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WINDOWS

Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia along with US Ambassador to India Kenneth I. Juster during the New US Embassy groundbreaking ceremony, in New Delhi on Friday

Babri demolition: HC moved against acquittal of accused



**HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI/LUCKNOW**

TWO Ayodhya residents on Friday moved the Allahabad High Court challenging a special CBI court's ruling that acquitted all 32 accused including BJP veterans L K Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi the 1992 demolition of Babri mosque. Ayodhya residents Haji Mahboob and Haji Sayyad Akhlaq Ahmad filed the petition in the Lucknow bench of the high court on behalf of All India Muslim Personal Law Board.

The two decided to challenge the special court's judgement after the CBI did not move the high court against the acquittal of the accused by the special court, said a counsel for Ayodhya residents.

Twenty-eight years after the Babri Masjid was razed, the special court last year had acquitted all 32 people including BJP veterans L K Advani, M M Joshi and Uma Bharti, accused of inciting a mob of "kar sevaks" to demolish the Babri mosque.

BUSINESS

Indo-US ties set to get a boost with Biden admin



50 birds die in last 3 days

NEW DELHI

AMID a bird flu scare, around 50 birds, mostly crows, have died in the national capital over the last three to four days, officials said on Friday. "We received information about the death of crows in Dwarka and Mayur Vihar Phase 3 and of a few wild birds in Hastsal in West Delhi.

"However, it is yet to be ascertained if bird flu infection is the reason," Dr Rakesh Singh from the animal husbandry unit of the Development Department said. Around 50 birds have died in these areas over the last three to four days, he said.

Officials from department collected samples from the three area and sent them to a designated laboratory in Jalandhar, Punjab on Friday, he said.

"Four samples each have been collected from Hastsal and Mayur Vihar Phase 3, while one sample has been taken from Dwarka. We have



Dip in chicken sales

NEW DELHI

AS the bird flu scare takes over Delhi, shops selling poultry meat across the city have claimed that there has been a "noticeable dip" in sales over the last few weeks.

"Ever since the news of bird flu came out, the chicken sales have gone down by at least 20 per cent. "We understand that customers go in a state of panic and stop buying chicken as a precaution, but it is important to know that once cooked properly, there is no health risk," said Irshad Kureishi, general secretary of the Delhi Meat Merchants Association. According to him, the dip in chicken prices from "Rs 200 per kg to Rs 150 per kg is a loss for both poultry farmers as well as the shopkeepers".

been following the standard operating procedure," Singh said. Besides, 100 more samples of poultry birds have been collected from across the city, he said.

The Centre had on Wednesday said that avian influenza or bird flu outbreak has been reported at 12 epicentres in Kerala, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh, while Haryana is on high alert due to unusual mortality at poultry farms in Panchkula.

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia had said on Thursday that there is no case of bird flu in Delhi yet and asked officials to keep a close watch on poultry birds coming in from neighbouring states to prevent any infection.

Eleven rapid response teams have been set up to monitor Delhi's potential hotspots, officials said.

Sisodia had also instructed officials to maintain a strict vigil on birds at major bird sites, especially poultry markets, water bodies, zoos and other potential hotspots.

'Our ghar wapsi after your law wapsi'

■ Assert farmers, ask Centre not to meddle in agriculture
■ Cannot repeal laws, says govt; sets Jan 15 for 9th round of talks

NEW DELHI

PROTESTING farmers on Friday stuck to their key demands of repealing the farm laws as the only way to end protests.

During the eighth round of talks between the farmers' representatives and the three Central ministers, the farmers said their "ghar wapsi" will happen only after "law wapsi" but the Centre insisted talks must be limited to contentious clauses and ruled out a complete withdrawal of the Acts.

At the eighth round of negotiations with the 41-member representative group of protesting farmers, the government said the farm reform laws have been welcomed by a large section of farmers in various states and asked the unions to think about the interests of the entire country.

Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar, Railways, Commerce and Food Minister Piyush Goyal and Minister of State for Commerce Som Parkash, who is an MP from Punjab, are holding talks



Farmers' leaders during the eighth round of talks with the Centre over the three contentious agri laws, at New Delhi's Vigyan Bhawan, on Friday. (R) Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar

with unions at Vigyan Bhawan in the heart of the national capital, while thousands of farmers have stayed put at various Delhi borders to protest against the three laws they find pro-corporate and against the existing mandi and MSP procurement systems.

"Discussion on the laws was taken up but no decision could be made. The government urged that if farmer unions give an option other than repealing, we'll consider it. But no option could be presented, so the meeting was concluded, and it was decided to hold the next meeting on January 15," Tomar said later at a press meet.

If govt calls us 700 times for talks, we will go: Tikait

GHAZIPUR: Ahead of the eighth round of talks with the Central government over the new farm laws on Friday, Bharatiya Kisan Union National Spokesperson Rakesh Tikait said the farmers leaders are ready to take part in talks with the Union government 700 times, but their demands will not change. Tikait



said: "If the government meets us 700 times, we are willing to go but the demand of the farmers will not change."

"The Central government will have to withdraw the farm laws and we will talk on the same even today. There will be no other thing on which the talks will be held."

MEET SET FOR MONDAY

PM to meet CMs over Covid vaccine rollout

NEW DELHI

WITH the Covid-19 vaccination drive expected to commence next week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to chair a meeting with the Chief Ministers of all the States. The meeting is likely to be held at 4 pm on Monday, said sources.

In the meeting, the Prime Minister is expected to discuss the detailed plans to roll Covid vaccines in all the states, following the Drug Controller General India's (DCGI) approval for the restricted emergency use of two vaccines Serum Institute's Covishield and Bharat



Biotech's Covaxin. The information comes on a day when Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan announced that the government is in the process of ensuring vaccination for all and the drive will start soon.

On January 3, two intramuscular vaccines - Bharat Biotech's Covaxin and Ox-

ford-AstraZeneca's Covishield manufactured by Serum Institute of India - were approved for restricted emergency use. Both are two-dose vaccines. Covishield is over 70 per cent effective, while Covaxin is currently in the Phase 3 trials but is "safe and provides a robust immune response", the drug regulator had said last week.

While the full efficacy of Covaxin is yet to be determined, it was given go-ahead by the DCGI citing 'public interest'. Covaxin is an indigenously developed vaccine by Bharat Biotech, in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

15-year jail for Mumbai attack mastermind Lakhvi

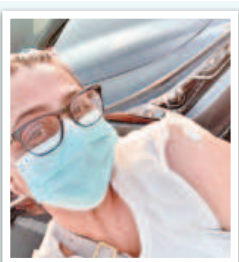
LAHORE

MUMBAI attack mastermind and Lashkar-e-Taiba operations commander Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi was sentenced to 15 years in jail on Friday by a Pakistani anti-terrorism court here in a terror financing case. UN proscribed terrorist Lakhvi, 61, who was on bail since 2015 in the Mumbai attack case, was arrested by the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) of Punjab province last Saturday. "The Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) Lahore convicted Lakhvi for commission of offences of terrorism financing in a case registered by the CTD for 15 years under different sections of the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997," a court official said after the hearing.



Arrest warrant against JeM chief

LAHORE: In a significant development, an anti-terrorism court in Pakistan issued an arrest warrant against banned Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) chief Masood Azhar on the charges of terror financing. The Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) Gujranwala issued the warrant during a hearing in a terror financing case instituted by the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) of Punjab police against some members of the JeM.



Actress Shilpa Shirodkar gets Covid jab in UAE

MUMBAI: Bollywood actress Shilpa Shirodkar has become the first to get vaccinated against coronavirus in UAE. The actress who resides in Dubai took to her social media handle to inform the same after getting vaccinated.

Shirodkar shared a selfie on Instagram baring her arm where she was injected.

Gurugram school murder: CBI charge sheets 4 cops

NEW DELHI

It was revealed during CBI investigation that a school bus conductor earlier arrested by Gurugram police was not involved in the murder case, following which the investigation continued further. CBI had apprehended a student of a senior class on November 7, 2017

THE Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Friday filed a supplementary chargesheet against four then officials of Haryana Police, including an ACP, in connection with the murder of a seven-year-old student of a private school in Gurugram in 2017.

A CBI official said here that the agency has filed a supplementary chargesheet against four then officials of Haryana Police, including an ACP, Inspector and Sub Inspec-



tor, in the court of special judicial magistrate, CBI cases, Panchkula in Haryana, in the ongoing investigation into the case.

The CBI had registered an instant case on September 22, 2017 on the request of Haryana government and further notification

from the Centre.

The case was earlier registered by Gurugram Police on September 8, 2017 related to the murder of a seven-year-old boy, a student of Class II at a private school in Gurugram.

The official said that after investigation, based on scientific evidence, including inspection of the crime scene, forensic examination, minute analysis of CCTV footages, analysis of various call records, circumstantial evidences and examination of several persons, the CBI had ap-

prehended a student of a senior class of the said school on November 7, 2017. "It was revealed during CBI investigation that a school bus conductor earlier arrested by Gurugram Police was not involved in the murder case, following which the investigation continued further," he said.

"During further probe, the alleged role of the said police officials came to light and a supplementary chargesheet has therefore been filed against them," the official added.

Bharat Biotech seeks DCGI nod to conduct nasal Covid vaccine trials

NEW DELHI: Days after getting Drugs Controller General of India's (DCGI) nod for India's first indigenously-made coronavirus vaccine, Bharat Biotech has again knocked on the doors of the drug controller seeking permission to conduct clinical trials of their intranasal vaccine for the viral disease. The Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech has applied to the DCGI for permission to start Phase 1 and 2 trials of their nasal coronavirus vaccine, top sources privy to the development said.

Womenia

TWEET PATROL


JUHI CHAWLA
@IAM_JUHI

Stopped by at Soul Africa, Kampala. Thank you for the Organic goodies Shamira. Gloria here hand makes the Shea Butter, Coconut oils, Nettle Tea. Going to indulge in the goodness. 🍵🌿🍯



Sunitha Lakshma Reddy takes over as chairperson of Women's Commission

SABYA SINGH

After around 2.5 years of dysfunctional women's commission, the state finally gets its official chairperson. The Telangana government appointed Vakiti Sunitha Lakshma Reddy as the chairperson and the members of women's commission on 27th dec.

Sunitha was also the former minister of women development and child welfare in Andhra Pradesh who has now taken the charge of being the Chairperson of the women's commission.

The new members took charge in the presence of Telangana State Information Technology and Municipal Administration and Urban Development minister KT Rama Rao. According to the minister, the state government has undertook several measures for the welfare and empowerment of women.

Maternal and infant deaths have considerably declined and institutional deliveries



Women development and child welfare state department organised the swearing in ceremony of Telangana state women commission at Buddha Bhavan on Friday

rose in the state. The Telangana government emphasised on the primacy of women's empowerment through various measures, including putting in place "She Teams" which work to address women's safety issues.

"We will strive our best to work for



special women's courts. In order to make women's safety effective, the She teams will be regularly co-ordinating with the women's commission. The emer-

gency number 181 will be functional for women to register their complaints from domestic violence to discrimination against women. These centres will allow women to understand their legal options as well. They do not have to hesitate or feel embarrassed to get in touch with us. One can approach the sakhi centres and we assure that the anonymity will be maintained. We will be taking up every case against women violence for quick disposal. I have just taken charge and let me understand and once I'm aware of things, I'll set up the priorities." Said Sunitha Lakshma Reddy, adding that along with her team members will bring awareness of schemes and will to educate women on their rights.

There are a total of 33 sakhi centres in the state. The emergency number 181 will not only function as an emergency number but will also connect them to sakhi centres. Sakhi centres also have a vehicular support for women who cannot commute, they will come down by their location to give coun-

selling. We are in talks with the police department on how to integrate Bharosa and sakhi centres.

All 6 members of the commission are based from different districts and different socio-economic status. Eshwari bai is from Adilabad district, coming from Kolam community and Shaheen coming from minority community, and other members are representing backward classes as well. All the members will strive to ensure that women issues are addressed.

181 is stationed at EMRI campus. It runs 100, 108 and 181. There are a total of 70,000 employees working in women development and child welfare and 60,000 anganwadi workers as well.

Divya Devarajan, IAS, Commissioner and Director, women development and child welfare, Government of Telangana who presided at the event said, "Women commission's duties are not limited to reacting, but to suggest the government on better policies and rules for women."

Style rules all 'timeless women' follow



There are some women who, despite their age, have a quality about them that feels effortless and ageless. You get the impression that they were dressing the same way 20 years prior and likely looked just as sartorially relevant during that decade as they do today. Their sense of style has more to do with knowing what works for them and sticking to it than it does their age. That's not to say they don't dress for their age, but they don't let "what you're supposed to wear" dictate how they present themselves to the world.

Intrigued by what goes into achieving this timelessness that some women seem to naturally possess, we set out on a mission to study them with the purpose of honing in on specific tips. Here are some rules that you all can follow.

Don't focus on trends

Wearing pieces and outfit combinations that never go out of style (e.g., a black turtleneck, straight-leg jeans, and ankle boots) ensures you'll never look like you're trying too hard. Effortlessness is key for timeless style.

