

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | SATURDAY | 13 FEBRUARY 2021



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**TMC MP Dinesh Trivedi
quits Rajya Sabha**



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**Myanmar protests
swell amid US curbs**

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**India take on England in
second Test from today**



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WEATHER
Max: 33.0°C
Min: 17.0°C
RH: 73%
Rainfall: NIL

Forecast: Clear.
Max/Min temp.
33/17 °C

**COVID-19
COUNT**
CASES (+11,636)
DEATHS (+93)
1,08,91,462 1,55,569

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS
(+143) (+1)
TS: 2,96,277 1,614
(+68) (+1)
AP: 8,88,760 7,162

CASES AROUND THE WORLD
10,84,74,469
DEATHS
23,83,558
COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
219
worldometers.info/
coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE
Sarvari; Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Shuddha Vidiya till 12:58 am
Star: Shatabhisha till 3:14 pm
Varjyam: 10 pm to 11:41 pm
Durmuhurtam: 6:47 am to 8:18 am
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10:30 am

HIJRI CALENDAR
Jamadi-ul-Akhir 30, 1442 AH

PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)
Fajar: 5:40 am
Zohar: 1:30 pm
Asar: 4:30 pm
Maghrib: 5:48 pm
Isha: 8:30 pm

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6:29 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6:04 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 7:39 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 8:23 PM

COUNTER POINT

SHORT TAKES
**NIRMALA DEFENDS
HER BUDGET AS
GOOD FOR ALL**
FC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, FEB. 12

Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharamana on Friday said that strong stimulus measures announced in her Budget 2021-22 would not only provide quick short-term solutions but also ensure long-term and sustainable economic growth, helping the country remain one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. She also said that the Budget was an instrument for promoting Atmanirbhar Bharat when economies across the world had suffered due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Silencing the Opposition's claim that he budget of being pro-rich, she said the government helped the poor by providing free food-grains, gas, building roads, houses etc.

**Global trade
recovered in Q4**
Chennai: Global trade recovered in the last quarter of 2020, reducing the overall decline for the year to about 9 per cent, finds an Unctad study. Some of the less competitive countries lost their market share during the pandemic while competitive ones improved their share in global trade.

Full report on Page 7

Quota in pvt varsities: Jagan Directs officials to convert colleges into private universities

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 12

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy said that the government has decided to amend the AP Private University Act, 2006 by which 35 per cent seats in private universities would be filled by the government quota. The amendment Bill will be introduced in the Budget session. He said that the govern-

ment had decided to introduce English medium in Intermediate and degree colleges, including professional colleges, to improve the employability of the students. CM Reddy was speaking at a review meeting on higher education in the CM camp office at Tadepalli on Friday where he enquired about the reopening of colleges and conducting of classes.

He directed the officials to set highest standards for new private universities and convert the existing colleges into private universities. He said there should be joint certification with 200 best educational institutions of the world and it should last for five years and this should be considered as criteria for recognising a college as a private university. Discussing aided col-

leges, it was opined that they should be handed over to the government or private totally if they cannot be run independently. With regard to introducing English medium at the degree level, the Chief Minister directed the officials to come up with appropriate courses so that students face trouble.

■ Page 2: CM wants practical knowledge

Under drone's watch



A drone used for surveillance by the police, during a Kisan Mahapanchayat in support of the ongoing farmers agitation against Centres farm reform laws, at Bahadurgarh in Haryana district on Friday. — PTI

Poll body gags Kodali for lowering its stature

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 12

The State Election Commission on Friday imposed a gag order on civil supplies minister Kodali Sri Venkeshwara Rao until the completion of gram panchayat polls on February 21.

State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar in the order issued stated that the SEC was not satisfied with the explanation given by the minister.

Accordingly, the SEC issued an order restraining the minister from speak to the media, to any group or groups of people or in meetings until the completion of the elections. The SEC said that the order would come into effect immediately and directed the Krishna district collector and the superintendent of police Krishna (Rural) district and the Vijayawada police commissioner to ensure enforcement of the order.

Earlier, the SEC had served a showcause notice on the minister for mak-

Don't talk against SEC: HC tells Jogi

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 12

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on directed the ruling YSR Congress MLA from Pedana, Jogi Ramesh not to speak against the State Election Commission or about the conduct of gram panchayat polls and also not to speak with the contestants.

