mathematicians had been working on for several decades, the National Academy of Sciences said.

“Their proofs provided new tools to address numerous other problems, which have been embraced by other computer scientists seeking to apply the geometry of polynomials to solve discrete optimisation problems,” the academy said.

The Michael and Sheila

Held Prize is presented annually and honours outstanding, innovative, creative, and influential research in the areas of combinatorial and discrete optimisation, or related parts of computer science, such as the design and analysis of algorithms and complexity theory. The prize was established in 2017 by the bequest of Michael And Sheila Held.

—PTI

We believe in WHO, says Harris

VP Kamala says WHO vital to control Covid pandemic, building back better global health

Washington, Jan. 22: The Biden administration believes that the WHO is vital to controlling the spread of Covid-19 and building back better global health and pandemic preparedness, Vice President Kamala Harris has told WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, a day after the US rejoined the UN health agency.

The US rejoined the World Health Organisation (WHO) on Wednesday in one of the first official orders of the Joe Biden presidency, reversing a key foreign policy decision his predecessor Donald Trump took last year after accusing the UN health agency of incompetence and bowing to Chinese pressure over the Coronavirus pandemic.

In April last year, as the Coronavirus pandemic was spreading across the globe, Trump cut off US funding to the WHO, saying it was “virtually controlled by China.” He then went further, triggering the process to pull the US completely out of the organisation.

The withdrawal was due to go into effect in July this year, but Biden’s order will cancel it. During her phone call on Thursday, Harris discussed the decision by the Biden administration to rejoin the WHO with the health agency’s Director-General Dr. Ghebreyesus.

Harris emphasised that she and Biden believe that the WHO is vital to controlling the spread of Covid-19 and building back better global health and pandemic preparedness, according to a read-out of the call issued by the White House.

“The vice president and the director-general also discussed the resumption of the United States’ role in the global public health and humanitarian response to the Covid-19 pandemic,” it said.

Harris also stressed on the Biden-Harris administration’s strong support for efforts to strengthen the global Covid-19 response, mitigate its secondary impacts, including



Snow-covered the ski lifts of the shut-down slopes of the Faraya-Mzaar ski resort, during a lockdown aimed at curbing the spread of the Coronavirus, in Faraya, northeast of Beirut, Lebanon, on Friday. Lebanese authorities have extended a nationwide lockdown to Feb. 8 amid a steep rise in Covid-19 death and infection rates.

— AFP

● **IN APRIL** last year, as the Coronavirus pandemic was spreading across the globe, Trump cut off US funding to the WHO, saying it was “virtually controlled by China.”

on women and girls, and advance global health security to prevent the next outbreak from becoming an epidemic or pandemic.

She emphasised the importance of making the US safer through global cooperation, the White House said. Ghebreyesus thanked Harris for the call and congratulated her and Biden on their inauguration.

Both the director-general and the vice president reiterated that they look forward to meeting in person. Earlier in the day, Anthony Fauci, the government’s top infectious-disease expert, while addressing the WHO executive board meeting said the US will cease the drawdown of its staff seconded to the agency.

—PTI

EU agrees to keep borders open but restrict travels

Brussels, Jan. 22: European Union leaders agreed that borders should remain open and assessed more measures to counter the spread of Coronavirus variants during a video summit as the bloc’s top disease control official said urgent action was needed to stave off a new wave of hospitalisations and deaths.

Expressing great concern about the virus’ mutations, the 27 leaders looked at further border restrictions like limits on

all non-essential travel, better tracking of mutations and improving coordination of lockdowns.

Though worried that another surge of deaths across the EU was imminent, they could not immediately agree on whether or not to halt non-

essential travel.

“It is of great importance not to travel, but you cannot immediately enforce this legally,” Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said after the conference call. European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen insisted on the importance of keeping borders open to ensure that goods continue to move smoothly while introducing measures “that keep us all safe.”

She said leaders discussed a proposal to introduce new trans-border “dark red zones” where infections rates are particularly high and where all non-essential travel should be discouraged.

Travellers from these areas could be required to undergo tests before their

departure and be placed in isolation upon arrival in another location. Von der Leyen said the commission will make precise recommendations to member states in the coming days.

Some 4,00,000 EU citizens have died from Covid-19-related causes since the start of the pandemic, and the head of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, Andrea Ammon, said that “an increasing number of infections will lead to higher hospitalisation and death rates across all age groups, particularly for those in older age groups.”

In a study published just before the summit, the ECDC warned of the high dangers of the new variants, like those initiating in Britain, Brazil and South Africa.

— AP

Beijing to test 2 million in 48hrs for Covid

Beijing, Jan. 22: Beijing on Friday kicked off a drive to test two million people in 48 hours as the city rushed to snuff out a new local cluster of cases believed to be linked to a more contagious virus variant.

Long queues snaked through the Chinese capital, which reported 19 Coronavirus cases in the past week — as the mass testing campaign got under way in Dongcheng

and Xicheng districts.

The two downtown districts include Tiananmen Square and several government ministry offices, and are home to around two million residents.

AFP saw one testing line stretch over 400 metres (1,300 feet), with around a thousand people waiting to be tested.

“I received the notification this morning and thought I’d come during lunch hour; but there are

so many people here in line,” one Dongcheng resident said.

Officials plan to complete the testing by Saturday, and with the Lunar New Year holiday looming — typically a time when hundreds of millions travel across the country to visit families — they are keen to avoid a fully fledged outbreak in Beijing.

Locals have complained about long wait times in freezing temperatures,

with social media users on Friday saying queues for tests were “unending” as residents braved the winter chill to get swabbed.

“I queued for three hours and finally got tested,” one user said on China’s Twitter-like Weibo platform.

The Xicheng district government said in a social media notice Friday that some of the confirmed cases had been into the area and there was an

“increased risk” of infections.

Dongcheng district also put out a notice to say tests would be organised in batches over Friday and Saturday for both residents and workers.

A partial lockdown is already in place in the city’s southern Daxing district, where five neighbourhoods have been ordered to remain indoors and all 1.6 million residents have been told not to

leave the city.

Beijing’s rush to test comes as China faces its highest number of cases in nearly a year, after Coronavirus was first detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019.

Officials have said that some of the cases detected in Beijing are linked to a variant of the deadly pathogen that was first found in the UK and is believed to be more transmissible.

— AFP

NEW | PROJECT Floridians skeptical of digging in swampy terrain prone to floods

Musk offers to build tunnels in Miami

Miami, Jan. 22: As the world waited with baited breath for the US presidential inauguration, Tesla CEO Elon Musk had more pressing issues at hand — exchanging tweets with Miami’s mayor about building a tunnel system under the Florida city.

Other mayors seemed enthusiastic about the potential project by Musk’s Boring Company, but many Floridians were quick to point out how shallow the water table is in the state’s swampy south.

“Cars & trucks stuck in traffic generate megatons of toxic gases & particu-

late, but @boringcompany road tunnels under Miami would solve traffic & be an example to the world,” the tech tycoon tweeted Monday, adding he had discussed the project with Florida Governor Ron DeSantis last week.