Avoid sloppy silhouettes

Although oversize looks are a current trend, tailored pieces are the number one way to achieve polish, which timeless women always have.

Stick to classic shoe styles

Look at any timeless woman's shoe collection and you'll find an array of chic, classic footwear like loafers, Chelsea boots, and block-heel pumps.

Go-to outfit formula

You'll never hear a timeless woman complain that she has nothing to wear. The reason? She has a go-to outfit formula that works for a variety of occasions and always makes her feel confident.

Don't over-accessorize

Wearing too many accessories at once can ruin a look, but timeless women stick to a select few sleek options that will only enhance their outfits.

Invest in outerwear

Since we wear outerwear on repeat and it's the first thing everyone sees, timeless women know to focus their wardrobe budgets on this all-important piece—and it shows. Gorgeous, versatile outerwear makes any outfit look more expensive and pulled together.



Unlock super soft hair with best care

Soft and frizz-free hair is wished by all. While genetics play an important role in determining the health of your hair, exposure to excessive pollution, stress, and a poor diet can cause damage to your hair. But you can always prevent excessive dullness and dryness of hair by unlocking the best care routine. One of the most effective ways to take care of your hair health is by regularly nourishing it with the goodness of combination of coconut oil and aloe vera which tackles frizzy hair resulting in super softness. This miracle combination can do wonders for your hair not only making it healthy but also so soft that you would want to keep touching it.

The benefits of using coconut hair oil with Aloe Vera:

- Forms a protective layer on your hair, keeping them safe from the external factors like harsh chemicals, dust, and pollution that may lead to dull hair
- Provides a long-term solution by helping you manage frizzy and dull/dry hair
- Acts as a natural moisturising agent with soothing properties
- Helps in hair growth
- Locks essential hydration in your hair thereby keeping them soft and manageable and less prone to breakage

Preparing this combo at



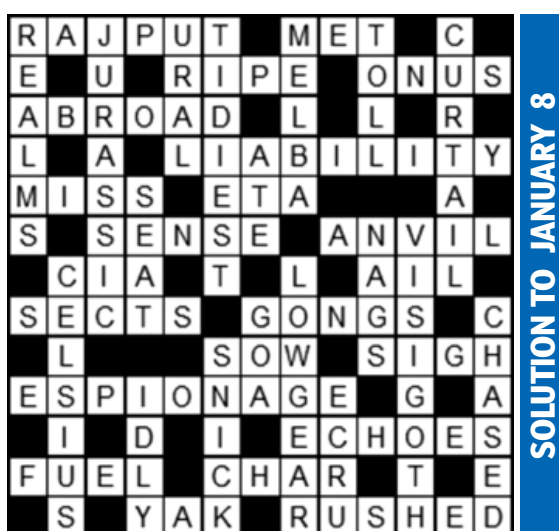
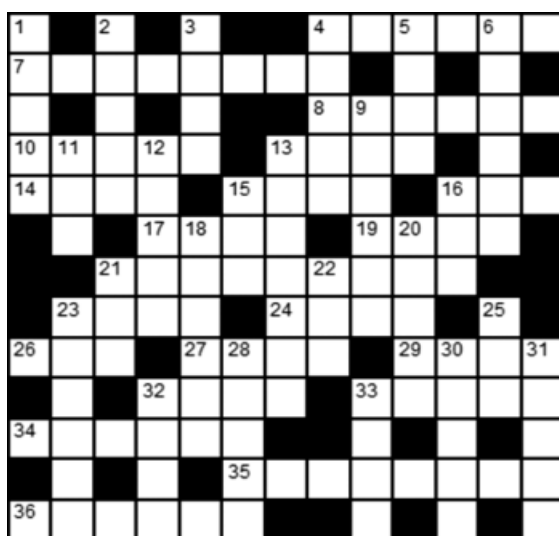
home on a regular basis seems cumbersome. Therefore, you can opt for parachute advanced aloe vera enriched coconut hair oil. Combination of coconut oil and aloe Vera extracts, a blend which traditionally a lot of people have been doing manually. So, it not just saves you from the manual hassle, but this miraculous combination of coconut hair oil with aloe Vera extracts nourishes your hair and provides a protective layer that keeps your hair strands moisturised and conditioned from deep within. Applying aloe vera enriched coconut hair oil before washing can prevent dullness and dryness post the wash.

The routine - All you have to do is take a few drops of coconut

hair oil and apply it gently on your hair starting from roots till the tips. Do this about 45 minutes before washing your hair with a mild cleaning solution. Post your hair wash, you may use a pea size amount of the same oil along the tips of your hair as a serum to give your hair that extra dose of softness while keeping the frizz at bay. It's light and non-sticky texture makes it the perfect accessory to slay any hairstyle. Follow this routine twice a week to see visible results over time. A regular application of this miracle combination will be your best bet to bid adieu to all your frizzy and dry hair woes, leaving you with well-nourished and hair so soft that you will want to keep touching it again and again.



Nmammi Agarwal



SOLUTION TO JANUARY 8

CROSSWORD

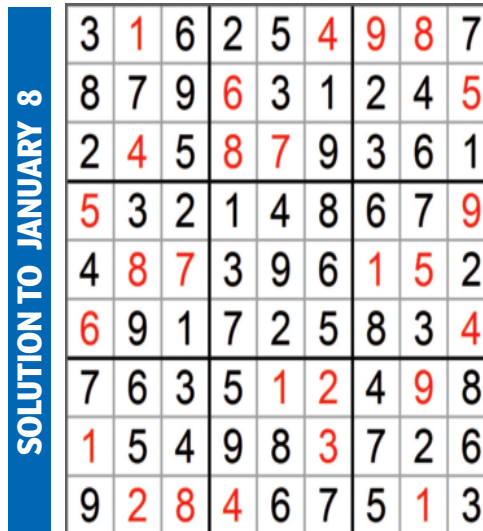
Across

- Ships of the desert ? (6)
- Venerate or respect ? (4,2,2)
- We sit on them (6)
- Tomb (5)
- Screen symbol (4)
- Hitler follower (4)
- Grow together (4)
- Acorn bearer (3)
- Shoal, bank (4)
- Peel (4)
- Capital of Karnataka (9)
- Festive occasion (4)
- Meshes (4)
- Bright colour (3)
- Summon (4)
- Chooses or selects (4)
- Stratagem (4)
- Retract (5)
- Notices or sees (6)
- Respirator (4,4)
- Plum-like fruit (6)

Down

- Dress; make straight (5)
- Precious stone (5)
- Impolite (4)
- Spherical bacteria (5)
- Intend (4)
- Immature insects (6)
- Casserole with potato layer (6)
- Hit sharply (3)
- Like some diseases (5)
- Babyhood (7)
- A small cask or barrel (3)
- Mine material (3)
- Make possible (6)
- Incendiarism (5)
- Naughty (3)
- Monetary unit of Albania (3)
- Japanese entertainer (6)
- Parents Teachers Assoc. (3)
- Reddish dye (5)
- Sham (5)
- Irish playwright (5)
- Bowling targets (4)
- Forearm bone (4)

SUDOKU



SOLUTION TO JANUARY 8

NEWS ROUNDUP

Renuka Shahane proud to play a doctor in web series

Actress Renuka Shahane feels proud to essay the role of a doctor in her upcoming web series.

The web series titled "Starting Troubles" is a medical comedy drama that revolves around Dr Jagdish Chaturvedi, a person whose heart lies in the world of acting though he ends up becoming a doctor. It is based on Dr Chaturvedi's autobiography "Inventing Medical Devices".

"Doctors unquestionably play one of the most important parts in everyone's lives. I could not be more proud to portray the role of a doctor in this medical drama," Renuka told.

"Working in a medical drama such as 'Starting Troubles' has helped me understand the magnitude of responsibility which the doctors have towards their patients and the society as a whole; which is why this show is very close to my heart. I hope the audience shows the same kind of love with which we have made this show," she added. The trailer of the show is already out. It sets the premise for the title of the series as it captures the comedy of errors that takes place when Dr Chaturvedi tries to live a double life -- as a doctor and as an actor-cum-standup comedian. The six-episode series will start streaming on BuddyBits from January 15 onwards.





“Once the Centre decides to recommend a presidential pardon to a convict on death row, then the pendency of the appeals of the co-accused in the apex court cannot become a ground for the delay in the process”

Beant case: Decide on Rajoana’s mercy plea before Jan 26, SC tells Centre

NEW DELHI

THE Supreme Court on Friday directed the Centre to decide before January 26 on the mercy plea filed on behalf of Balwant Singh Rajoana, who was awarded the death penalty for the 1995 assassination of then Punjab Chief Minister Beant Singh.

A bench headed by Chief Justice SA Bobde told Additional Solicitor General (ASG) KM Nataraj, representing the Centre, that the government should decide on Rajoana’s

pleas for commutation of the death penalty before the Republic Day. “It is a good date,” the CJI quipped.

On December 4, the Supreme Court had said that once the Centre decides to recommend a presidential pardon to a convict on death row, then the pendency of the appeals of the co-accused in the apex court cannot become a ground for the delay in the process.

The top court had asked the Centre when it would send a proposal to the President, un-

der Article 72 of the Constitution, for the commutation of the death sentence of Rajoana.

The Article deals with the President’s power to grant pardon, suspend, remit or commute sentences in certain cases.

The bench noted that on September 7 last year, the Ministry of Home Affairs sent a letter to the Punjab Chief Secretary to intimate that a proposal would be sent to the President to commute Rajoana’s death sentence.

The Chief Justice cited this

letter which said that the release of some prisoners, including Rajoana, was proposed on the 550th birth anniversary of first Sikh master, Guru Nanak Dev.

The ASG submitted that the proposal was not sent to the President since the appeal of other co-accused in the case was pending.

In response, the apex court said: “A pending appeal of other co-accused has no relevance to the decision to commute the death sentence of some convicts...”

Ex-serviceman held on charges of spying for Pak

MEERUT

A retired Armyman was arrested on Friday in Uttar Pradesh on the charge of working for a Pakistani spy agency since 2016, official sources said.

The sources told IANS that retired Signalman Saurabh Sharma was apprehended by the Uttar Pradesh Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) following inputs from the Military Intelligence (MI) Unit in Lucknow.

The ex-serviceman was allegedly working for Pakistani intelligence handlers based in Karachi.

In November last, officials of the Lucknow MI had received inputs regarding Sharma’s ‘involvement’ in espionage activities, the sources said. The information code-named ‘Operation Cross-Connection’ was shared with the UP ATS in early Decem-



ber, following which a joint investigation was initiated.

After his arrest from his parental house in Bihuni village in Hapur district, Sharma told his interrogators that he got in touch with a Pakistani intelligence operative on Facebook in 2014.

The operative, he said, ini-

tially introduced ‘herself’ as a defence journalist. Subsequently, by 2016, he had started sharing sensitive military information in return for money, the sources said.

Sharma, the sources said, shared all the sensitive information through text, audio and photo messages and also

calls, mostly on WhatsApp. He allegedly received several payments from his Pakistani handlers.

The former serviceman was discharged from the Army in June 2020 on medical grounds. The sources said that proof of his activities have been found on his mobile phone too.

An FIR has been lodged at the Gomti Nagar police station in Lucknow against Sharma under Sections 120-Band 123 of the IPC, Sections 3, 4, 5 and 9 of the Official Secrets Act, and Section 13 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

The UP ATS is likely to seek his police custody from a local court for further investigation.

The Lucknow MI Unit, UP ATS and central intelligence agencies are jointly examining further leads in the case, the sources added. (ANS)

Akhilesh for quota on basis of caste population

LUCKNOW

SAMAJWADI Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav has advocated that reservation for all castes should be on the basis of their population.

Akhilesh Yadav, who is presently on a tour of Bundelkhand, told reporters: “The BJP government is trying to divide the other backward classes (OBCs) under backward and most backward categories. As per Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, only one caste is getting the benefit of reservation.”

He did not elaborate the names of the castes.

Akhilesh further termed the BJP as a ‘party of liars’ and alleged that the BJP had changed names of projects launched by him, to claim credit for the same.

“This airstrip where I am standing was built when my father (Mulayam Singh Yadav) was the chief minister,” he said to prove his point.

Replying to a question on Covid vaccination, he said the government had no concrete plan about it and it should say clearly when the poor would get the vaccine.

He also came down heavily on the gov-



ernment on handling of the law and order. He said that women are unsafe and crime against them had increased.

Speaking on Badaun gangrape and murder, he said it would have met the Hathras fate had the medical report not disclosed the cruelty.

He further said the Samajwadi Party would form the next government in Uttar Pradesh and would enter into alliance with smaller parties.

Spurious liquor kills 5 in UP's Bulandshahr

BULANDSHAHR/LUCKNOW

FIVE people have died and 16 others hospitalised after allegedly consuming spurious liquor in Uttar Pradesh’s Bulandshahr district, police said on Friday. The authorities have suspended four policemen and removed three senior Meerut zone excise officials from their post for laxity. An excise inspector and three other members of the department have also been suspended. Police have also arrested the main accused, identified as Kuldeep.