As the SEC issued a gag order on the legislator on Thursday on the charges of threatening the voters to influence them until February 17, he moved a

lunch motion petition in the High Court on Friday. Single-judge bench headed by justice D.V.S.S. Somayajulu heard the petition and imposed curbs on the legislator on speaking against the SEC and the ongoing polls. However, the court permitted him to speak to the media persons about government schemes.

The court also directed the SEC to serve notice on the legislator and seek an explanation for making such comments. The case was posted for the next hearing on February 15.

ing allegedly derogatory remarks against Kumar during his press meet earlier in the day. The utterances were lowering the stature of the SEC and the public standing of the elec-

tion commissioner, it said, adding that the minister's comments were made with a malicious intent.

■ Page 2: Minister denies making derogatory remarks



KAKINDA CIVIC REPRESENTATIVE KILLED BY FRIEND

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB. 12

Kampara Ramesh, corporator of ninth division in Kakinada Municipal Corporation, was brutally killed, allegedly by his friend Gurajana Chinna. It is stated Chinna ran the corporator over with his car multiple time in drunken rage at a car washing centre in Valasapakala village of Kakinada Rural Mandal. The incident occurred at 2 am on Friday.

■ Page 2: Corporator was brought dead, say doctors

BUS FALLS INTO ARAKU GORGE, 4 FROM HYD DIE

DC CORRESPONDENTS
VISAKHAPATNAM/
HYDERABAD, FEB. 12

Four persons, including a months old baby were killed and 19 others sustained injuries when a mini-bus in which they were travelling plunged into a 100-feet deep gorge in Anantagiri mandal in Visakhapatnam district on Friday evening.

All the victims and the injured belonged to the same extended family and were residents of Shaikpet in Hyderabad. They had hired the bus for a trip to Araku valley in Visakhapatnam district. They left in the bus hired from Dinesh Travels, also based in Shaikpet, on February 10 and were expected back on February 14.

According to officials involved in the relief and rescue operations at the accident site, among the dead were two men, a woman and a baby.

■ Full report on Page 2

CM okays more polls under SEC

To complete political activity within 2 months and focus on attracting investments to state

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 12

The state will soon witness a paradigm shift in governance with Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy deciding to prioritise development and attracting investments after successfully launching and stabilising welfare schemes in the first two years of his tenure.

As part of this multi-pronged strategy, the Chief Minister, sources close to him told *Deccan Chronicle*, decided to not object to holding of even mandal, zilla parishad and municipal polls before the end of State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar's stint in March.

"He wants to finish the political activity by facilitating all polls in the next one or two months and focus fully on propelling growth by taking advantage of the post-Covid economic initiatives of the Centre," sources said.

The government is said to have conveyed its decision to cooperate with the SEC on conduct of elec-

AP to vote in phase 2 of village polls today

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 12

The second phase of gram panchayat elections in the state will be held on Saturday to elect 2,786 sarpanches and 20,817 ward members. There are 7,507 sarpanch candidates and 44,876 ward members in fray, as 539 sarpanches and 12,604 ward members have been elected unanimously.

The State Election Commission has set up 29,304 polling stations for voters to exercise their franchise. Of them, 5,480 are considered sensitive and 4,181 hyper sensitive. Authorities have arranged 18,387 big, 8,351 medium and 24,034 small ballot boxes at the various polling booths.

As part of anti-Covid-19 measures, authorities have arranged for face masks, hand sanitisers, thermal scanners and hand gloves at all polling stations.

■ Page 3: Polls will end at 1.30 pm in Maoist areas

As part of anti-Covid-19 measures, authorities have arranged for face masks, hand sanitisers, thermal scanners and hand gloves at all polling stations.

■ Page 2: Construction to resume in Amaravati

SC seeks AP's response: Polls in 'Odisha villages'

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, FEB. 12

The Supreme Court on Friday sought response from the AP government on a contempt petition filed by the Odisha government alleging that former (Andhra Pradesh) was holding panchayat election in three of its villages in violation of the undertaking given in 2006 by Odisha and undivided Andhra Pradesh before the top court to maintain status quo on the disputed areas.

Justice A.M. Khanwilkar heading a bench also comprising Justice Aniruddha Bose directed the listing of the matter on February 19.