Musk was responding to a tweet from Miami Mayor Francis Suarez inviting him to the city to discuss “potential solutions for the benefit of our future.” “If Governor & Mayor want this done, we will do it,” Musk tweeted.

Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava chimed in, tweeting, “Let’s talk,” and Fort Lauderdale Mayor Dean



Elon Musk

Trantalis said his city also “would love to be apart of this discussion.” The exchange comes amid Suarez’s push to lure

Silicon Valley investors and tech developers to Miami.

But many were skeptical of digging tunnels in swampy terrain prone to flooding due to rising sea levels.

“It doesn’t seem very smart and it is certainly going to be expensive,” Kurtis Gurley, a professor of structural engineering at the University of Florida, told CBS Miami.

There’s a reason that Floridians haven’t built basements to shelter from hurricanes, despite the storms’ prevalence in the region.

“Aquaman must be the project manager,” joked

Wilkie Brutus, an NPR affiliate reporter, on Twitter.

“This is probably the most important and innovative human being alive today but somebody ought to explain the geology of Florida to him before some incredibly stupid shit happens,” tweeted Michael Grunwald, a reporter in Florida for Politico.

Florida sits on a porous limestone plateau with plenty of open or subterranean canals, and is prone to flooding and sinkholes — cavities that appear suddenly due to groundwater erosion.

— AFP

Fauci says he feels liberated with Biden

Washington, Jan. 22: In his first White House briefing as President Joe Biden’s top advisor on Covid-19, Anthony Fauci said it was “liberating” that he could focus on science without fear of repercussion now that Donald Trump had left office.

The top infectious disease scientist was briefing reporters on Thursday on the state of the US outbreak that has claimed more than 4,08,000 lives.

Asked to compare his experience under the previous administration to the new one, the 80-year-old responded a little coyly at first, saying he wasn’t sure he could

“extrapolate” based on first impressions. “But one of the things that was very clear as recently as about 15 minutes ago, when I was with the president, is that one of the things that we’re going to do is to be completely transparent, open and honest.

“If things go wrong, not point fingers but to correct them and to make everything we do be based on science and evidence.”

Toward the end of Thursday’s briefing, Fauci was asked by another reporter to expand on his “jokes” about the differences in the management styles between the two leaders.

— AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

23 JANUARY 2021

Put politics, profit aside; level with all on vaccine

India is at present in the midst of one of the largest public health campaigns the world has ever seen: Vaccination against Covid-19 pandemic. Its first phase, which started on January 16, seeks to inoculate three crore Covid warriors including medical professionals and frontline workers. Initial reports suggest that the response to the programme has not been all that encouraging and there exists some reluctance, if not resistance, in taking the jab.

Addressing a public health issue is as much the job of the public as that of the government, and the programme should have received a wholehearted welcome since the target group is very much part of the system that fights the pandemic. That has not happened, and the government needs to assess its reasons. While doing so, it must bear in mind two things: one; lack of transparency in the whole exercise, and two, technical glitches in the CoWIN app that monitors it.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi misses no opportunity to stress that the two vaccines that are being used for the programme are made in India. However, there have been doubts even among health professionals about the suitability of introducing Covaxin, the indigenously developed and manufactured vaccine, in the programme since it has been cleared only for phase III of the clinical trial. Now, days after the programme has started, and after lakhs of people have taken their vaccines, the two companies that manufacture the vaccines have come out with advisories to the people. They contain certain precautions those who go for them must take, including an advice that people with certain medical conditions should avoid taking them.

This late realisation, if one may call it so, is grossly unacceptable. The government and the companies should have been upfront about the products from the beginning, instead of resorting to chest-thumping about their being made-in-India. Nobody has a doubt about the capabilities of Indian scientists or Indian manufacturers: the latest *Lancet* reports

underscores the efficacy of the vaccine, and says all adverse events were mild and moderate and were more frequent after the first dose. But the fact remains that the scientific process should be allowed to be completed in its entirety; political and commercial considerations should wait for their turn. The government must at least now do a rethink on the campaign and be true and honest with the people on its components. It must win people's confidence by placing all the facts before them, to start with; piecemeal and ad hoc release of critical information is not the right way to do it.

Technical glitches hampering the vaccination programme equally defy logic. The government had ample time to develop a proper, fool-proof mechanism for it but its performance on this front has been dismal. Similar was the case with Aarogya Setu, the app that helps people follow Covid-appropriate protocol. The government must ensure that such mass programmes are designed with little technical interface, realising the fact that a great share of the Indian population has little access to technology products. And when used, they should come without glitches and in an easy-to-use form. The government must realise that this is a fight India can ill-afford to lose.

Don't censor OTT content

An assault on creativity in cinema is being carried out by the political class. The grounds that the stereotypical Indian neta is being lampooned or projected in negative shades are not sufficient to allow censorship to stifle the medium of free cinema. Indian content on OTT platforms has also been seen to flourish during the pandemic when people have been forced to mostly stay indoors and their wide search for sources of entertainment has seen them embrace Internet-based media.

The serial *Tandav*, of a distinctly political thriller genre with startling resemblance to recent events in the country, has been under attack from many States and its makers have been forced to issue apologies and pull scenes just to please those who have been beating the drum of protest on their taking offence at content. The denigration of gods is a smoke screen under which many of these objectors operate. This is deeply disappointing because India is not a country that prosecutes people under blasphemy laws.

Censorship of OTT content is a grave offence against cinematic art. International platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime and Hotstar have explored uncharted territory in front of Indian audiences too because they are free of governmental controls like rigid censorship of content as in films for theatrical release. They serve a very mature audience who have been able to absorb art without boundaries from international sources. Playing spoilsport are the usual suspects from the illiberal spectrum of politics, spurred on by political leaders who think nothing of Orwellian state controls of thought processes and social engineering.

It is risible that the objection to the serial *Mirzapur* comes on the ground that it besmirches the image of UP in projecting it as a lawless state ruled by mafias. The top court had only recently emphasised that viewers had a choice and they could switch off channels if they felt offended by particular content. The less official India intercedes in all this the better because State control of lives in India has proved inhibiting enough in various facets of life, including art.