According to a government spokesperson in Lucknow, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has directed officials to initiate stern action under the National Security Act and the Gangsters Act in the case. Bulandshahr Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Santosh Kumar Singh said some people had fallen sick at Jeet Garhi village of the district on Wednesday night after consuming liquor purchased from Kuldeep.

Delhi cabinet gives nod to set up Konkani academy

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

THE Delhi cabinet on Friday approved the setting up of a Konkani academy in the national capital.

“Congratulations to all Konkani speaking people and all those who love Konkani language. To promote Konkani language, Delhi Cabinet today approved setting up of a Konkani academy in Delhi,” Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said in a



tweet. Konkani is an Indo-Aryan language that is spoken by the Konkani people living primarily in the country’s western coastal region. It is one of the 22 scheduled languages mentioned in the Constitution’s 8th schedule and the official language of Goa.

Goa AAP rejects pre-poll alliance with Congress

NEW DELHI/PANAJI

THE Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Goa on Friday rejected any possibility of an alliance with the Congress ahead of the 2022 Assembly elections, state AAP convenor Rahul Mahambre said on Friday.

Mahambre’s comments come on a day when state Congress President Girish Chodankar hinted in an interview with a local TV news channel that the party could have an understanding with the AAP for the 2022 Assembly polls.

There is no question of the AAP tying up with the Congress. We will be going into the state Assembly elections on our own strength. But this statement by the Congress president proves one thing, that we are not the B-team of the BJP or the Congress. It has been a charge levelled against us in the past,” Mahambre said.

10 Nigerians with expired visas to be deported

NEW DELHI

TEN Nigerian nationals who were picked up by the police from the Uttam Nagar area in New Delhi’s Dwarka district for not having valid visas and overstaying illegally in India, are going to be deported.

When the police team asked the Nigerian nationals to show their visas and passports, they failed to produce them.

“Their visas have also expired but they are continuously staying in India which is gross violation of the Indian visa norms. They have not provided any suitable reason and supportive documents for their overstay in India,” said Santosh Kumar Meena, DCP Dwarka.

Due to visa violations, these foreign nationals have been sent to the Lam-pur Sewa Sadan in New Delhi’s Narela area till their travel arrangements are made.

Rahul appeals people to join ‘Kisaan Ke Liye Bole Bharat’ campaign

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

CONGRESS leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday appealed to people to join the social media campaign ‘Kisaan Ke Liye Bole Bharat’ supporting the farmer protests. The campaign started at 10 am.

“Peaceful protests are an integral part of our democracy. Our farmer brothers and sisters are receiving support from all across the country. You should also join along in support of them so that the anti-farmer laws are repealed. #kisaan_ke_lie_bole_bhaart” Gandhi tweeted.

He also shared a video on Twitter related to the campaign asking people to share their views on farmer protests via posts and videos on social media.

The video claimed that the Bharatiya Janata Party is anti-farmers while Congress works towards their betterment. He said Congress will fight with the farmers to get the three contentious farm laws repealed.

“The country is going to face



a Champaran like tragedy once again. Then there was with British company the farmers had to fight with, now it is with Modi’s friends’ companies. But every farmer of the movement is a Satyagrahi who will continue to fight for his rights,” the Congress tweeted on January 3.

The Congress party has time and again slammed the Union government over the farm laws. Earlier, Rahul Gandhi met with President Ram Nath Kovind to discuss the laws and the issues faced by protesting farmers.

Farmers are protesting at the borders of Delhi since November 26 against the Farmers’ Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020; the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020; and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.

A ‘Nihang’ or Sikh religious warrior displays his skills during the farmer’s protest for repeal of the Centre’s Agri laws, at Singhu border, in New Delhi on Friday

SC seeks Centre’s reply on plea for appointment on SC/ST panels

NEW DELHI

THE Supreme Court on Friday sought a response from the Centre on a plea seeking direction for the appointment of full-term chairman and vice-chairman of the National Commissions for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The plea said the role of the constitutional bodies was pivotal for taking into account the issues related to atrocities upon the oppressed communities.

A bench headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde and comprising Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian after hearing submissions from advocate Rajesh Inamdar, representing NGO People’s Chario-

teer Organisation, sought response from the Centre and others. The plea has argued that headless-commissions had been reduced to paper-tigers and were fast losing their relevance, becoming non-functional and were reduced to a window-dressing, it claimed.

In a PIL filed through its secretary Ankur Azad, the organisation said there was neither the chairperson or chairman and the vice-chairperson, nor the members in both the NCSC and the NCST. Similarly, the top posts of such a panel in Uttar Pradesh are lying vacant.

“This shows the total lack of empathy and seriousness, as regards the rights of the SCs and STs and the redressal of

the encroachment and transgressions of their rights. The result of it has proved catastrophic to the whole community, extremely vulnerable. They are now bearing the brunt of being targeted systematically by the anti-social elements,” it said.

The plea assumed significance in the wake of the alleged gang-rape and subsequent death of a 19-year-old Dalit girl in Hathras, causing massive outrage across the country.

The petition stated that the role of the commissions as constitutional bodies was important, as they take into account the issues related to SC and ST atrocities. They exercise power of a civil court and can also, like

the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), approach the appropriate Court for injunction or mandamus to protect the interests of the SCs and STs, it said.

“Owing to glaring vacancies, the Commissions were being run by the bureaucracy, which made them toothless, ineffective and rendered the victims of the atrocities remediless,” it said.

The petition said it was the utmost necessary and imperative that this court directed the Central and Uttar Pradesh governments to make appointments of the respective posts in the concerned Commissions. It also sought a direction for publishing the Annual Reports, within a reasonable time.



The plea assumes significance in the wake of the alleged gang-rape and subsequent death of a 19-year-old Dalit girl in Hathras, causing massive outrage across the country

Covid-19 and India’s successful proactive role

POLITICS for our leaders is all about self-consideration and nothing more. This is a strange predicament of the Indian politician. Come what may he will play to the gallery. Taking a shot of vaccine is a personal choice, no doubt. However, here it is slightly different. You don’t take the vaccine and catch the virus, you will be spreading it to others, if the virus were to be non-contagious, no one would have bothered about such politicians.

So why are some of them refusing to take the vaccine dose or ask people to go for it. Does vaccine have a political colour? India will be able to vaccinate the entire population soon, says Harsh Vardhan Union Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan. Soon it would be a reality to vaccinate the en-

tire population in the country against Covid-19 after prioritising risk groups. The Centre has started a new Covid platform to track particulars of potential vaccine beneficiaries and also issue electronic certificates to them.

The dry run is progressing well in the country so far. Even if there are going to be any complications in a few cases, it is only expected. India has done extremely well in developing vaccines in the shortest possible time, and presently two vaccines have been given emergency use authorisation.

“In the next few days, also in the near future, we should be able to give this vaccine to our countrymen prioritising those who are at risk in public and private sectors. The government has already made known the scheme of

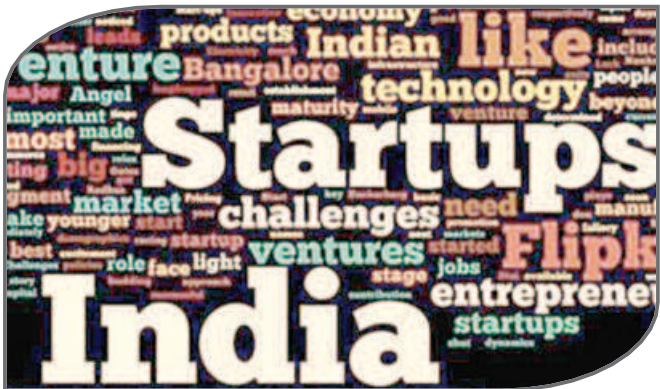
things,” the Minister has added. In a country that is vast like India with a population of 1.35 billion, everything was done smoothly and meticulously without any glitches. India had started the preparation for the impending vaccine drive against Covid four or five months ago after Prime Minister Narendra Modi constituted the national expert group for vaccination.

All the minute details were worked out and the information was shared with those at the grassroot level. In the process, several lakhs of health workers were trained adequately. Earlier, the government used to track the vaccine in terms of the temperature it was stored. Now we started the new Covid platform in tracking the details of potential beneficiaries, places where they are likely to

get the shots, pre and post vaccination including giving an electronic certificate and follow it up with the second dose with detailed text messages and reminders.

This is a remarkable achievement. India was the first country in the world to take note of the pandemic on January 6, 2020 and launch into action. A year of action has led to the country having one million testing kits per day from a mere one when the pandemic started. India has the highest recovery rate and the lowest fatality rate and almost all those infected got treated and returned home.

The scientists and medical fraternity besides those in diverse fields rose to the occasion and displayed exemplary dedication and commitment. India is able to export PPE kits, N95 masks and ventilators – almost everything that people used to talk about shortage then. Let us, once in a while, acknowledge India’s capability too.



India home to 21 unicorns valued at USD 73.2 billion

LALIT K JHA

INDIA is currently the third-largest startup ecosystem in the world and is home to 21 unicorns valued at USD 73.2 billion, India’s top envoy in the US has said, as he expressed hope that more than 50 startups might join the unicorn club as early as 2022. “Entrepreneurial activity has picked up in India. In 2020 India was among the top 50 innovative economies,” India’s Ambassador to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu said.

“Today India is the third-largest, startup ecosystem in the world and is home to 21 unicorns valued at USD 73.2 billion. By some estimates, more than 50 ‘soonicorn’ startups might join the unicorn club as early as 2022,” he said. A unicorn is a term to indicate a privately held startup company valued at over USD 1 billion. Soonicorns are startup companies that are good candidates for late-stage investment and have a good possibility of becoming ‘unicorns’.

“A little below 2019 but definitely encouraging, considering the current pandemic. It is because people like you were not averse to taking risks and were not deterred by challenges. People like you continued to think out of the box. People like you put all your efforts in creating a better life around you,” he said. Rise of Indian IT companies, large talent pool, increased expendable income of Indian middle class and availability of capital have contributed to the growth of India’s startup ecosystem.

More recently increased usage of smartphones, access to the internet, and recent reforms to push digital finance have given further impetus. There has also been a significant push from the Government through initiatives like Startup India and Digital India, he said. “Indian startups are steadily evolving into global entities creating business products, and solutions for the global market,” he added.

“The Bay Area- Silicon Valley is the world’s topmost innovation hub accounting for, I am told, more than a fifth of global venture capital investment. Its success has been hard to replicate elsewhere even with sizeable investments,” he said, adding that the important ingredient that is often found missing elsewhere is the culture of Silicon Valley. Three cities- Bengaluru, Mumbai and NCR Delhi- have changed the face of modern India and find a place among the famous Global Startup hubs. Cities like Pune, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Kolkata are counted amongst the emerging startup hubs. “We need to do more to be counted amongst the ‘superstar hubs’,” he said.

Noting that India and Silicon Valley have a close relationship spanning over many decades, Sandhu said Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to Silicon Valley in 2016 signified the importance of this entrepreneurial bridge and partnership. Sandhu said that Indian programmers, engineers and entrepreneurs are providing their skills and that too in sizeable numbers to US companies.

India is also a leading R&D hub for many of these companies. Many US-based venture firms have been investing in Indian talent and are amongst the largest players in the field. Bay Area- Silicon Valley is also central to growth strategies of many Indian companies bringing innovation to the doorstep of customers with the help of startups, he said.

“In the US, startup ecosystem is developing beyond Silicon Valley and big economic centres like New York, Boston, L.A, Chicago, Philadelphia in Pennsylvania, Research Triangle in North Carolina, Portland, Minneapolis, are gaining prominence, as emerging start-up hubs. This has opened up new opportunities for collaboration for Indian entrepreneurs,” Sandhu said. Around 150 Indian startups attended the event, said the Indian Embassy in a statement.

4 SUCCESSFUL STARTUPS BY WHARTON ALUMNI

ALPHAVECTOR (Sachin & Vishal Chopra) - Founded by brothers, Sachin and Vishal Chopra, AlphaVector is a homegrown startup championing the cause of Cycling and Active Lifestyle in India. Through a range of innovative, engineered for endurance and safety and performance-driven bicycles from brand Ninety One, the brothers aim to encourage millennials and Gen-Z to reclaim the outdoors. Ninety One is inspired by India’s rich history and embodies its action-oriented and constantly evolving spirit. Backed by Fireside Ventures, Aavaana Capital and Titan Capital, AlphaVector has raised Pre-Series A funding and is innovating the D2C (direct-to-consumer) space with a unique omnichannel business model.

Every online purchase is mapped to a dealer offline through AlphaVector’s 91CARES program ensuring the customer has the satisfaction of guaranteed assembly/service and a delightful riding experience during the lifetime of owning the bike. It also offers hassle-free support across the country ensuring customer delight all through the journey of purchasing an AlphaVector bike to riding it for many years.

PhonePe (Sameer Nigam, Rahul Chari, Burzin Engineer): PhonePe is a wallet-based payment solution for consumers. It is making lives easier with UPI-based solutions for money transfer, online payment at retail merchants, mobile & DTH recharging, paying postpaid & utility bills, checking account balance, online shopping, splitting bills, online travel ticket booking, and more. Founded in 2015, PhonePe has been acquired by e-commerce major, Flipkart. PhonePe has recently USD 700 million (about Rs 5,172 crore) in primary capital at a post-money valuation of USD 5.5 billion.