As advocate Mahfooz Ahsan Nazaki appearing for the Andhra Pradesh government wanted to raise preliminary objections to the contempt plea by Odisha, the court asked him to say whatever he wanted in his reply.

Nazaki later told *Deccan Chronicle* that in 2006, the top court had disposed of the matter after recording an undertaking by both the states to maintain status quo and there were no directions. In the absence of any directions by the top court, there cannot be contempt.

Most of Kotiya sides with AP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 12

The dispute over 21 Kotiya villages between Odisha and AP has once again come to national focus after the Odisha government filed a contempt petition in the Supreme Court against AP for issuing a notification on holding gram panchayat elections in three of the Kotiya panchayats.

This is a six-decade-old dispute with both AP and Odisha claiming jurisdiction over the villages. Fortunately, the poor Adivasis of these villages have been able to reap benefits from both the states. They have two ration cards and draw essentials from both governments. They also participate in elections held by both the states. But when it comes to health services and post school education, these villagers look up to AP.

All 21 schools have Odiya and Telugu medium schools. Except for villagers of Buridi, Kotiya

THE Odisha government seems to be under the impression that gram panchayat elections are being held for the first time in these disputed Kotiya villages.

**RAJANNA DORA,
MLA, Saluru**

and Eguvagangepadara, most others opt for Telugu medium.

"Our welfare schemes like Ammavodi, Cheyutha, Rythu Bharosa and others have attracted the villagers. This has caused heartburn within the Odisha government," Saluru MLA Peedika Rajanna Dora said. He said the Odisha government seems to be under the impression that panchayat elections are being held for the first time in these villages.

■ Page 2: Polls will be held in disputed villages

BREAKING | ICE

Chinese troops to move back after deal created areas that they occupied as 'no-go' zone

India asserts no land was sacrificed for China deal

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, FEB. 12

The defence ministry said on Friday that India had not conceded any territory to China in the disengagement agreement on Pangong Tso. The next military-level talks will take up the outstanding issues at Hot Springs, Gogra and the Depsang plains.

The MoD statement also said India has persistently maintained the right to patrol till Finger 8 in Pangong Tso, including in the current pact with

China. "India has not conceded any territory. On the contrary, it has enforced observance and respect for the LAC and prevented any unilateral change in the status quo," the MoD said.

The defence ministry said it had taken note of some "misinformed and misleading" comments on the disengagement at Pangong Tso. This comes after Congress leader Rahul Gandhi accused Prime Minister Modi of "giving away Indian territory". Mr Gandhi said the Army held the Finger 4 area in

● AS PER the agreement on disengagement of troops, the Chinese troops will move east of Finger 8 and the Indian troops will move to their permanent base at Dhan Singh Thapa Post near Finger 3.

● THE AREA between Finger 4 and Finger 8 will be "no go" zone for some time for both the armies.

Ladakh along the LAC, but now it will move back to its permanent base near Finger 3.

As per the agreement, the Chinese troops will move

east of Finger 8 and the Indian troops will move to their permanent base at Dhan Singh Thapa Post near Finger 3. The area between Finger 4 and

Finger 8 will be "no go" zone for some time for both the armies.

The ministry said the assertion that Indian territory is upto Finger 4 is categorically false. "Even the LAC, as per the Indian perception, is at Finger 8, not at Finger 4. That is why India has maintained the right to patrol upto Finger 8, including in the current deal with China," the MoD said.

It said the permanent posts of both sides at the north bank of Pangong Tso are longstanding and well

established. "On the Indian side, it is Dhan Singh Thapa Post near Finger 3 and on the Chinese side, east of Finger 8," it said. The current agreement provides for the cessation of forward deployment by both sides and continued deployment at these permanent posts, it said.

The MoD also said that defence minister Rajnath Singh's statement in Parliament on Thursday had also made clear that there are outstanding problems to be addressed, including at Hot Springs,

Gogra and Depsang. "The outstanding issues are to be taken up within 48 hours of the completion of the Pangong Tso disengagement," said the statement. It noted that effective safeguarding of our national interest and territory in eastern Ladakh sector has taken place as the government had reposed full faith in the capabilities of the armed forces. "Those who doubt the achievements made possible by the sacrifices of our military personnel are actually disrespecting them," it added.