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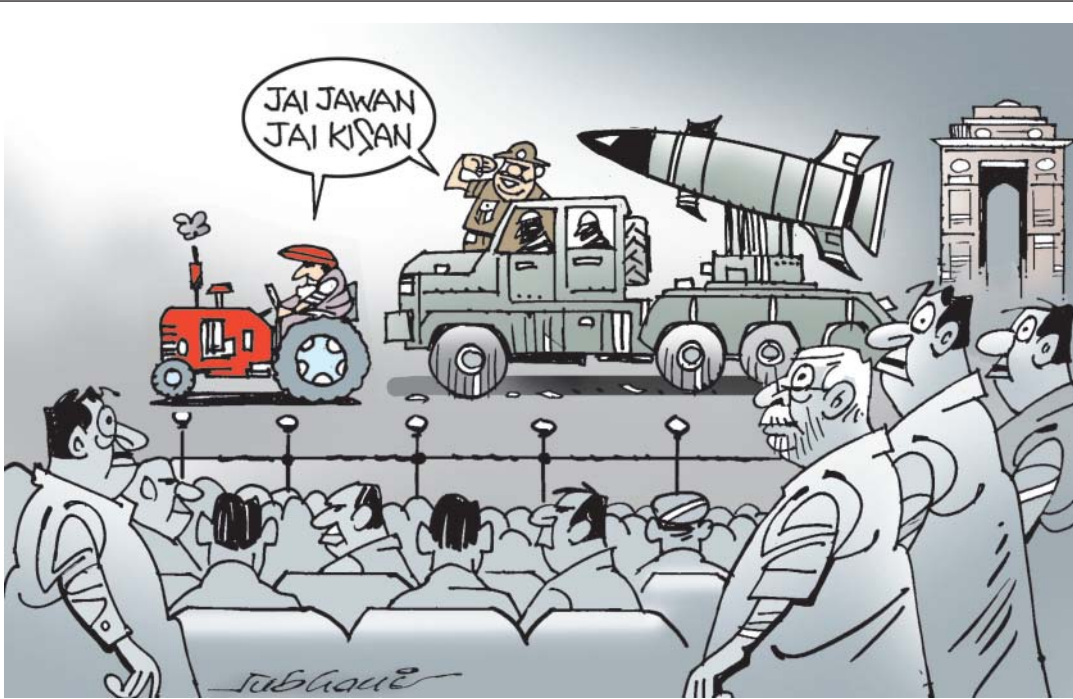
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Subhani



Vaccine hai to hum hai: Get ready for the vaxxie!



Shobhaa's Take

I am all set for "the jab". Hoping I will get it soonest.

Admission: I am severely needle phobic, to the extent that I cannot watch someone else getting a prick even if it is on the screen. Despite that and several other reservations, I am consoling myself on many levels. I am all set to shoot my "vaxxie" — for those asking, "*wat dai?*" — a "vaxxie" is a selfie shot with the arm that is not going under the vaccinator's needle. Right now, despite a slight tremor in my voice as I write these words, I am thanking my stars that I am not Norwegian. And that I am not yet 80. Chances are pretty high that I'll survive the jab and live to tell the tale.

Besides... and here's my biggest trump card — I am 100 per cent Indian! Fully-fully *desi*, inside out! This is my biggest shield. Not being a scientist, my wonky reasoning does not have to make sense to anybody but myself, and a few crazies like me. Never before has being born an Indian and having lived my entire life in India been such a boon!

Poochoh kyon? Go on, ask, *na?* Look at our comparatively low numbers with Covid-19 deaths (approximately 165K). There has to be some explanation for this phenomenon. I seriously believe it is India's dirt. I grew up in Mumbai, surrounded by germs and bacteria of every known description. I have happily eaten street food since my childhood. I played in and with mud, consuming some of it too. I did not wash my hands twenty times a day. But I did bathe regularly, okay? My home was scrupulously clean (my

mother ensured that), but even she could not stop me from devouring roadside *bhulpuri*, *paani puri*, college canteen cutlets and exposed greasy snacks peddled by favourite vendors outside local train stations. This was true about all my friends back then — we ate the most unhygienic food ever, and none of us fell seriously sick. Our stomachs, we joked, were "zinc lined" and our systems bug-proof.

Let's loosely call this a vital "immunity building" exercise, for want of a better medical term. We ate and drank rubbish 00 who knows? These bad habits may have spared us from picking up the deadly coronavirus today. Nothing unique about our youthful experiences — most of India conforms to this pattern. We are called filthy by the Western world. Our "unsanitary" existence is wittily mocked — but hey — please explain how come we have not dropped like flies, like people in other, more "developed" countries? Is it our unique DNA structure that's helping Indians combat the global scourge better than most nations still reeling under fresh cases and strange variants of the virus?

January 16, 2021 will

India is well and truly on its way to recovery from the deadly Covid-19 virus. As for me, I will time my blowdry with the jab. I can't afford to ruin my historic 'vaxxie'! Come on Bollywood... pull out a few cool 'vaxxie' looks.

January 16, 2021 will always remain a red letter in India's calendar. It was the one Saturday citizens had been impatiently waiting for ever since the world went into lockdown mode and life came to a standstill.

always remain a red letter in India's calendar. It was the one Saturday citizens had been impatiently waiting for ever since the world went into lockdown mode and everyday life came to a standstill. It's the day we kicked off the most challenging immunisation exercise in the history of the world. According to available data, over two lakh citizens were vaccinated on Day 1. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was justifiably proud when he addressed the nation at 10.30 am and said: "We are launching the world's biggest vaccination drive and it shows the world our capability." All our chests suddenly grew to 56 inches! It is an ambitious plan, involving thousands, as 300 million people hope to receive their jab in this phase, by the end of summer. These include 30 million doctors, nurses, police personnel and firefighters. The next lot, of 270 million, will reach all those over the age of 50 (me!), and those with other vulnerabilities. This impressive rollout is nothing short of a feat — and must be acknowledged as such.

For now, I am studiously ignoring the cynics and doomsday prophets who are pointing out all kinds of loopholes and deficiencies. Sanjiv Agarwal of Good Governance India Foundation is asking tough questions like: "Does all of India need a vaccine?" He believes that India has already achieved a high level of immunity and perhaps only the truly vulnerable need the jab. We are

waiting for the ultimate photo-op that shows Prime Minister Narendra Modi pushing up his *kurta* sleeve and baring his upper arm for the shot. Yes, there are going to be hiccups and setbacks. Yes, we need more data, more time... but can we afford to wait? In Mumbai, the drive was suspended for two days. Frankly, I'm fine with the chief minister's decision to do so. There was talk of a server being down, and messages not going out on time. Apparently, the turnout was lower than expected, with genuine concerns about the vaccine getting "wasted". But given the rumour factories at work, this is hardly surprising. Each vial can vaccinate 10 people. Once a vial is opened, it cannot be preserved for more than eight hours. Despite these early roadblocks, citizens are filled with confidence and hope that the timely delivery of the shots is definitely going to halt the coronavirus — and hopefully, any mutant/variant as well.

Being sentimental, superstitious and God-fearing, I loved the *aartis*, pujas and prayers that were conducted when the vaccines left the Serum Institute of India in Pune. Or later, when hospital employees greeted the health workers carrying the precious boxes to the designated venues with mithai and flowers. This is so endearing and such an Indian thing to do! Why not? I am prepared to pray to an icebox filled with life-saving vaccine vials without any self-consciousness! *Vaccine hai, to hum hai!* India is well and truly on its way to recovery from the deadly Covid-19 virus. As for me, I will time my blowdry with the jab. I can't afford to ruin my historic "vaxxie"! Come on Bollywood... pull out a few cool "vaxxie" looks. Airport looks are so 2020!