Simple, fast, and secure, PhonePe is one app for all things money which you can use to pay whenever you like, wherever you like. The founder & CEO, Sameer Nigam, founded PhonePe in 2015 and has won the coveted Wharton Venture Award by his alma mater. Before PhonePe, he served as the SVP Engineering and VP Marketing at Flipkart. His Flipkart journey started in 2011 when the company acquired his earlier startup - Mime360. Sameer has also served as the Director of Product Management at Shopzilla Inc, where he built the company’s proprietary shopping search engine.

Milk Basket (Anurag Jain, Yatish Talwadia, Ashish Goel & Anant Goel): Milk Basket is a hyperlocal delivery startup that is a subscription-based service fulfilling daily dairy essentials and household needs of users. Milkbasket has recently raised \$5.5 million funding led by Inflection Point Ventures in the Series B round. Existing investors Blume Ventures, Kalaari Capital, Mayfield India, Unilever Ventures, and BeeNext also participated. Milkbasket has raised over \$33 million in funding so far. Before founding Milkbasket in early 2015 with his friends, Anant had the experience of running three ventures. Anant has the vision to touch the lives of over a million households with Milkbasket’s micro-delivery model, which he believes, will redefine the online grocery delivery industry in India.

FabHotels (Adarsh Manpuria & Vaibhav Aggarwal): Founded in 2014, Fabhotels is a new age budget hotels brand, now with 600+ hotels in 50+ Indian cities. The founders founded it based on a real-life problem where they faced a huge problem finding reliable, trustworthy, and value for money accommodation wherever they travelled, and unwillingly, ended up spending on top-end hotels instead. This was a problem that a lot of their friends faced as well. Hence, they decided to launch their own brand of budget hotels. Till date, FabHotels has raised \$48.6 Mn in seven funding rounds. In June 2019, the company raised Rs 54 Cr from Goldman Sachs, Qualcomm Ventures, and Accel Partners India.

All hotels follow rigorous housekeeping procedures, undergo strict auditing processes, and have courteous trained staff to ensure a hassle-free experience every time a consumer checks in.

Politics is the same dirty exercise



UNITED States of America which is known as ‘Agradajya’ has displayed absolute disdain for the democratic process. The way a billionaire businessman, reality TV star and political outsider exhibited his utter disregard for democracy and disdain in handing over power to his successor has made the countries which believe in democracy hang their head in shame.

Right from day one of becoming the President of US, Trump has proved that he was an unconventional politician. At that time many thought that there was nothing wrong in being unconventional if it helps the country and the world. But no would have perhaps even thought that he would prefer a bloody exit and would face an unpredictable future.

In the modern electoral history of US, no other president had shown such disregard to the democratic process. Trump should have recalled how smooth the transition was when Barack Obama stepped out of White House. No other president had declared himself elected even as the trends of the results were going against him. No other president had spread so much disinformation till the US Capitol was attacked.

Trump conceded his defeat and realised that his game was over only after five people died in the “insurrection” and violence when his supporters stormed US Capitol. This act of Trump was condemned by all including the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, the closest ally of US and the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It may be recalled that Trump and Modi had shown excellent bonhomie. Trump’s actions made even Modi express his distress over the rioting and violence that took place and an attempt to subvert democratic process was made.

Though Trump has on Thursday finally conceded to US President elect Joe Biden and condemned the acts of violence by his supporters, the fact is that the violence mirrored the behaviour of authoritarians and Trump failed to stop the slide over the so called fiscal cliff. It is ridiculous to say that his focus

now turns on smooth power transition. He also said those who indulged in violence do not represent America.

What a realisation after the damage to the country’s image has been done. If those who indulged in violence are not Americans, what about the perpetrators? There is no point in the lip service saying, “I am outraged by the violence, lawlessness and mayhem.”

Even before issuing an appeal to the rioters to stop, Trump insisted that the “election was stolen,” and called rioters very special. Over the last two months Trump had encouraged his supporters to challenge the results, which he said were fraudulent without providing adequate evidence to back his claims. On Wednesday, shortly before rioters breached the Capitol’s perimeter Trump had said, “We will never concede”.

The Trump episode and his behavioural pattern, should come as a lesson for the countries which believe in democracy particularly India which claims to be the biggest democracy. Whether it is the national parties or the regional parties, everyone who comes to power

do not want anyone else to grow and succeed. This trend has been increasing in the country.

There is nothing wrong for the political parties to work to be in power or to come to power but what is disturbing is the authoritarian trends that are being seen and the authoritarianism that is creeping into the functioning of administration as well. This tendency defeats the purpose of having a well oiled administrative system consisting of civil servants and state servants.

It will not be a surprise, if our politicians make use of the mayhem of US as an example of how their opponents could be and equate them with Trump and soon we may see posters on social media with the body of Indian politician with the face of Trump. All parties may try to make him their ‘Trump card’ to belittle their opponents.

‘Hail thy Lord’ kind of situation seems to be creeping into Indian politics. Instead of doing what ever the party in power deems good for the people and leave the judgement to the people to retain them in power or not, politics has been converted into a business model. Have strategists, eliminate the opposition, and use even religion, caste and community sentiments for continuing in power or coming to power.

About two decades back, the focus used to be on prop-

agating the policies and programmes of the Government adopting two fold strategy. One utilise the sound and drama wing of the Information and Public Relations by the respective state Governments and the DAVP (Directorate of Audio Visual and Publicity) which used to have special teams visiting the rural areas and screening special documentaries and organising various cultural programmes.

For the urban people, advertisements in newspapers in a systematic manner following the rules and procedures laid down by the Government was the order of the day. But all that has now been thrown to winds. New unwritten rules, new unwritten protocols have become the order of the day.

All political parties feel that social media is the best way to reach the people forgetting that for a politician, direct contact with the people of constituency is the best and the only way to win an election. Yes, the social media has its own role to play but then it can be a double-edged weapon. Moreover, it has been noticed that it being used more to troll the opponents and verbally attack each other.



Every political party has huge membership and triggering trouble is not a big issue. In a country like India, once if such a situation arises, controlling it would become a major problem. Already we are seeing that the present day politicians are not sparing any issue and are utilising caste, community and religion for narrow political gains

LETTERS

Democracy in distress

THE storming of the Capitol by the Trump supporters is all the more shocking. It is an assault on democracy. It is a shame on the people and needs to be condemned. Mr Trump claims that Joe Biden won the elections fraudulently. But he has not come out with concrete proof on his allegations. It is really a dark day in the history of the US that storming, violence and vandalism has taken place in the Capitol where smooth transition of power was expected. A high level probe should be ordered and those involved in the violence should be taken to task as it should be a deterrent for others. US should see that Biden’s searing in ceremony on 20th of this month is held sans any untoward incident.

Sravana Ramachandran, Chennai

thehansreader@gmail.com

Gearing up for vaccine

AS a nation, we are gearing up for the vaccine programme on a scale never before done. The mega dry run for it has gone off well. Vaccination provides immunity against Covid-19 and offers the best hope for protecting ourselves from the disease. It is marvellous what science can do. By getting vaccinated we can get the better of the pandemic.

While the priority groups get the jab in the first phase, others have to wait for their turn. The first tranche will cover 300 million people - 10 million health care workers, 20 million frontline workers and 270 million people comprising those above 50 years of age and people with comorbidities. It is a mercy that most of our elected representatives will make it to the first phase by virtue of their age. It is hoped that the government will ensure that at no stage socioeconomic inequalities will affect equity in access to the vaccines.

David Milton, Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

Tax relief

I appeal to Union Finance Minister to extend tax relief to senior citizens facing hardships during high inflation and pandemic. I suggest to enhance income tax exemption limit from 3 lac to 5 lac for seniors in the age bracket of 70 and 80 as this age group is more vulnerable to health hazards. Moreover, the rate of taxation may be reduced from 20 per cent to 10 per cent and 30 per cent to 15 per cent and not to tax medical insurance for seniors.

K L Rao, Gurugram

Create a congenial climate

IT is perverse; it is sending the wrong signal. It’s a combination of political opportunism and political naiveté—these words of George Hoffer befittingly reflects the current situation in Andhra Pradesh. In Andhra Pradesh, the ruling and opposition parties are entangled in an ideological war and fighting with each

other for the betterment of their electoral gains. It is very vexing to perceive that they are trying to expose each other at every act. The government and opposition are buying their time roaming around the courts on certain policy matters and creating a topsy-turvy environment in all areas.

The opposition parties are thoughtlessly giving the calls for organizing the rallies and yatras to the places that are the root cause for the eruption of tumult. This is creating not only law and order problem but also fight among certain sections of people. It is an open secret and a well-known thing that no political party would dare to stir up a hornet’s nest like religiously sensitive issues. This is a crystal known thing for the opposition parties too but they are trying to jump to the moon. The ruling YSRC Party has no immediate threat with this kind of chaos but it has to take tough measures to not reoccur such type of incidents. Further, it should not give scope for the opinion that it having a soft corner towards one religion.

E Gajendra Nath Reddy, Badvel



Hyd first city to launch S&T's Mega Cluster

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

HYDERABAD has become the first city to roll out the Government of India-backed Science and Technology Mega Cluster. The Cluster was launched by Minister for IT and Industries K T Rama Rao. This is one of the four cities chosen by the Centre under the Prime Minister's Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC) to facilitate nationwide scientific collaboration.

The city cluster aims to improve overall outcomes for science, technology and innovation in the country. This cluster will be led by the Research and Innovation Circle of Hyderabad (RICH), a Government of Telangana initiative.

The Hyderabad Cluster, driven by RICH, will help in taking lab-based invention to the field level to bring change in the lives of the citizens, said KTR. The state government, he said, was looking to help launch at least 5 large impactful companies over a period of next 5 to 7 years, which will benefit millions, generate wealth, and create over 100,000 jobs across the

The Cluster aims to improve overall outcomes for science, technology and innovation in the country. This cluster will be led by the Research and Innovation Circle of Hyderabad (RICH), a Government of Telangana initiative

country. "In the long term, our goal is to make Telangana the best Centre of Excellence for Life Sciences, Agriculture and Digital Technology," he said.

KTR further said, RICH has been created as a collaborative effort to bring all the stakeholders on to one platform. The State has over 60 R&D labs (including government and private sector) creating a vibrant ecosystem. The State's focus on innovation has been broad-based covering students, rural population, farmers and women, besides industry and academia."

Telangana's pharma companies are today leading the national effort in developing drugs and vaccines for human good. Hyderabad is the vaccine capital and contributes one-third of the global human vaccines. Agriculture companies in the State are the largest providers of seeds nationally.

Principal Secretary IT, Jayesh Ranjan said, "We introduced the concept of RICH because we realised that we have an array of R&D institutions located in Hyderabad, which are the best in the world, to ensure that the industry benefits from the presence of these institutions. In the last four years, RICH has been able to bring together the interests of the R&D institutions, industry, startups and the government. The Hyderabad Cluster will enable RICH to take part in international projects and collaborations among all the key stakeholders, he said.

Ajit Rangnekar, director-general of RICH, said, "Hyderabad has already fully internalised the concept of multi-disciplinary cluster. RICH, which has initiated several efforts towards research and innovation, is ready to initiate the works on the Science and Technology Hyderabad Cluster."

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

THE Telangana lawmakers will be among those who would get the first dose of corona vaccine along with frontline warriors. Most of them would be going to their constituencies and taking the vaccine. They say that this was a measure being contemplated to create confidence among people that the vaccine was safe and there was no need to have any kind of apprehension.

Sources said that a final decision to this effect and an action plan to administer the vaccine to all the people in the state would be finalised at a high-level meeting convened by Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao on Monday. The meeting would also address all the pending revenue related issues under the new Revenue Act.

It is learnt that the Chief Minister got feedback from the authorities that people were ex-

pressing doubts on the safety of vaccines after all kinds of rumours were spread through social media recently. With the nation-wide vaccination programme to be launched from January 13, the state government feels that it should take confidence-building measures so that people would come forward and get vaccinated. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will also be interacting with all the Chief Ministers on Monday to discuss the preparedness of the States to administer the vaccine.

KCR instructed the state Police, Health, Municipal Administration and Panchayat Raj officials to finalise the list of frontline warriors in their respective wings in the first phase of vaccination programme. The local body authorities have been asked to prepare a list of senior citizens who are above 55 years of age from the

It's an effort to drive away apprehensions among the people



A health worker takes part in a dry run as part of preparedness for the administration of Covid-19 vaccine at Gandhi Hospital on Friday. Photo: Adula Krishna

voters' lists prepared by the Election Commission of India. Source said that the meeting would also discuss the preparedness of the state health department and the requirement of workforce and logistical support to take up the vaccination. However, what would happen to those senior citizens whose names are missing or removed from the voters' list is not yet clear.