Readers can send feedback to www.shobhaade.blogspot.com

LETTERS

KCR TRAINED KTR

K.T. Rama Rao seems to have been trained by his father to take control of the state ('KTR for CM soon' chorus gets louder, *DC, Jan. 22*). He was doing a survey of Warangal and Hyderabad during the floods, opening flyovers, 2 BHK houses and presiding over meetings. It will be good to have a young CM who works from the Secretariat and allots time to meet the public like NTR.

T. Kaish Ditya
Hyderabad

TRS is doing a lot of homework for the future CM. Though leaders are divided, it is becoming difficult for KCR to decide on it. KTR is good in delivering tasks and mixes well with the people. As a young leader, he might the CM post.

Dr G.V. Kumar
Hyderabad

BIDEN'S TASK

We wish Joe Biden all the good fortune to carry his country forward in these challenging times (*A return to decency in US will be good for the world, DC, Jan. 22*). Biden sounded positive and full of purpose and clearly emphasised his immediate priority of upholding national unity and collaboration.

Phaneendra V.
Hyderabad

JAGAN EXAMPLE

The 'Mobile Dispensing Units' supplying ration and high quality rice to all the ration card holders in AP is a great initiative. Is Jagan Mohan Reddy setting an example for all politicians by truly caring for the people? He's fulfilling promises he made before elections and setting an example for good politics.

K. Nikitha Rachel Melissa
Secunderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Cong-R to contest 32 Lok Sabha seats

HYDERABAD, JANUARY. 22 The Ruling Congress had set up its candidates in 32 constituencies out of 41 to contest the mid-term elections for Lok Sabha scheduled to be held in the first week of March.

Making the announcement the Chief Minister, Mr. K. Brahmananda Reddi told newsmen that the party would support Independents in Hyderabad, Secunderabad and Visakhapatnam constituencies.

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



"If any young person with attitude Refuses to express their gratitude For the love they are shown — Just leave them alone With no single degree of latitude"

— From Ghazals of Gulligoochi by Bachchoo

Friends from India informed me that the talented and A-list presenter of the nation's most honest TV channel NDTV, Ms Nidhi Razdan, was approached through email to take up a post as a visiting professor of journalism at Harvard University.

Ms Razdan, who in all fairness deserves invitations from universities with greater reputations and more rigorous standards than Harvard (Cambridge UK, for instance, comes to mind) fell for the hoax. Perhaps she, in an act of altruism, wanted to do some charitable service to herds of benighted American students.

She may have thought, in accepting the offer of a professorship, that she could bring the great Indian standards of fearlessness before government, religious authority or bigotry

followed by Indian newspapers, TV, radio and even film and web series, to the Americans who have fallen for Donald Trump's tweets and the fake news of his media sycophants over these last few years.

Having made her plans to depart for New England, Ms Razdan, as a good journalist would, checked on the authenticity of the invitation and found that there was no such invitation and the correspondence she had got on the Internet was some purposeless, elaborate joke. The humour escapes me, though!

What it does confirm, gentle reader, is that the greatest instrument of public discourse, of the dissemination of information, of the connectivity of the human race, can be as malevolent as it is benevolent. Not only has it put tremendous power (we are not talking about wealth) in the hands of those who control these devices of the ether, it has also facilitated evil.

Twitter, Facebook, Amazon and the rest decided last week, after Donald Trump's urging his supporters through these platforms to overturn American democracy, to ban his "free speech". A decent gesture, but one

that came years after they allowed any and all manner of hate speech, terrorist and even openly fascist propaganda to go uncensored on their platforms. Crooks and perverts seemed welcome.

Because, gentle reader, Ms Razdan is not the only one to have fallen for fake offers which arrive through the Internet. Must I now admit that I have been, on several occasions contacted through email to inform me that I am the lucky winner of millions of pounds on the Nigerian Lottery?

It seemed the first time like very welcome news. I wonder how many others in our world, this vale of tears, didn't stop to consider that they couldn't have won the Nigerian Lottery as they hadn't bought a ticket to enter it. Of course, the emails persuaded me that a fan and admirer, who insisted on remaining anonymous, had bought a hundred tickets in my name and one of them had proved the lucky one. All the paymaster of the lottery now wanted was my bank details, passwords, etc, and the money would be deposited, making me an instant millionaire, in the following twenty-four hours.

How could I resist? I sent my details post haste to the designated email address, expecting a phone call any minute from my bank's branch asking me to attend and shift my millions into safer and more profitable investments.

And then, two hours later, when the banks opened, a call did come. The lady banker at the other end asked me to identify myself. Yes, the necessary checks and usual questions — my birth date, the name of my first dog, my best friend's favourite food, the bra size of my first girlfriend — I rattled all the details off. Then came the news. The lady banker at the other end said that since my account had been overdrawn for three months by several hundred pounds, they were suspending all activity on it.

I was of course aware that my account was in the red, but surely all that would change when my lottery win came in. Holding the phone some distance from my mouth, I let out a contemptuous laugh, saying words to the effect of "you just wait, young lady, your branch is going to be flooded with a bigger deposit than what elephants leave in the jungle". She politely

ly asked what I meant. I told her about my triumph at the Nigerian Lottery.

There was a long pause and she said I was the hundredth customer to fall for what was a confidence trick and if I had had any money in my account it would have disappeared.

Disappointed and downcast, I buttoned the call off.

Hanh, merey yaaron, I knew that the Internet and the social media are the vehicles of fraud as never before. In imitation of a famous Indian scam, some crooks have taken to sending posts to the unwary to say that they are guilty of tax fraud and they ought to deposit X amount immediately or be arrested that very day. Those with a guilty conscience will be inclined to fall for it.

Myself? Having been made a fool of once, I've resolved to train myself to be a cyber detective with the help of my distant cousin, Hutoxic Feromonerplacementwalla (abbreviated mostly to Effpeewalla), the first Parsi woman to be appointed to the post of detective sergeant at the Bottomlea police station. Okay, not quite Kamala Harris, but still something?

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,878.54	-1.50
Nifty 50	14,371.90	-1.50
S&P 500*	3,841.19	-0.31
Dollar (₹)	72.97	0.03
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.67	0.57
Euro (₹)	88.79	-0.16
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,861.263	0.53
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	55.64	-0.82
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.939	-0.29
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.094	-0.013

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Indian Bank Q3 profit more than doubles to ₹514 cr

Indian Bank more than doubled its profit at Rs 514.28 crore in the third quarter against Rs 247.16 crore in the year-ago period. Total income was Rs 11,421.34 crore, up from Rs 6,505.62 crore. The bank's gross NPAs as a percentage of assets rose to 9.04 per cent from 7.20 per cent. The percentage of net NPA was lower at 2.35 per cent as against 3.50 per cent. The bank had made provision of Rs 2,314.35 crore.

Tata Motors raises prices by up to ₹20,000



Tata Motors said it has raised prices of its passenger vehicle (PV) range by up to Rs 20,000 to offset rising input costs and semiconductor shortages. The company joins others like Maruti Suzuki and Mahindra & Mahindra, which have also hiked their vehicles' prices. "Rising input costs and material costs of steel, precious metals and semiconductor have compelled the company to pass on the part of the cost to customers," it said.

GMR Philippines JV executes terminal contract

A joint venture of GMR Airports handed over new terminal building at Clark international airport to the Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA), Philippines. The 40,000-square metre terminal building at the airport, which is situated between Angeles and Malabacat cities, was constructed within 24 months by the joint venture of GMR Airports and Megawide Construction Corporation, GMR said.

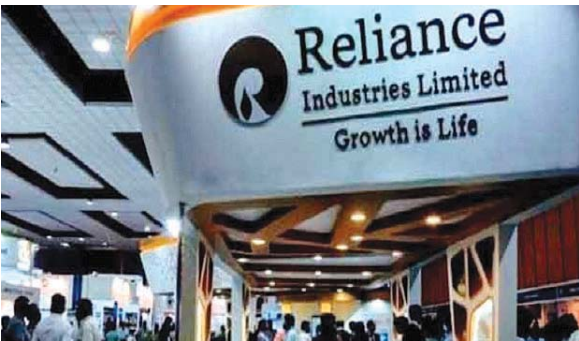
Ducati launches Scrambler bike range at ₹7.99 L

Italian luxury motorcycle brand Ducati launched the all-new Scrambler bikes in India with the range starting at Rs 7.99 lakh for the Scrambler Icon Dark and going all the way up to Rs 10.99 lakh for the new 1100 Dark Pro at pan-India showroom. With this update all three models, namely, Ducati Scrambler Icon, Ducati Scrambler Icon Dark, and the Ducati Scrambler 1100 Dark Pro are now BS6 norms compliant.



Telecom & retail bring 51% earnings

Reliance's Q3 net rises 12%



New Delhi, Jan. 22: Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries Ltd on Friday reported a better-than-expected 12 per cent rise in December quarter net profit on improving oil-to-chemical business, strong continued momentum in retail and a steady telecom unit Jio.

Consolidated net profit in October-December stood at Rs 13,101 crore, compared to Rs 11,640 crore net earning in the same period a year back, the company said in a statement. While oil-to-chemical, or O2C, business improved quarter-on-quarter, it was lower than year-ago earnings but this was more than made good by a spurt in consumer-facing businesses of telecom and retail, which now contribute to 51 per cent of earnings as compared to 37 per cent a year back. About 56 per cent of the pre-tax profit (Ebitda) of Rs 8,483 comes from Jio and Reliance Retail. Net income was further aided by a 20 per cent year-on-year decline in finance expenses due to cash coming in the digital unit, Jio Platforms and Reliance Retail from Google/financial investors, respectively. Revenue was down 18.6 per cent at Rs 137,829 crore. Jio, the telecom arm, posted a 15.5 per cent quarter-on-quarter rise in net profit to Rs 3,489 crore as it added over 25 million subscribers and per user income rose to Rs 151 per month. It had 410.8 million

subscribers at the end of December. The average revenue per user (ARPU) compared with Rs 145 per month in the previous quarter. A sharp recovery in fashion and lifestyle businesses helping retail get back to pre-Covid level saw the segment's cash profit rise 76.3 per cent to Rs 2,482 crore. Overall retail revenue was dragged down by transfer of fuel retailing business to a separate unit where UK's BP Plc has a 49 per cent stake, and one-off factors impacting grocery. The firm added 327 new stores to take the total number to 12,201. The traditional O2C business Ebitda was down 28.1 per cent at Rs 8,756 crore on lower prices and pandemic impacting fuel demand. It, however, was up quarter-on-quarter. Finance cost at Rs 4,326 crore was 29 per cent lower on a quarterly basis. Reliance said it has completed fundraising from selling minority stakes in

Jio Platforms Ltd—the unit that holds telecom and digital businesses, and Reliance Retail to global investors. It raised Rs 152,056 crore in Jio and Rs 47,265 cr in retail. A cumulative cash inflow of Rs 220,231 crore helped it turn into a net cash surplus company. Gross debt fell to Rs 257,413 crore as of December-end when compared to Rs 336,294 crore as of March 2020, while cash at hand rose to Rs 220,524 crore from Rs 175,259 crore. Net debt stood at a negative (-) Rs 2,954 crore. Commenting on the results, Mukesh Ambani, chairman and managing director, said: "We have delivered strong operational results during the quarter with a robust revival in O2C and retail segments, and a steady growth in our digital services business." Reliance said it along with its partner BP has started production from the R Cluster, an ultra-deep-water gas field in block KG D6. —PTI

HDFC Bank shares slip after Sebi slaps ₹1 cr fine

New Delhi, Jan. 22: Shares of HDFC Bank on Friday fell over 2 per cent after Sebi imposed a penalty of Rs 1 crore for invoking securities pledged by stock broker BRH Wealth Kreators in violation of the regulator's interim directions. On the BSE, shares of the private lender ended at Rs 1,443.65 apiece, falling 2.05 per cent over the previous close. Intraday, it had hit a low of Rs 1,440.7. On Thursday, Sebi imposed a penalty of Rs 1 crore on HDFC Bank for invoking securities pledged by BRH Wealth Kreators in violation of the regulator's interim directions. The bank has also been directed to transfer Rs 158.68 crore along with 7 per cent interest per annum into an escrow account till the issue of settlement of clients' securities is reconciled. The Sebi had found that HDFC Bank on October 14, 2019 invoked the pledge of securities to the extent of Rs 158.68 crore and thereafter, sold most of the securities and appropriated the sale proceeds towards the outstanding under the various credit facilities advanced by the bank to BRH. The private sector lender had granted credit facilities to BRH and BRH Commodities aggregating to Rs 191.16 crore and Rs 26.61 crore, respectively. —PTI

No let up seen in iron ore exports

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JAN. 22



JSW STEEL NET JUMPS MANIFOLD

New Delhi, Jan. 22: JSW Steel on Friday reported a manifold jump in its consolidated net profit to Rs 2,669 crore for the December 2020 quarter. The steel-maker had clocked a net profit of Rs 187 crore in the year-ago quarter. Its total consolidated income during October-December 2020 rose to Rs 22,006 crore, compared

with Rs 18,182 crore in the year-ago period. The company's total consolidated expenses stood at Rs 18,120 crore, higher as against Rs 17,719 crore a year ago. On a standalone basis, the firm registered a net profit of Rs 2,829 crore, against Rs 691 crore in the year-ago quarter. Its standalone income was at Rs 19,408 crore, compared with Rs 15,902

44.8 million tonnes in calendar year 2020. At the same time India has been facing a production shortage. Ica estimates domestic iron ore deficit to be 55 million tonnes in FY21. Of the 18 auctioned blocks, which had contributed 53 per cent to Odisha's overall iron ore production in FY20, only seven have started production, leading to the shortage. Ore supply shortage is likely to persist in the near term until new miners ramp-up production. The shortage of ore has

seen prices rallying by 140 per cent in Odisha since June-end and the prices have rallied 100 per cent in Chhattisgarh as well. The rising iron ore prices combined with shortage saw steel prices going up by 55 per cent to Rs 58,000 a tonne in January against the year-ago month. This has affected the downstream industries. The rising steel prices coupled with the pandemic impact on global trade saw engineering exports fall 13.24 per cent for the April-November period.