The Chief Minister would also discuss the reopening of the educational institutions, enforcement of the new Revenue Act and the challenges facing in the land and property registrations, Palke Pragathi, Pattana Pragathi and Haritha Haram. All the collectors were instructed to attend the meeting with complete information on the agenda circulated to them.

Demand grows for resumption of MMTS services in Hyd, too

MEGHNA NATH
HYDERABAD

THE daily MMTS Train users are pressing for a demand for resumption of services at the earliest, as minimum fares would help commuters who used to take the trains before lockdown.

Even as steadily everything is returning to normalcy and the public transport including bus services and metro rails have already started plying, but one service which is yet to resume its services is the Multi-Modal Transport System (MMTS) trains.

The passengers are eagerly awaiting the decision to resume MMTS services at least in the new year. Most of whom depend on MMTS services are finding it difficult to travel to their workplaces and to reach other destinations. Now some of them have also started demanding openly. Many daily passengers and

travelers associations have requested the South Central Railways (SCR) and state government to resume the MMTS services as soon as possible.

SCR operates 12 rakes on Secunderabad-Lingampally, Hyderabad-Lingampally and Secunderabad-Falaknuma sections. Around 1.60 lakh passengers use the MMTS services every day and fare of the service is in three slabs Rs 5, Rs 10 and Rs 15. Around 121 MMTS trains serve various users across the city with 25 local stations apart from Secunderabad, Kacheguda and Hyderabad.

"As steadily the public transports have resumed but it is nearly 10 months since the MMTS is yet to begin its services, whereas in other states the local trains are on track. Although the buses and metro rails have resumed, many people cannot afford to travel through metro rails and metro rails do not cover every nook and corner of the city. It would

► Around 121 MMTS trains serve various users across the city with 25 local stations

► Around 1.6 lakh passengers used the MMTS services everyday

► Fares of the service were in three slabs Rs 5, Rs 10 and Rs 15

► Steadily public transportation being renewed; but MMTS users waiting for nearly 10 months

be better if MMTS services resumes," said J Ramu, a daily MMTS traveller, Secunderabad.

"The commuters of the twin cities are eagerly waiting for the resumption of MMTS trains services whereas central and western railways have resumed the local trains services. But in Hyderabad, SCR has not taken any decision to resume the MMTS services. Due to non-availability of the MMTS services, the people who depended on these services are now forced to opt for other public transports. Also, there are very limited buses, no direct buses are available, and much time is con-

sumed at bus stands. The Travelers Associations have appealed to the SCR and the State government to take immediate steps to start MMTS services," said Noor Ahmed, President for LT (long train) & MMTS Travelers Association.

"All the public transports have been resumed barring MMTS services, why so? As MMTS fares are very minimal it would benefit many people. Many travellers are eagerly waiting and also have submitted various representations to the State government and railway authorities regarding the resumption of trains services.

ALL-FAITH MEET

Botcha sees TDP conspiracy behind attacks on temples

- Ministers hold a meeting of all-religious leaders in the wake of govt issuing GO constituting committees for communal harmony
- Lash out at TDP chief Naidu alleging that he is behind the desecration of idols to divert the attention of people from the good deeds of YSRCP govt
- Reiterate that CM is treating all faiths equally

AMARAVATI

CHIEF Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy has been taking all the required measures to promote religious harmony in the state and brought GO MS 6 constituting committees at both district and state-level for safeguarding communal harmony, said ministers Botcha Satyanarayana, Amzat Basha, Mekathoti Sucharitha and Vellampalli Srinivas here on Friday.

They held a meeting here on Friday with the leaders of various religions where steps to be taken to safeguard religious harmony in the state were discussed.

The representatives of religions asserted that politics



Minister for Municipal Administration Botcha Satyanarayana, Home Minister Mekathoti Sucharitha, Deputy Chief Minister Amzat Basha, Minister for Endowments Vellampalli Srinivas and elders of various religions addressing a press conference at irrigation camp office in Vijayawada on Friday

should not be mixed with religion to whip up passions. They were of the view that no religion promotes violence or hatred against other religions and appealed to the people to maintain peace.

Addressing the media, Botcha Satyanarayana alleged that the opposition parties have been conspiring to create unrest in the state by inciting religious hatred among the people to divert their attention from the government's welfare activities. He said that Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy would treat all religions equally and warned that all those behind vandalism of idols would be punished soon.

"Opposition leader N Chandrababu Naidu, after losing power is plotting to destabilise

the government with evil intentions and is conspiring to defame the government by desecrating temples. They want to create a bad impression among the people by portraying the events of the past as the current happenings and publicising them on social media," he said and reiterated that TDP leaders were planning these incidents just a day before the scheduled government programmes to divert people's attention.

The minister said that there is no place for religious hatred in Andhra Pradesh and to maintain religious harmony, a government order was issued constituting state-level and district level committees headed by the chief secretary at the state level, including

officials from various departments and representatives from all religions.

Venugopala Dikshitulu, chief priest of TTD, said that all religions in the state should practise their religious beliefs and respect other religions without causing any disturbance.

Ahmed Sheikh Bin Shabeen of Shamirra Peetam said that the Chief Minister was implementing many welfare schemes in the state respecting all religions, irrespective of their caste, religion, and community. AELC moderator Bishop Elijah said that universal brotherhood is the message that society needs, where no religion must be hated and no one should use religion for creating communal hatred.

SIT formed to probe desecration incidents

AMARAVATI

A Special Investigation Team (SIT) was formed to investigate offences related to temples and desecration of idols from September 2020 onwards.

A release form the director general of police (DGP) said that the SIT was formed in view of a series of incidents wherein idols

have also been desecrated causing disturbance to the communal harmony in the state.

Additional director of ACB, Vijayawada, G V G Ashok Kumar will head the 16-member team. The team will investigate all the cases and incidents pertaining to temples and desecration of idols reported since September last year.

AP logs 319 new fresh cases, 1 death

AMARAVATI

THE state reported 319 fresh coronavirus cases, 308 recoveries and one death in 24 hours ending 9 am on Friday. The cumulative confirmed positive cases so far touched 8,84,490 after 1.22 crore sample tests, with an overall infection positivity rate of 7.24 per cent, a health department bulletin said. The total recoveries stood at

8,74,531 and deaths 7,127, leaving 2,832 active cases, it said. Krishna district reported 46 fresh cases and one death in a day. Chittoor added 44 and Guntur 39 new cases while 10 other districts reported less than 30 fresh cases each. After a lull for several days, wherein it saw daily new Covid-19 cases below 10, Kurnool added 26 anew in 24 hours, pushing its active caseload upwards to 97.

Inter 1st year classes from Jan 18

AMARAVATI

MINISTER for education Audimulapu Suresh said admission process for Intermediate first year will be conducted offline as per court directions. He said first year Intermediate classes will begin on January 18 and schedule for examinations will be released soon.

Speaking to media persons at the Secretariat here on Friday, the minister said that Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy will launch the second phase of Amma Vodi online payments to beneficiaries on January 11. Regarding Intermediate admissions, the minister said sale of applications for admissions began on January 7 and the last date is January 17. Intermediate examination process for 2020-2021 will continue till May this year and schedule will be planned keeping in view the competitive examination as per CBSE syllabus.

Suresh said the Inter syllabus was reduced by 30 per cent due to Covid-19 and absence of classes. He warned of serious ac-

- Education Minister says exam schedule will be released shortly
- Asks students to complain on WhatsApp or through email against colleges collecting excess fees
- CM to launch Amma Vodi phase-2 online payments on Jan 11



Minister for Education A Suresh addressing a press conference at the Secretariat on Friday

tion against those private institutions, if they conduct classes without permission from the government. He said the college managements should collect fee as per the Covid guidelines by giving 30 per cent subsidy. If they failed to do, so the recognition of the colleges will be cancelled. The minister said students can lodge complaints on excess fee on WhatsApp No: 9391282578 or ourbieap@gmail.com. Based on the complaints received, raids

were conducted on private college in Gollapudi village, he added.

The minister said that the Board of Intermediate Education (BIE) has not increased the examination fee structure due to Covid pandemic and students have to pay Rs 500 for first year and Rs 680 for second year.

Regarding Amma Vodi second phase payments, the minister said that the beneficiaries' lists were displayed at schools, village and ward secretariats.

GVL questions inaction on temple attacks

HANS NEWS SERVICE
VIJAYAWADA

EXPRESSING concern over the repeated attacks on temples all over the state, BJP Rajya Sabha member G V L Narasimha Rao said here on Friday that the government did not take any action against the perpetrators stating that it was handiwork of some mischievous elements.

Alleging that the government had failed miserably in providing protection to the temples, he wondered as to why the police stopped the BJP leaders when YSRCP and TDP leaders were free to go to Ramatheertham.

Addressing a press conference here, Narasimha Rao said that they had taken the Thursday's incidents at Nellimarla to the party high command's notice and Union minister of state of home affairs G Kishan Reddy also enquired with Somu Veerajulu about the incident. A memorandum would be submit-

- Says they will take the unjust arrest of BJP leaders who were on their way to Ramatheertham to the notice of Union Home Minister Amit Shah

- Asks the YSRCP govt how many people have been arrested so far in cases involving desecration of temples



BJP MP G V L Narasimha Rao and party leaders addressing a press conference in Vijayawada on Friday

ted to Union home minister Amit Shah, he said. He ridiculed the proposal of forming committees for communal harmony and wondered what purpose would it serve. The so-called religious heads so far had not condemned the attacks on temples, he pointed out.

The BJP MP asked the government to reveal how many persons were arrested in connection with the attacks on temples so far. He wondered if there was any secret understanding between the YSRCP and the TDP.

'Waved Tricolour to show Trump loyalists not racists': Indian-origin man

WASHINGTON/ LOS ANGELES

Amid a sea of unruly members of a pro-Donald Trump mob waving American confederate flags and flags supporting the US President in the attack on the US Capitol Hill, there was the presence of one that stood out: a man waving the Indian tricolour.

The man has been identified as Vincent Xavier Palathingal, a resident of Virginia, who traces his roots to Kochi, Kerala, and had earlier been picked by Trump to be member President's Export Council, according to News18 report.

The media caught up with the 54-year-old, who said he was not part of the violence that followed when the mob breached the Capitol Hill, leading to the deaths of five persons. He claimed he was there only for a "peaceful protest" against "election fraud" – a claim that Trump has been pushing since his defeat in

November, but has been thrown out of US courts over lack of any evidence. Asked why he was holding the Indian flag during the protests on January 6, Vincent said it was to show that the Trump supporters were not racists, and the protest rally was not a racist movement. "I would not be able to hold an Indian flag and walk around if it was a racist movement," he said.

He said there were about 10 Indians in the group of Trump loyalists, and five of them were from Kerala.

"Whenever I have been at a Trump rally, I've seen people of Vietnamese, Korean, even Pakistani origin, carrying their flags. This is also to show that such rallies are not a racist movement," he added.

According to his official website, Palathingal was born in Kumbalam in Kerala's Ernakulam district. He completed his schooling at St Thomas High School and Sacred Heart High School in Thevara. After his graduation, he worked as Project Engineer at Kerala



Industrial and Technical Consultancy Organization in Kochi and another year as a Site Engineer at Ali-AI Sehebani Associates in Al-Hofuf, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The he moved to the United States after securing admission for a Master's in Civil Engineering at the University of Reno.

He went on to work with the Maryland State Highway Administration, Metro Washington Council of Governments and FannieMae. In 1998, Vinson started Amaram Technology, providing IT support to businesses and government bodies.

Palathingal is a committed Republican and Trump supporter. He describes himself as a pro-business conservative.

On Indian politics, though he describes himself as "neutral" on social media, he has been extremely critical of the Left Front in Kerala.

'IMPEACH' DONALD TRUMP

WASHINGTON/ LOS ANGELES

DEMOCRATIC Assistant House Speaker Katherine Clark has said a vote to impeach US President Trump could be held as "early as by mid-next week."

"We do have a process we have to go through... but we have a president who incited a seditious mob to storm the Capitol. We now have five deaths from that and the harm to our democracy is really unfathomable," she told CNN.

The House Democratic Caucus is to hold a conference call at noon on Friday, Reuters reported citing a Democratic aide.

If the US president is impeached in the House, the process then moves to the Senate for a trial. As we reported earlier, to succeed in convicting and removing the president, Democrats would need a two-thirds majority in the Senate, and there is no indication they would get those numbers.

Also, it is not clear whether enough time remains to carry out the process. Trump is due to leave office on January 20, when Joe Biden will be sworn in. Speaker Nancy Pelosi has already indicated she could convene the House to launch their second impeachment proceedings against Trump if Vice-President Mike Pence does not invoke the 25th Amendment to the Constitution to declare the president unfit for office.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi has already indicated she could convene the House to launch their second impeachment proceedings against Trump if Vice-President Mike Pence does not invoke the 25th Amendment to the Constitution to declare the President unfit for office.

Toll rises to 5

A police officer who sustained injuries during the US Capitol violence has died, officials said, raising the death toll in the riot to five. US Capitol Police Officer Brian D Sicknick was injured while engaging with protesters and returned to his division office, where he collapsed. He was taken to a local hospital where he "passed away due to injuries sustained while on-duty", US Capitol Police (USCP) said in a statement .