Sensex drops below 49K on profit taking

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JAN. 22

The market continued to be volatile ahead of the Union Budget with investors taking profit home after the benchmark indices surged earlier this week to new all-time high. The Sensex closed 746 points, or 1.5 per cent down, at 48,878, a day after it hit the 50,000 mark. The Nifty-50 closed at 14,371.90, down by 218.45 points, or 1.5 per cent. The BSE Mid-cap Index fell 1.19 per cent and the BSE Small-cap, 1.04 per cent. Foreign portfolio investors turned net sellers by Rs 635.59 crore while the domestic institutions were net sellers by Rs 1,290.35 crore. "We are seeing some kind of profit booking at higher levels as the Sensex touched the psychological mark of 50,000 this week. The persisting rise in (Covid-19) cases has intensified restrictions in parts of Europe, UK and Hong Kong which is impacting global markets," said Rusmik Oza, head of Fundamental Research, Kotak Securities.

The market is speculating about a Covid Tax in the Union Budget. Global cues were also not favourable. A slowdown in eurozone business activity accelerated in January, making a new recession almost certain as the Covid-19 pandemic continues to batter the economy. "A double-dip recession for the eurozone economy is looking increasingly inevitable as tighter Covid-19 restrictions took a further toll on businesses in January," Chris Williamson, chief business economist at IHS Markit, said. Bajaj Auto and Tata Motors were the biggest gainers in Nifty-50 this week, with up-move of 14 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively. Reliance Industries gained 6 per cent this week. PSU and metal stocks were the biggest losers this week. Amongst PSUs, ONGC and Coal India are down 8.6 per cent and 7 per cent, respectively. Profit booking has led to correction in Tata Steel (-8.5 per cent) and Hindalco (-5.8 per cent), Oza said.

INDIGO PAINTS IPO SUBSCRIBED OVER 117 TIMES



RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JAN. 22

Indigo Paints IPO subscription stood at more than 117 times on the final day of the public bidding process. As per the last update, the public offer was subscribed 189.57 times by the qualified institutional buyers, 263.05 times by non-institutional or high net worth investors and 15.93 times by retail individual investors. Indigo Paints' Rs 1,170 crore public issue was priced at Rs 1,488 to Rs 1,490 per equity share of Rs 10 face value. Sequoia Capital backed Indigo Paints raised Rs 348 crore from 25 anchor investors on January 19. The Pune-based firm manufactures a range of decorative paints and has an extensive distribution network across India.

CSR rules now allow firms to take up multi-year projects

New Delhi, Jan. 22: The government on Friday amended various rules pertaining to the CSR regime, including allowing corporates to undertake multi-year projects and making registration compulsory for agencies implementing CSR activities on companies' behalf.

Besides, companies have been permitted to set off the excess amount spent under CSR up to three succeeding financial years. They have also been allowed to create or acquire capital assets through CSR in the name of beneficiaries or a public authority or registered trust, among others. Non-compliance with CSR provisions has been decriminalised by shifting such offences to penalty regime, while companies having CSR obligation below Rs 50 lakhs have been exempted from constituting a CSR Committee, according to the corporate affairs ministry. Under the Companies Act, 2013—being implemented by the corporate

MAKING IT EASY

- Registration compulsory for agencies implementing CSR activities
- Firms can set off excess amount spent under CSR up to three years
- They can also create or acquire capital assets in beneficiaries/trusts name
- CSR offences decriminalised

affairs ministry—certain class of profitable companies are required to shell out at least two per cent of their three-year annual net profit towards corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities in a financial year. The amendments are aimed at further improving the ease of doing business, decriminalising non-compliance with CSR provisions as well as to make the CSR framework

more transparent, an official told PTI. Further, the idea is to move from just looking at expenditure to focusing on impact of CSR projects implemented under the companies law, the official added. In a significant move to boost transparency, agencies implementing CSR projects for companies should get registered with the ministry's MCA 21 portal and the system will automatically generate a unique CSR registration number. The registration requirement will be effective from April 1, 2021. Also, international organisations have been permitted to carry out designing, monitoring and evaluation of the CSR projects or programmes. However, they cannot act as implementing agencies. According to the official, such a move will help in bringing in the best international practices in the field of CSR and capacity building. —PTI

CRYPTOS WON'T WORK AS ACTUAL CURRENCIES: UBS



MARK CRANFIELD JAN. 22

Cryptocurrencies may never be able to work as actual currencies, according to UBS Global Wealth Management. The "fundamental flaw" inherent in cryptocurrencies is that supply can't be reduced when demand is slumping in most cases, Paul Donovan, chief economist at UBS GWM, said in a video this week. That means they can't be considered currencies, he said. A "proper currency," as Donovan termed it, can be a stable store of value, providing certainty that it will be able to buy the same basket of goods tomorrow as it buys today. That confidence is derived from central banks' ability to reduce supply when demand is falling. There is no such mechanism for switching off supply on most cryptocurrencies, and therefore their value can slide - leading to a collapse in spending power. "People are unlikely to want to use something as a currency if they've got absolutely no certainty about what they can buy with that tomorrow," Donovan said in the video. Bitcoin futures are listed on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange alongside contracts for most major currencies, but the difference in daily trading volumes suggest that some investors haven't yet embraced the crypto as a fully fledged currency. Amid the 11 per cent price plunge for Bitcoin on Thursday transactions for the January futures were just above 13,000, while there were around six times as many for Japanese yen futures. —Bloomberg

HEALING | TOUCH Climate change, social inequality seen as biggest global threat

Unilever for living wage across value chain

New Delhi, Jan. 22: Anglo-Dutch FMCG major Unilever on said everyone who directly provides goods and services to the company will earn at least a living wage by 2030. The company will spend 2 billion euros annually by 2025 with suppliers owned and managed by people from under-represented groups. This is part of commitments announced by Unilever to help build a more equitable and inclusive society by raising living standards across its value chain, creating opportunities through inclusivity and preparing people for the future of work, Unilever said in a statement on Thursday. Unilever CEO Alan Jope



A living wage is defined as the minimum income necessary for a worker to meet his or her basic needs and is higher than the normal wage

said, "The two biggest threats that the world currently faces are climate change and social inequality." The past year has widened the social divide, and decisive and collective action is needed to build a society that helps to improve livelihoods, embraces diversity, nurtures talent, and offers opportunities for every-

one, he added. "We believe the actions we are committing to will make Unilever a better, stronger business; ready for the huge societal changes we are experiencing today—changes that will only accelerate. Without a healthy society, there cannot be a healthy business," Jope said. A living wage is defined as the minimum income

necessary for a worker to meet his or her basic needs and is higher than the normal wage. It allows workers to participate fully in their communities and help them break the cycle of poverty. Under living wage, people can afford a decent standard of living, covering a family's basic needs—food, water, housing, education, healthcare, transportation, clothing; and includes a provision for unexpected events. "Our ambition is to improve living standards for low-paid workers worldwide. We will therefore ensure everyone who directly provides goods and services to Unilever earns at least a living wage or income, by 2030.

"We already pay our employees at least a living wage, and we want to secure the same for more people beyond our workforce, specifically focusing on the most vulnerable workers in manufacturing and agriculture," the company said. Unilever will work with its suppliers, other businesses, governments and NGOs—through purchasing practices, collaboration and advocacy—to create systemic change and global adoption of living wage practices. In parallel, Unilever will also help 5 million SMEs in its retail value chain grow their business through access to skills, finance and technology by 2025. —PTI

SHORT TAKES

Vaccination may jeopardise Oly

Tokyo: Japan is publicly adamant that it will stage its postponed Olympics this summer. But to pull it off, many believe the vaccination of its 127 million citizens for the coronavirus is key. It's an immense undertaking in the best of circumstances and complicated now by an overly cautious decision-making process, bureaucratic roadblocks and a public that has long been deeply wary of vaccines. Japan hopes to start Covid-19 vaccinations in late February, but uncertainty is growing that a nation ranked among the world's lowest in vaccine confidence can pull off the massive, \$14 billion project in time for the games in July, casting doubt on whether the Tokyo Olympics can happen. Japan has secured vaccines for all its citizens, and then some, after striking deals with three foreign pharmaceutical makers Pfizer Inc., AstraZeneca and Moderna Inc. — *AP*

Spanish player tests +ve in Oz

Melbourne: A Spanish tennis player ranked in the top 70 who was forced to quarantine in her hotel room after potentially being exposed to the coronavirus on an Australian Open charter flight says she tested positive for Covid-19. Paula Badosa, a 23-year-old who reached the fourth round at last year's French Open, wrote on Thursday on Twitter that she received her test result for the illness caused by the coronavirus on the seventh day of her hard quarantine. "I have some bad news," Badosa said in a post written in Spanish and English. "Today I received a positive Covid-19 test result. I'm feeling unwell and have some symptoms, but I'll try to recover as soon as possible listening to the doctors. I've been taken to a health hotel to self isolate and be monitored." — *AP*

Hockey girls hold Chile senior side

Santiago: A resilient Indian junior women's hockey team came from behind twice to hold Chile senior side to a 2-2 draw in their fourth match of the tour here. Deepika (40th minute) and Gagandeep Kaur (55th) led India's fight back after Chile had taken the lead twice through goals from Mariana del Jesus Lagos (21st) and Fernanda Villagran (51st). With three wins from as many games in the tour, the Indian team started the match brightly as they tried to penetrate Chile's defence, but could not find a clear opportunity inside the first 15 minutes. Chile, on the other hand, relied on counter attacks with their tactic paying off in the second quarter. The Indian juniors will again play Chile senior side in back-to-back matches on Saturday and Sunday. — *PTI*

Lakers win eighth game on the road

Los Angeles: LeBron James scored a season-high 34 points as the Los Angeles Lakers won their eighth straight road game with a 113-106 victory over the Milwaukee Bucks on Thursday. The victory opened a seven-game road trip for the NBA champion Lakers, who are hoping this is the beginning of another run of victories. They had a five-game winning streak snapped in their most recent outing, a 115-113 loss to Golden State. "Our motivation was not losing two in a row tonight. We were able to get that accomplished," said forward Anthony Davis. James made a key three pointer and capped his night with an emphatic double clutch slam dunk as the Lakers improved to a NBA best 12-4 on the season after Thursday's gritty performance at the Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee. — *AFP*

Live on TV

BADMINTON

Thailand Open: Semifinal matches from 9.30 am on Star Sports 2 HD, 3

CRICKET

Big Bash League: Melbourne Renegades vs Brisbane Heat from 10.35 am; Melbourne Stars vs Perth Scorchers from 1.45 pm on Sony Six, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Kerala Blasters vs Goa from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

Italian League: Roma vs Spezia from 7.30 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

English Premier League: Aston Villa vs Newcastle from 1.30 am (Sunday) on Star Sports Select 1

MIXED FEELING

Big gun Sindhu exits but mixed pair Satwik-Ashwin enters semis

Bangkok, Jan. 22: Error-prone P. V. Sindhu suffered a demoralising defeat in the quarterfinals while Sameer Verma's gallant fight too ended in agony at the Thailand Open here on Friday.

However, Satwicksairaj Rankireddy claimed twin wins in mixed and men's doubles quarterfinals along with Ashwini Ponnappa and Chirag Shetty to keep India's flag fluttering at the badminton World Tour Super 1000 tournament here.

Sindhu looked a pale shadow of the player who had won the world championship gold in 2019 as she committed too many unforced errors to go down 13-21, 9-21 against home favourite Ratchanok Intanahon.

"I made a lot of unforced errors and I think that I gave away easy points. I didn't play my best today. It wasn't my day," a crestfallen Sindhu said.

In men's singles, Sameer's giant-killing run also came to an end after he squandered a match point to go down 13-21, 21-19, 20-22 to world no. 3 Anders Antonsen of Denmark in a quarterfinal contest.

With the defeat of Sindhu and Sameer, Indian challenge in singles competition ended in the tournament.

The doubles players, however, gave fans something to cheer as Satwik and Ashwini upstaged world no. 6 pair of Peng Soon Chan and Liu Ying Goh of Malaysia 18-21, 24-22, 22-20 after toiling hard for one hour and 15 minutes.

"We have played them three times. We have won twice and lost once. We were confident. We knew our main strength would be our attack. They were under pressure. We kept



India's Satwicksairaj Rankireddy (right) goes for a shot next to teammate Ashwini Ponnappa during their mixed doubles quarterfinal match against Indonesia's Chan Peng Soon and Goh Liu Ying at the Thailand Open badminton tournament in Bangkok on Friday.

● **Olympic silver medallist P. V. Sindhu was a pale shadow of himself and was outclassed by Malaysia's World No. 92 Kisona Selva-duray 21-10, 21-12 in the women's singles second round of the Thailand Open.**

● **The Indian men's doubles and mixed doubles pairs are in the semifinal of a Super Series. The mixed doubles pair has gone into the last 4 for the first time. The men's pair are on course to defend their win from last year.**

fighting. We had our chances and never messed up," Satwik said.

Later in the day, Satwik and Chirag saw off another Malaysian pair of Ong Yew Sin and Teo Ee Yi 21-18, 24-22 in 37 minutes.

The Indian men's doubles and mixed doubles pairs are in the semifinal of a Super Series. The mixed doubles pair has gone into the last 4 for the very first time and the men's doubles are on

course to defend their sensational win from last year.

Earlier, Sindhu looked awfully out of form as she was all at sea against Ratchanok, a former world champion.

"Some of my lifts were going out and going out of control. I was hitting with so much power sometimes. I should have controlled things a lot more. If I had won the first game, I think things would have

been comparatively different," she said.