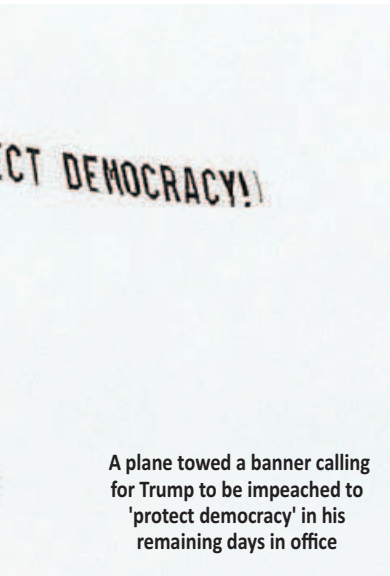
'Contempt'

Describing the attack on Capitol Hill by Trump's supporters as one of the darkest days in the US history, President-elect Joe Biden said the violence was the result of the President's "contempt for democracy". The riot at the US Capitol was not dissent, disorder or protest, it was chaos, Biden told reporters on Thursday in Wilmington, Delaware. "The incident was "one of the darkest days in the history of our nation", Biden said

Cop resigns

US Capitol Police Chief Steven Sund has announced that would resign this month after he faced criticism for failing to prevent supporters of President Donald Trump from storming the building.

Sund's resignation came hours after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Democratic Leader Senator Chuck Schumer on Thursday demanded his resignation and said that he would be fired if he did not resign.



A plane towed a banner calling for Trump to be impeached to 'protect democracy' in his remaining days in office

Badaun gangrape, murder

Victim shouldn't have gone out late, alone: NCW member

Priyanka Gandhi slams member for her remarks

NEW DELHI

A member of the National Commission for Women (NCW), Chandramukhi Devi, stoked controversy by saying that the Badaun gangrape-and-murder incident, involving a 50-year-old Anganwadi worker, could have been avoided had the victim not ventured out in the evening.

Speaking to the media after meeting the family of the victim, she said, "Even under any influence, a woman should keep track of time, and should not venture out late. Perhaps, had the victim not gone out in the evening, or gone along with a family member, she could have been saved."

Her remarks have kicked up a storm resulting in NCW chairperson, Rekha Sharma, clarifying that she does not know why her colleague had made the statement. Taking to Twitter, Sharma said: The gangrape-and-murder of a 50-year-old woman in the Ughaiti area of Uttar Pradesh's Badaun district on Sunday, January 3, by a local priest and his two accomplices has sparked outrage across the country.

Accusing inaction on the part of the local police, the NCW took cognisance of the issue and sent a two-member NCW team to the village to enquire into the matter on Thursday, of which Chandramukhi Devi

was part.

Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra slammed Chandramukhi Devi.

"Do you think that women's safety will be ensured after this kind of statement? The NCW member is blaming the victim for the crime. The administration is upset how the post-mortem report got leaked; in Moradabad, a victim is battling for her life. Women will not forgive this kind of treatment," the Congress leader said.

A priest was quizzed throughout the night for his alleged role in the gangrape of an anganwadi worker in this Uttar Pradesh district after his arrest in the early hours of Friday, police said. "Mahant" Satya Narayan, the main accused in the case, was hiding in a forest area near the house of one of his followers in Mewali village under the Ughaiti police station, from where he was picked up in a late-night crackdown, they said, adding that he was on the run for five days. The priest, who is in his 50s, was immediately arrested and interrogated by a police team. Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Sankalp Sharma said the sub-inspector in-charge of the area, Amarjit Singh, was suspended on Friday.



Give bulletproof jackets, arms to forest staff: SC

NEW DELHI

EXPRESSING serious concern over brutal attack by poachers on unarmed forest officials, the Supreme Court on Friday asked the state governments to follow the Assam model and provide firearms and bulletproof jackets to forest guards.

Pointing out that the situation was "serious", a bench headed by Chief Justice SA Bobde and comprising Justices AS Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian, cited the example of a particular state and said that it was "extremely distressing" to see forest officials wearing slippers and armed with sticks put on duty to protect large tracts of forest land and flora and fauna.

"It is difficult to imagine how any law can be enforced by the forest officers and staff who are poorly armed against poachers, who are likely to be heavily armed," the bench observed.

"A forest ranger is in a situation where he cannot call for help, unlike a policeman in a city. No one to help him in a forest," the CJ remarked.

"We find it difficult to comprehend how these forest officers and staff would be in a position to protect the environment and forests that are normally vast tracts of uninhabited land, of which poachers take undue advantage to carry out their nefarious activities," the top court said in its order.

The apex court's observations came during the hearing of an application for stay on all proceedings against forest officers and staff concerned vis-a-vis an FIR registered under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act on May 23, 2020, at the Mount Abu police station in Rajasthan.

The top court stayed the proceedings as an interim relief and scheduled the matter for hearing after four weeks.

Earlier, during the hearing, the Chief Justice recalled that pangolin scales were seized by forest officials in the past, adding that these were in great demand in China. The poachers operate as part of an illegal international trade in wildlife, running into millions of dollars.



Kangana records statements before police

MUMBAI

BOLLYWOOD actor Kangana Ranaut on Friday appeared before Bandra police here alongwith her sister to record statements in a case of sedition and spreading communal hatred, and claimed in a video earlier in the day that she was being targeted for expressing her views.

Ranaut, who has been provided Y-plus category security of CRPF personnel, and her sister Rangoli Chandel arrived at the police station in suburban Mumbai around 1 pm with their lawyer amid heavy media presence. They left after nearly two hours.

A senior police official said they could be called again for questioning after the next hearing in the magistrate's court.

'Restore Railway concession for sportspersons'

MUMBAI

After Union sports minister Kiren Rijiju, former Maharashtra sports minister Ashish Shelar has also requested Union railways minister Piyush Goyal to restore the fare concessions for athletes travelling for various sports meets.

The concessions, across 38 categories which include sportspersons and senior citizens, were stopped by the railways ministry through its circular on March 19, 2020 in a move to discourage train journey and contain the spread of Covid-19.

With sporting activity resuming in the country now, a large number of sportspersons are heavily dependent on the railways for their travel and the fare concessions help state associations ease the financial burden of sending their athletes for various all India, state and national events.

Shelar, a former Mumbai Cricket Association president and BJP leader, wrote a letter to Goyal and spoke with him expressing his concern about the sportspersons. The 48-year-old, contesting for the Boxing Federation of India (BFI) president's post in their upcoming polls, feels he was duty-bound to address this issue.

"It is a genuine concern of our sportspersons, which I have taken up at the highest level. I am confident of a positive response soon," he said in an official statement.

In his letter to Goyal, Shelar wrote: "As sporting activity resumes across the country, complying with all Covid-19 norms of course, sportspersons are looking to travel from one city to another, from one town to another, to compete in various tournaments and competitions. In addition, many youngsters, boys and girls, need to travel for training, coaching and attending camps."



A flock of pigeons flies over Jal Mahal during a cold winter day, in Jaipur on Friday

Bird flu confirmed in 6 States

NEW DELHI

THE Centre on Friday said bird flu has been confirmed so far in Kerala, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Gujarat, and asked these six states to contain the disease as per the action plan.

Unusual mortality of 16 birds has also been reported at DDA park Hastals Village in the national capital, and samples have been sent to a testing lab. "So far, the disease has been confirmed from six states (Kerala, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Gujarat).

"It is learnt that culling operations have been completed in both the affected districts of Kerala. The disinfection process is underway," according to an official statement. States that are still unaffected by Avian Influenza (AI) have been requested to keep a vigil on any unusual mortality among birds and to report immedi-

ately so that necessary measures are taken in the fastest possible time, it added.

Central teams have been deployed to visit the affected states of Kerala, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh for monitoring and for epidemiological investigation. The government said that in Haryana, there has been confirmation of Avian Influenza positive samples from ICAR-NIHSD in poultry (two poultry farms) of the Panchkula district.

Positive samples have also been reported in migratory birds in the Junagadh district, Gujarat, and in crows in Sawai Madhopur, Pali, Jaisalmer and Mohar districts of Rajasthan.

Therefore, the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying has suggested the affected states to contain the disease as per the Action Plan on Avian Influenza. "Unusual mortality of 16 birds has also been reported in DDA park Hastals Village, Delhi.

SC to hear plea against Kerala churches' compulsory confessions

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi submitted that male priests have abused the confessions made by the women and added that the matter is connected with constitutional importance, if confession is an essential religious practice

NEW DELHI

THE Supreme Court on Friday agreed to hear a PIL by a group of Christian women from Kerala questioning the practice of compulsory confessions in the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, terming the practice as violative of the constitutional rights to freedom of religion and privacy.

A bench headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde and comprising Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian allowed petitioner Bina Titty and others to amend the petition to bring some additional facts in the matter.

At the outset, the bench asked senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, representing a group of five women, why didn't he move the Kerala High Court, and he

replied that the apex court had already referred to similar questions, which were framed in the Sabarimala judgment, for consideration by a nine-judge Constitution bench. Since the issue is pending in the top court, the High Court could not have heard the matter, Rohatgi said.

Attorney General K.K. Venugopal, representing the Centre, however, contended that the issue has emerged from the dispute in Malankara church, which the apex court settled in 2017, and the High Court concerned can deal with the matter.

Rohatgi submitted that the male priests have abused the confessions made by the women, and added that the matter is connected with constitutional importance, if confession is an essential religious practice. He argued that it is also important to



examine that if it violated the right to privacy.

After a brief hearing in the matter, Rohatgi asked the top court to allow him to amend the petition and to bring more facts on record.

The plea, filed through advocate Mohit D. Ram, has argued that confession involves laying bare all secrets of the confessor which he/she believes to be sinful. "However, much to the dismay of the petitioners, in the present case, the priest, part from being not faithful to the sect of the petitioners, has also misused his position as the priest and indulged in acts of blackmailing the members of the parish," the plea said.

The petitioners have argued that in certain cases, priests have even sought sexual favours from the female members of the parish. "The petitioners and

similarly placed persons need to confess before a priest of their own choice," added the plea.

On December 14, a bench headed by the Chief Justice had sought response from the Centre, the Kerala government and high functionaries of the church on the plea challenging the alleged practice of forced and mandatory confession from every of its members.

The plea was filed by Mathew T. Mathachan, Shaji P.J. and Jose C.V., through advocate Sanand Ramakrishnan.

"This pernicious practice of forced, compulsory and mandatory confession (not being voluntary) from every member both men and women is causing several other problems, including sexual exploitation of women and blackmailing," said the plea.

TODAY'S QUOTE

Centre will honour SC decision on farm laws

“The government is still hopeful that union leaders will come with alternatives to discuss in the next round of talks on January 15. The government is always committed to follow whatever is decided by the SC


— Narendra Singh Tomar, Agriculture Minister



PRICE RISE

M&M hikes prices of vehicles by 1.9 pc

Mahindra & Mahindra (M&M) hikes prices of its range of personal and commercial vehicles by around 1.9 per cent with immediate effect which amounts to Rs 4,500 - Rs 40,000, depending on the model and variant. The current price increase will be effective for all bookings done between December 1, 2020 and January 7, 2021.

FOREX (buy rates in ₹)			
US Dollar	77.84	South	
Euro	94.31	African Rand	5.47
UAE Dirham	21.99	Hong Kong Dollar	10.89
Thai Baht	2.8	Japanese Yen	0.81
British Pound	103.64	New Zealand Dollar	55.91
Australian Dollar	59.84	Saudi Riyal	21.52
Canadian Dollar	60.75	Swedish Krona	10.27
Swiss Franc	86.1	Singapore Dollar	58.14

DELHI SATURDAY 9 JANUARY 2021

BIZ BRIEFS

Union AMC eyes growth

Union AMC announced its growth strategy aimed at doubling its AUM (Assets under management) to Rs 10,000 crore with growth coming in from 830 cities. The company has undergone significant changes in various facets of its operations as well as in ownerships ready to take off on a high growth trajectory and appear in its new avatar or version 2.0. G Pradeep Kumar, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Union Asset Management Company Private Limited, said “The AMC has implemented a more robust investment process resulting in improved performance of various schemes of Union AMC. The company also manages a portfolio for Daichi through FPI route. The year 2020 has also witnessed amalgamation of Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank with Union Bank of India”.

Prione gets CII Award

Prione Business Services Pvt. Ltd (Prione), a joint venture between Catamaran and Amazon, won the recognition for active customer engagement at the ‘Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Award for Customer Obsession, 2020’ ceremony. Prione has won this award for the second consecutive year. The results were announced at the virtual event hosted by CII. The award was distributed by Leena Nandan, Secretary, Department of Consumer Affairs. It recognizes customer centric organisations, where the customer is at the centre of all that they do. Sandeep Varaganti, MD and CEO, Prione, said, “At Prione, customer obsession forms the core of everything we do and how we do it. As an organization consisting of highly motivated teams, we take pride in receiving this award by CII again which further validates our customer obsession as we strive to keep pushing the bounds with customer delight.”