MARIN BREEZES INTO SEMIFINALS

Spanish fifth seed and former world number one Carolina Marin sailed through to the semi-finals, beating Turkey's Neslihan Yigit 21-6, 21-15.

Marin is aiming for back-to-back titles in this week's tournament — the second of three consecutive events in Bangkok

that culminate in next week's World Tour Finals. She came out on top last week against top-seeded Tai Tzu-ying, and continued her winning streak on Friday — despite Yigit holding a brief lead in the second set.

"I wanted to keep going, keep fighting and keep the focus on what I needed to do, even when Yigit was leading," said Marin.

World no. 6 Marin will be facing off in the semi-finals against South Korean An Se-young, a formidable teenager who was awarded "Most Promising Player" in 2019.

They already duelled in last week's tournament, with the more experienced Marin winning 21-18, 21-16. — *Agencies*

Deepak storms out, suspended

Vadodara, Jan. 22: The Baroda Cricket Association (BCA) has suspended senior player Deepak Hooda, who had stormed out of the camp before the start of Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, for this domestic season for "indiscipline" and "bringing disrespect to the game."

Hooda had walked out of the team on the eve of domestic T20 tournament after a spat with captain Krunal Pandya. He had alleged "misbehaviour" on the part of Pandya.

"He (Hooda) has been suspended for this season for indiscipline and bringing disrespect to the BCA and the game. Without informing the team and the BCA, he left the team and the (bio) bubble," BCA secretary Ajit Lele told PTI on Friday.

The decision to suspend Hooda was taken during the Apex Council meeting of the BCA which was held on Thursday evening.

Hooda, who was initially appointed as Baroda's vice-captain for Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, had stormed out of the bio-bubble on January 9. He had alleged "misbehaviour" on the part of Pandya in an e-mail sent to BCA.

"At this moment, I am demoralised, depressed and under pressure," Hooda, who has played 46 first-class matches, wrote



From last some days, my team captain Mr Krunal Pandya is using abusing language to me (sic) in front of my teammates and also other State teams.

— DEEPAK HOODA justifies leaving Baroda camp at the T20 tourney

in the e-mail.

"As from last some days, my team captain Mr Krunal Pandya is using abusing language to me in front of my teammates and also other state teams who have come for participation at Reliance Stadium Vadodara."

Following Hooda's letter, the BCA had sought the manager's report. — *PTI*

ROYALS TRADE BATSMAN UTHAPPA TO SUPER KINGS

New Delhi, Jan. 22: Veteran India batsman Robin Uthappa has been traded to Chennai Super Kings in an all-cash deal, IPL franchise Rajasthan Royals said on Thursday. The 35-year-old right-hander from Karnataka had scored just 196 runs in 12 matches in the last IPL in UAE after being picked up by Rajasthan Royals at the last IPL auctions.

"I really enjoyed my year at the Royals and had a great time being part of this franchise. I am now excited for the next part of my crickering journey joining CSK for IPL 2021," Uthappa said in a release.

CAREY, COULTER-NILE NOT SURPRISED AT IPL FRANCHISES RELEASING THEM

Australian players Alex Carey and Nathan Coulter-Nile said they were not surprised at their IPL franchises releasing them and they are hoping to find a team in next month's Players Auction for the upcoming edition of the cash-rich league. While wicket-keeper batsman Carey was released by last edition's runners-up side Delhi Capitals on Thursday, Coulter-Nile was de-listed by champions Mumbai Indians.

"It wasn't a surprise. I didn't play a lot of cricket, just sat on the sidelines, so it probably makes sense to open that spot up for someone else," Carey was quoted as saying by *cricket.com.au*. — *PTI*

Siraj is find of Oz series: Shastri

New Delhi, Jan. 22: India head coach Ravi Shastri on Friday described rookie pacer Mohammed Siraj as the find of the Australia tour, hailing him for playing a key role in the historic Test series win despite personal loss and racial abuse from spectators Down Under.

Siraj could not return to India after his father died barely a week after he landed in Australia with the Indian team in November last year. He also faced racial abuse from a section of the crowd in Sydney during the third Test.

Despite all this, Siraj finished the series with 13 wickets — the most by any Indian bowler — as the team came from behind to script a memorable 2-1 win.

"Find of the tour for shoring up the bowling attack the way he did — Mohd Siraj. He fought through personal loss, racial remarks and channelised them to find home in the team huddle," Shastri tweeted in appreciation of the 26-year-old pacer.

Siraj turned out to be one of the architects of India's success and successfully stepped into the shoes of his senior pace colleagues after making his debut in the series-turning second Test.

In the fourth Test in Brisbane, Siraj led a young Indian bowling attack, picking up his maiden five-wicket haul in the longest format of the game. He returned with match figures of 7/150 as India beat Australia by three wickets at the Gabba.

Siraj revealed that on-field umpires had offered his team the option of leaving the third Test against Australia midway after he was subjected to racial abuse by the crowd in Sydney, a proposal that was turned down by skipper Ajinkya Rahane.

After his arrival in the country, the youngster had driven straight to his father's grave in Hyderabad to pay his respects. He had dedicated each of his wickets in Australia to the departed soul. — *PTI*



Pacer Mohammed Siraj gestures during a press conference at his residence in Hyderabad on Thursday.

Saha bats for Pant

Kolkata, Jan. 22: Rishabh Pant the batsman redeemed himself spectacularly in Australia and his much-criticised wicket-keeping skills are also on the mend, feels senior India stumper Wriddhiman Saha who wants the youngster to be given some breathing space as "no one learns algebra in class I".

Saha, who is considered India's number one Test wicketkeeper, said in an interview that he does not believe that Pant's heroic show in Australia would close the door for him in the Indian team.

"You can ask him (Pant), we have a friendly relationship and help each other whoever gets into the XI. Personally, there's no conflict with him," Saha said.

"I don't see who is No.1 or 2... Team will give a chance to those who do better. I will continue to do my job. Selection is not in my hands, it's up

THAKUR HAPPY TO BE CALLED BOWLING ALLROUNDER NOW

Mumbai, Jan. 22: It was a debut over two years after his actual debut and Shardul Thakur says he took a quantum leap from being just a fast bowler to a bowling all-rounder with his impactful show in India's epoch-making Brisbane Test win over Australia. Thakur snared seven wickets and was India's top scorer in the first innings, striking 67 while batting at No.8. He, along with Washington Sundar, pulled the team out of trouble by conjuring a crucial 123-run stand. The partnership eventually played a key role in the team's three-wicket win.

His Test debut was back in 2018 which last just 10 balls thanks to injury.

"Yes, I can be called a bowling allrounder. I have that ability to bat and even in future, whenever I get my opportunity to bat, I am going to contribute useful runs to the team's total," Thakur said. — *PTI*

to the management."

"No one learns algebra in class I. You always go step by step. He is giving his best and will definitely improve. He has matured and proved himself. In the long run, it augurs well for the

Indian team."

"The way he has shown his intent after being sidelined from his favourite T20 and ODI formats was really exceptional," Wriddhiman further added. — *PTI*

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