Indo-US ties set to get a boost with Biden admin

SUSHMA RAMACHANDRAN

THE chaos that raged on January 6 in the capital of the United States has damaged the image of that country as a haven of democracy. Unseemly scenes of protestors rioting in the country's main legislature flashed all over the world. Despite all this mayhem, however, there is finally no doubt that there will be an orderly transition of power with Joe Biden becoming the next US President. It is in view of this certainty emerging that American stock markets continued to rise even after the unprecedented rioting at Capitol Hill. For India, there are many implications of the change of guard in that country and these may have an impact on the pace of economic recovery here in the months to come. The first and most immediate outcome is that with a Democratic President, it is evident that the current fiscal stimulus will not only be continued but probably intensified as days go by. The Democratic Party has, in fact, been in favour of a larger stimulus package than the 900 billion dollar plan cleared by their Congress recently.

Given that policies will be in favour of fiscal easing, foreign institutional investors are expected to continue pouring funds into emerging economies like India. This will strengthen the bullish trend in equity markets here though domestic factors will continue to play a significant role. Foreign direct investment flows may also get a boost especially as the Indian economy is expected to bounce back rapidly in 2021, even according to global rating agencies.

Second, it could mean that negotiations on trade issues will finally reach a satisfactory conclusion. The relationship with the Trump administration has been contentious in the trade arena. No wonder then that a proposed free trade agreement has been stalled for several years. The situation worsened when the US imposed higher tariffs on steel and aluminium imports from India and then went to remove this country from the list of developing nations entitled to the long standing duty concessions



Given that policies will be in favour of fiscal easing, FIs are expected to continue pouring funds into emerging economies like India

known as the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP). Though the extent of the impact was downplayed by the Commerce Ministry here, it meant that many Indian goods were no longer as competitive in that market as previously.

Third, there could be some softening on the issue of H-1B visas to this country's software companies. This is an area that is of concern to the Indian information technology sector as visa curbs have a long term effect on software exports. What is of immediate concern is that a system based on salary levels is sought to be introduced in the next few days, making H-1B visas easier only for those with higher wages. There are expectations that the Biden administration may overturn this decision, as it will make it difficult for American companies to access Indian IT expertise. Hopefully this will bring some relief to software companies in this country. Fourth, there is now every hope that the US will resume its active role in many multilateral organisations including the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Over the past few years, the Trump administration has virtually withdrawn from this institution by cutting funds support and not filling key positions. The WTO's influence has thus waned, making countries turn more to regional trade agreements. The return of the US

could revitalise this multilateral agency which has been a bulwark for India and other developing countries. And finally with both India and the US still mired in the pandemic, there could be more cooperation in terms of sharing data and ensuring that sufficient vaccines are available globally. The US is a centre for medical research and development but right now India is a hub for vaccine manufacturing. Collaboration between the two countries would be a positive development for the entire world. The Covid situation is not easing soon in the US, UK or Europe given the second wave of infections that has hit these regions.

India's infection rate may be coming down but there is no knowing whether new variants or mutations of the virus could create havoc in the future. Collaboration is thus the need of the hour to ensure that both rich and poor countries are able to get vaccinations at the same time. India has already clarified that its vaccine producers are free to export to the rest of the world.

The change of guard in the US is thus likely to have more positives than negatives for the Indian economy. There are apprehensions that pressures from leftist or progressive groups as they are called in the Democratic Party may lead to linkages of economic issues with human rights questions. But such linkages have been made by previous US administrations as well and trade diplomats have the experience to tackle them. In the short and medium term, however, it looks as if President-elect Joe Biden's presence will result in a better dialogue and enhanced economic ties between the two countries.

Covid crisis fuelled demand: LIC chief

Life insurance industry recorded a de-growth of 27.92% till May 2020, LIC Chairman tells *Bizz Buzz*

KUMUD DAS
MUMBAI

PHASED unlock process in the country, which began way back in June, has helped increase life insurance penetration in the country, says LIC chairman, MR Kumar.

Due to lockdown and related restrictions which impacted the mobility of marketing force, as at the end of May 31, 2020, life insurance industry recorded a de-growth of 27.92 per cent in FYP (first year premium) at Rs 20,466.75 crore as compared to Rs 28,395.89 crore and a de-growth of 51.02 per cent in policies (14,24,373 policies as compared to 29,08,093 in the previous year).

However, as phased unlock process started from June resulting in increased economic activities, our industry adopted innovative digital business processes in meeting the expectation of the market and as on November 30th, the life insurers clocked a FYP of Rs 1,66,6,62.96 crore as compared to Rs 16,92,51.19 crore. The de-growth was brought down to 1.53 per cent.

“It is a matter of fact that the pandemic has made people aware of the importance of life insurance

and it may be the inflexion point for life insurance becoming a nudge product from a push product which will ultimately benefit the population,” said LIC chairman M R Kumar, while talking to *Bizz Buzz* on the sidelines of CD Deshmukh Memorial Seminar, National Insurance Academy (NIA), Pune this morning. Meanwhile, the LIC Chairman has given a call for having new metrics of evaluating the life insurance penetration in the country.

“It is time I think that for India we start building our own metrics of evaluating the penetration of Life Insurance, without going by the metrics used worldwide. We need to think differently on this issue,” he said. India is an under-insured country and we are a nation of under-insured people. In a country of 1.38 billion people, approximately only 20 per cent of the total insurable population of India is covered under some or the other form of insurance. The penetration of life insurance stood at 2.82 per cent in FY2019, which marginally increased from the level of 2.74 per cent in FY2018. Save for the years between 2006 and 2010, life insur-



MR Kumar, LIC chairman

ance penetration in India has remained between 2 per cent and 3 per cent. It had touched a high of 4.6 per cent in 2009, which was the year when India crossed the world average of the then 4 per cent life insurance penetration.

For the last one decade now, India's life insurance penetration has remained below the world average. As of fiscal year 2019, the life insurance density in India was \$58. Similar to the insurance penetration in India, the density also surged until fiscal year 2010, after which it saw a gradual decline. The numbers inched up again around fiscal year 2017 indicating resurgence in the insurance density. The ‘mortality protection gap as a percentage of protection need’ depicts the level of vulnerability of individual households. This ratio is highest in India, at 82.7 per cent, followed by China, Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia at around 70 per cent to 75 per cent.

TCS Q3 net profit rises to ₹8,701 cr

BENGALURU

IT major Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) on Friday reported a 7 per cent increase in its net profit for the quarter ending 31 December, 2020, at ₹8,701 crore as against Rs 8,118 crore in the year-ago period. The company announced interim dividend of ₹6 per share. On Friday, the company's scrip on BSE closed nearly 3 per cent lower at ₹3,120.35. “Growing demand for core transformation services and strong revenue conversion from earlier deals have driven a powerful momentum that helped us overcome seasonal headwinds and post one of our best performances in a December quarter,” said TCS Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director Rajesh Gopinathan.

Bitcoin soars past \$40k

CHARLOTTE

FIRST it went through \$20,000. Then 10 days later, it broke through \$25,000, and then, with barely taking a breath, it crossed \$30,000. Now only a few days into 2021, the price of bitcoin has crossed \$40,000.

Nothing's new with the digital currency in the month since it crossed \$20,000 - there's been no major change in how it can be used. Although some investors are now using the notoriously volatile currency as a ‘store of value,’ which is traditionally a title saved for safe haven investments like gold and other precious metals. “Will you be able to buy a cup of coffee with bitcoin? Probably not with the current version of Bitcoin. It's largely become a store of value,” said Mike Venuto, a co-portfolio manager of the Amplify Transformational

Data Sharing ETF, a \$391-million exchanged-traded fund that focuses on blockchain technologies and companies that deal with cryptocurrencies.

Media attention to its rise has only added fuel to the rally. But investors in digital currencies and companies that trade or ‘mine’ them are warning people to be skeptical of Bitcoin's recent rise and to be braced for a lot of volatility. It's been a wild ride for bitcoin the last three years. The digital currency made its big Wall Street debut in December 2017, when the major futures exchanges rolled out bitcoin futures.

The attention drove Bitcoin to roughly \$19,300, a then-unheard-of price for the currency. Then it all evaporated. The currency's value plunged sharply in 2018, and by December of that year Bitcoin was worth less than \$4,000 a coin.

REAL CORNER

Covid-19 takes heavy toll on realty in 2020

HOUSING sales in the national capital region (Delhi-NCR) plunged 50 per cent year-on-year during the 2020 calendar year to 21,234 units on low demand because of the Covid-19 pandemic, property consultant Knight Frank India said on Wednesday.

The sales of residential properties fell 37 per cent to 1,54,534 units in 2020 across eight major cities as compared with 2,45,861 units in the previous year, the consultant said in its ‘India Real Estate - Residential and Office Update H2 2020’ report.

Housing sales fell in all eight major cities, with demand falling most in Ahmedabad and least in Pune. According to the data, housing sales fell 18 per cent in Pune to 26,919 units during 2020 from 32,809 units in the previous year. Mumbai saw 20 per cent decline at 48,688 units last year from 60,943 units during 2019. The Maharashtra govern-

ment's decision to temporarily cut stamp duty on registration of properties led to higher sales in Mumbai and Pune region during the last four months of 2020 calendar year. Housing sales in Delhi-NCR decreased 50 per cent to 21,234 units from 42,828 units, while demand slumped 51 per cent in Bengaluru to 23,579 units from 48,076 units during the period under review. In Chennai, sales fell 49 per cent to 8,654 units in 2020 from 16,959 units in the previous year.

The sales of residential properties in Hyderabad declined 38 per cent to 10,042 units from 16,267 units. Kolkata saw 21 per cent fall in sales to 8,912 units from 11,266 units. Ahmedabad was worst hit, with sales down by 61 per cent to 6,506 units in 2020 from 16,713 units in the previous year. Knight Frank India CMD Shishir Bajjal said, “Despite the

on-going pandemic, the H2 2020 sales growth in some cities is fairly encouraging.

In Q3 2020, the real estate market started witnessing revival signs, further recording a significant improvement in homes sales during Q4 2020.” Out of the total sales number in H2 2020, he said Mumbai and Pune contributed around 50 per cent in home sales. “This marvellous performance can be largely attributed to the state government's decision of reducing stamp duty in Maharashtra.

The other state governments would need to jump into the bandwagon or offer something similar to bolster demand across their markets,” Bajjal said. The RBI's decision to maintain low repo rates has narrowed the margin between rent and home loan EMI paid to banks, he said.

HANS BUSINESS
MUMBAI

URBAN housing shortage has increased in 2018 compared to 2012. In 2012, urban housing shortage of 18.78 million units affected about a quarter of urban households. About 96 per cent of this shortage was accounted for by housing for low-income groups, says a study by Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER).

In 2018, urban housing shortage based on the number of physically inadequately housed households was 29 million, 54 per cent higher than 2012. Congestion emerges as the primary cause of physical inadequacy in housing.

The per capita floor area of congested households declined from 111 sq ft in 2012 to 83 sq ft in 2018, signalling the urgent need to address congestion, the report says. Moreover, standalone housing policies are not the best housing solution for low-income households, says the report which has jointly been authored by Debarpita Roy and Meera ML.

“In the wake of very high price-to-income ratio in cities, households are left with no choice but to accept lower housing standards to make it affordable,” says Amit Patel, who teaches at McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston.

The shortage has been almost exclusively confined to EWS and LIG households. Employing the latest available nationally representative household data on housing conditions, the study finds EWS and LIG households' demand for housing to be price and income inelastic.

Commenting on this Patel said that limited land supply in urban areas crowd out the low-income households. Our housing markets are dysfunctional both for ownership and rentals especially for the urban poor. There needs to be, he said, a plethora of mechanisms in place

KEY FINDINGS

- Demand for housing is price and income inelastic
- Price elasticity is less than the income elasticity
- Vulnerable households require greater attention
- Price elasticity is lowest in magnitude and positive



for encouraging markets to provide housing solutions for urban poor.

Further analysis reveals these households have accepted congestion in housing as a way of life, making the task of addressing housing inadequacy a challenging prospect. The study recommends housing policies for low-income households - should work in tandem with efforts to improve their health, education, and livelihoods; focus on rental housing for the most vulnerable economic groups among low-income households; and incentivise incremental housing to address congestion.

Slum housing has been a key focus area of housing policy. Considering homeless households, non-slum households living in physically inadequate houses and slum households, the estimated number of inadequately housed

households in 2018 works out to a maximum of 47.3 million or 41 per cent of urban households.

The findings also highlight the need to think beyond traditional standalone price-based ‘housing policies’ and focus on a more holistic approach encompassing access to basic services, health, education, employment and established social networks.

The study finds that the issue of congestion can be addressed by constructing one more room in houses occupied by 17- 18 million households, and by constructing two or more rooms in houses occupied by 2 million households. Improvements and repairs might also address the issues of obsolescence plaguing an estimated 3.5 million non-slum households.

DEMAND FALLS 37% ACROSS 8 MAJOR CITIES; HOUSING SALES PLUNGE 50% IN NCR



BCCI against 'hard quarantine' in Brisbane for Team India

SYDNEY

THE Indian cricket team will not be able to travel to Brisbane for the fourth and final Test of the ongoing Border-Gavaskar Trophy if they will have to undergo another round of hard quarantine, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has reportedly told Cricket Australia.

According to an ESPN report, the BCCI mentioned this point in its latest communi-

cation to CA on Thursday.

A BCCI official confirmed that an email had been sent to CA, and said that a hard quarantine was "immaterial" when the India squad had already spent the first two weeks upon arrival in Australia isolating, the report further said.

According to the official, the Indian team management has told the BCCI that the players had cited it was becoming "too stressful" to be restricted to the team hotels.

The Indian players have been asked by the BCCI to not go outside their hotel premises during their stay in the city. This strict quarantine will be followed by another hotel-ground-hotel routine in Brisbane that hosts the fourth Test currently scheduled to be played from January 15-19 at The Gabba.

Stand-in skipper Ajinkya Rahane had earlier said that the Indian cricketers on

tour in Australia are not annoyed by the strict quarantine rules and are abiding by them. He, however, had added that it is a challenge for the team to be locked inside the team hotel while witnessing people in Sydney carry on with normal life outside.

On Monday, Cricket Australia had clarified that they haven't heard anything "formal" from BCCI about Team In-

dia's unwillingness about playing the fourth Test in Brisbane.

Members of the Queensland government have, however, stated that not abiding by the rules is not an option for Team India.

"If the Indians don't want to play by the rules, don't come," Queensland's Health Shadow Minister Ros Bates said on Sunday, as per Fox Sports.

Tim Mander, Queensland's Shadow Sports Minister, also said there's no room for ignor-

ing the protocols and that every individual would have to go through the same drill.

"If the Indian cricket team wants to spit the dummy and disregard quarantine guidelines in Brisbane for the fourth Test, then they shouldn't come. The same rules must apply for everyone. Simple," Mander said.

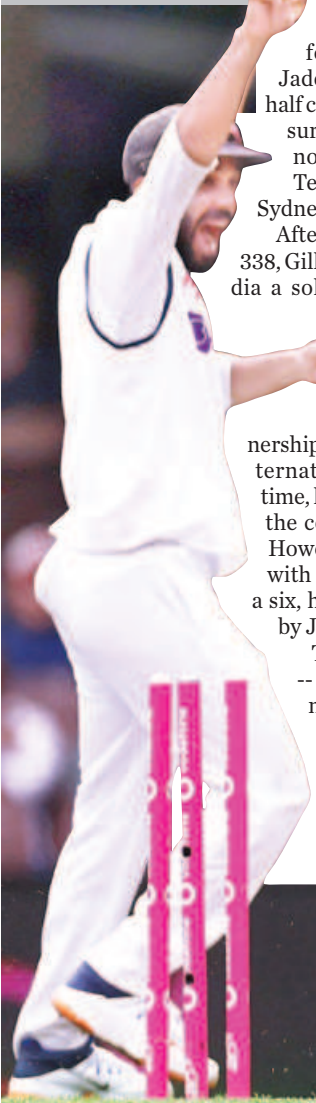
The series is currently tied at 1-1 with Australia winning the first Test in Adelaide while India registering a win in the second in Melbourne. (IANS)



Jadeja, Gill shine as India rule Day 2 despite Smith century

THIRD TEST

SYDNEY



A brilliant all-round performance by Ravindra Jadeja, followed by a superb half-century by Shubman Gill ensured India won Day Two hours of the ongoing third Test against Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG).

After bowling out Australia for 338, Gill and Rohit Sharma gave India a solid start as they not only played cautiously but scored runs at a decent rate during the course of their 70-run opening partnership. Rohit, who was playing international cricket after a long time, looked in good touch during the course of his 77-ball knock. However, after scoring 24 runs with the help of three fours and a six, he got out caught & bowled by Josh Hazlewood.

That wicket didn't deter Gill -- playing only his second Test match -- as the youngster kept scoring boundaries and impressed many with his shots and went on to score his maiden fifty.

However, just after

reaching the milestone, he was caught at slips by Cameron Green off the bowling of Pat Cummins.

Stand-in skipper Ajinkya Rahane and Cheteshwar Pujara then made sure the visitors didn't lose any further wicket as they battled against the impressive bowling display by Australia.

India reached 96/2 at Stumps -- having Rahane and Pujara unbeaten on 5 and 9 respectively -- and still trail by 242 runs.

Earlier, prolific batsman Steve Smith scored a brilliant hundred as Australia scored 338 before getting bundled out in the post-Lunch session.

Apart from Smith who scored 131 before getting run out, Marnus Labuschagne made a significant contribution of 91 before falling short of his fifth Test ton. Debutant opener Will Pucovski had also scored 62 on the rain-hit first day of the match.

For India, Jadeja was the pick of the bowlers as he returned with figures of 4/62 in his 18 overs.

Jasprit Bumrah and Navdeep Saini picked two wickets each while Mohammed Siraj scalped one.

Ace off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, however, went wicket-less in the 24 overs he bowled and conceded 74 runs.

'A star has arrived': Gill slams maiden Test fifty in Sydney

SYDNEY

RIGHT-handed opener Shubman Gill drew rich praise from many on social media, including the likes of Dinesh Karthik and VVS Laxman, after he scored his maiden Test half-century in the ongoing third match of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

Gill, who opened the innings alongside Rohit Sharma, scored 50 in 101 deliveries, which included eight boundaries during India's first innings at the Sydney Cricket Ground. The pair added 70 runs for the first wicket, before Sharma was dismissed by Jos Hazlewood on 26. The 21-year-old, however, continued his resistance and went on to register his maiden Test half-century in his only third innings. Shortly after reaching the milestone, Gill was removed by right-arm pacer Pat Cummins who got the youngster caught in the gully by Cameron Green.

"A star has arrived. Good start Gilly! You looked good the whole time.



SCOREBOARD

Australia 1st Innings (overnight 166/2)	
Will Pucovski lbw b Saini	62
David Warner c Pujara b Siraj	5
M Labuschagne c Rahane b Jadeja	91
Steven Smith run out (Jadeja)	131
Matthew Wade c Bumrah b Jadeja	13
Cameron Green lbw b Bumrah	0
Tim Paine b Bumrah	1
Pat Cummins b Jadeja	0
Mitchell Starc c Gill b Saini	24
Nathan Lyon lbw b Jadeja	0
Josh Hazlewood not out	1
Extras (B-4, NB-5, W-1)	10
Total (All out in 105.4 overs) -----338	
Fall of wickets: 1-6, 2-106, 3-206, 4-232, 5-249, 6-255, 7-278, 8-310, 9-315	
Bowling: Jasprit Bumrah 25.4-7-66-2, Mohammed Siraj 25-4-67-1, Ravichandran Ashwin 24-1-74-0, Navdeep Saini 13-0-65-2, Ravindra Jadeja-18-3-62-4.	
India 1st Innings	
Rohit Sharma c and b Hazlewood	26
Shubman Gill c Green b Cummins	50
Cheteshwar Pujara batting	9
Ajinkya Rahane batting	5
Extras (W-5, NB-1)	6
Total (2 wickets, 45 overs) -----96	
Fall of wickets: 1-70, 2-85	
Bowling: Mitchell Starc 7-4-19-0, Josh Hazlewood 10-5-23-1, Pat Cummins 12-6-19-1, Nathan Lyon 16-7-35-0.	

Don't be too hard on yourself about the dismissal," Karthik said on his official Twitter handle. Laxman tweeted: "For someone playing only his 2nd Test match, Shubman Gill looks very assured at the wicket. Good solid defence, positive stroke play and clarity of thought. Definitely has a very bright future for India in all the three formats."

Gill had impressed in his debut Test as well as he played knocks of 45 and 35 in the Boxing Day Test which India won by eight wickets in Melbourne. (IANS)

Steve Smith now with most Test tons against India

SYDNEY

AUSTRALIA'S Steve Smith on Friday became the batsman to score the maximum number of hundreds against India in Test cricket.

Smith achieved the feat on the second day of the ongoing third Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy at the Sydney Cricket Ground. He played a brilliant knock of 131 before getting run out.

The right-handed batsman has scored eight hundreds in just 25 innings against India that he has played so far.

Gary Sobers (30 innings), Vivian Richards (41 innings) and Ricky Ponting (51 innings) also had scored eight centuries against India.

Smith, currently ranked third in ICC Test rankings, has now scored 27 Test hundreds, equalling Virat Kohli, Graeme Smith and Allan Border.

With his Friday's inning, Smith also ended Australia's near four-year drought of centuries against India. The 31-year-old was, in fact, the last Australian to score a hundred for his country against India back in 2017 when he made 111 in the first innings of the Dharamsala Test.

Since then the Aussies went 11 completed innings, all in Australia, without a century before Smith himself broke the jinx.

Prior to Australia's first innings in the ongoing Test at the SCG which ended at 338, the individual highest score by an Australian batsman was 79 by Marcus Harris during the last series in 2018-19. Harris is sitting on the bench in this series. (IANS)

Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill on Thursday became India's first opening pair in 11 years to bat out 20 overs outside Asia. Gill and Rohit added 70 runs in 27 overs on Friday, with the latter getting dismissed on the last ball of the 27th over for a 77-ball 26. Gill went on to score 50 off 101 balls

Bengaluru FC face SC East Bengal in first match without Cuadrat

MARGAO (GOA)

BENGALURU FC will face East Bengal in their first match after the departure of coach Carles Cuadrat at the Fatorda Stadium on Saturday. The season has hardly been an ideal one for the 2018/19 champions with three consecutive defeats resulting in Cuadrat's time with the club coming to an end.

They are up against a team who are unbeaten in their last four games. East Bengal followed up their first win of the season with a draw against FC Goa where they were arguably the better team despite their captain Danny Fox getting a red card early in the second half.

"We have an important game tomorrow. The players know it. In these seven years, this has happened for the first time. We have lost three games in a row. It is not easy for them to digest. They



Erik Paartalu return from suspension to bolster BFC's midfield

want to bounce back. We have to leave behind everything and focus on the next game," said Bengaluru FC interim coach Naushad Moosa.

"East Bengal are a decent side. They are getting better. Bright (Enobakhare) is a talented player. We will be playing more entertaining football. We can assure you that. We have to remain compact when we lose the ball. We have had fewer clean sheets. The focus is not to concede early goals," he said.

This season, Bengaluru FC had the worst goals conceded average under Cuadrat which proved to be their downfall in the last few matches. With the attack not being able to bail them out, they have struggled, winning just three of their last nine games. In these games, they scored as many as they conceded (12). East Bengal will be looking to build on the performances they have put up since the turn of the year. Their run has been in no small part down to new recruit Bright Enobakhare, who has scored in consecutive games for the Kolkata side.

MATCH RESULT

NorthEast United FC lose to Hyderabad FC 2-4

Would love to see T10 cricket within Olympics: Gayle

ABU DHABI/NEW DELHI: Veteran West Indies batsman Chris Gayle has stated that he would "love" to see T10 format of cricket in the Olympics. "I would absolutely love to see T10 within the Olympics. It would be something huge for the sport from a general point of view. I also think T10 can be (held) within the United States also since it's a big platform," said Gayle while speaking from his home in Jamaica. "I think most people don't recognise the States for cricket, but T10 is very much suitable to be held within USA, and I believe it can help generate bigger revenues as well," he added. Gayle will be playing for Team Abu Dhabi in the upcoming edition of the Abu Dhabi T10 league slated to take place from January 28 to February 6. "First of all, I want to say that it's good to be back. I've missed the past two seasons, so it's good to be back within T10," he said. (IANS)

Chile tour: Indian jr. women's team to play 6 games

NEW DELHI: The Indian junior women's hockey team will be touring Chile later this month where they will play six matches as they prepare for the Junior World Cup scheduled to be held later in the year. The team will take on the junior Chile team on January 17 and 18. Thereafter, they will be up against the senior Chile team on January 20, 21, 23 and 24. "We are absolutely ecstatic about touring Chile as it's been a while since we got some match practice due to the coronavirus pandemic, so this will be a good outing especially as it's coming at an apt time. It's all thanks to the efforts taken by Hockey India that we are in a position to return to competition once again," said captain Suman Devi Thoudam. The team played their last competition in December 2019 when they squared off against Australia and New Zealand in the 3-Nations Tournament before the Covid-19 pandemic. (IANS)

BFI elections to be held on February 3

NEW DELHI: The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) will hold its elections on February 3 in Gurugram, the national federation said on Friday. The BFI said in a statement that the Delhi High Court on Friday accepted its proposed schedule for the elections. "During its previous hearing, the Hon'ble Court had directed BFI to submit a schedule of elections before January 8, 2021. BFI has filed an affidavit through Director-Administration along with a proposed election schedule," said the BFI. "Election Schedule provided to the court by the Director-Administration of BFI, represented by Advocate Hrishikesh Baruah and Parth Goswami, has been accepted by the Hon'ble Court. And elections will be held as per the schedule on February 3, 2021. All parties have accepted the schedule provided by the BFI." Originally scheduled to be held on December 18, the BFI's election was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. (IANS)





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