SHORT TAKES

GANTA, AVANTI
SHARE DAIS AT
HUNGER STRIKEDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 12

Tourism minister Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao (Avanti) on Friday shared the same dais with his political guru Ganta Srinivasa Rao, Telugu Desam MLA, at the relay hunger strike protesting against privatisation of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP).

The hunger strike, started at the main gate of VSP, has been launched by Ukku Parirakshana Committee. The hunger strike camp was inaugurated by Kolla Rajamohan Rao, who had participated for getting the steel plant for Visakhapatnam in 1970s.

Soon after the inauguration, Ganta Srinivasa Rao displayed to people his new resignation letter written as per format required by the assembly speaker for acceptance. Announcing that he was resigning from the assembly in interests of the people, Ganta appealed to Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy that he convene a meeting of his cabinet immediately and pass a resolution against privatisation of the steel plant.

The tourism minister, suggested to Ganta Srinivasa Rao that resignation should be used as the last resort against the central government and not now. "Right now, it is time to unite political parties, trade unions and people to launch a state-wide agitation, till the centre revokes its decision," Muttamsetti remarked.

CPI national general secretary said the state government should enact a new law to prevent PSUs from selling off lands allotted by the state government. He later called on those sitting on hunger strike.

CENTRE HAS
DECEIVED STATE,
SAYS CONG CHIEFDC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, FEB. 12

Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee working president Tulasi Reddy on Friday said the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government at the centre has succeeded in deceiving AP due to incompetence of the present YSR Congress government and the earlier TDP government in the state.

Otherwise, he wondered how the centre could neglect granting special status to Andhra Pradesh when such an assurance had been given at the time of state's bifurcation itself.

Speaking to media persons at Vempalli in Kadapa district, Tulasi Reddy underlined that under the State Reorganisation Act, north Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema had been given ₹24,350 crore under a special development package similar to Bundelkhand. But only ₹1,050 crore came to the state. He pointed out that the central government has to give total ₹5 lakh crore to AP under various provisions of the Reorganisation Act, but it has given only ₹18,000 crore. Not just that, Kadapa district was denied a steel plant and Nellore district a port despite the two being promised. Further, construction of central projects like Polavaram and IIT are progressing very slowly, he pointed out.

The state Congress chief said while the centre is thus doing injustice to state, parties like YSRCP, Telugu Desam and Jana Sena are perpetrating additional injustice on AP by maintaining their alliance

TWO RETURNING
OFFICERS
SUSPENDEDDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 12

Srikakulam collector and election officer J. Niwas suspended two returning officers of LN Peta in the district for dereliction of duties. One of the officials, L. Govardhana Rao, school assistant of Kuntibhadra Zilla Parishad High School under Kothuru mandal, was appointed returning officer for LN Peta gram panchayat (stage-2). The other was reserve returning officer V. Mallesu, teacher at the Temburu Zilla Parishad High School of Patapatnam mandal.

They were suspended under Section 134 of Peoples Representation Act, 1951 and AP Service Rules. They were asked not to leave the headquarters until further orders.

On February 9, Govardhana Rao was allegedly negligent in securing the ballot papers and handing them over to proper authority, as per a preliminary inquiry.

No Jagan link in POSCO deals: Min.

Peddireddi alleges that Chandrababu Naidu was suffering from a "Jagan phobia"

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 12

Minister for Panchayat Raj Peddireddi Ramachandra Reddy said on Friday that no connection existed between Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy and the POSCO steel company. Instead, Reddy urged Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu to comment on the issue of Vizag Steel Plant privatisation.

The minister refuted an allegation of TD leader Chandrababu Naidu that the CM planned to purchase the Vizag Steel. He admitted that POSCO representatives met CM Jagan, but this was a courtesy call. Recalling that Venkaiah Naidu had, as a student leader, agitated for the setting up of the Vizag Steel Plant, he said the VP should now intervene and stop the Centre from privatizing this prestigious entity.

Minister Reddy told the media that Chandrababu Naidu was suffering from a "Jagan phobia".

"Naidu is envious of Jagan," he said and added that Jagan as CM has implemented over 90 per cent of the promises the YSRC made in its election manifesto. "Jagan did this in just 18 months and took his governance to the doorsteps of the people through village and ward secretariats."

He said the YSRC will win the present gram panchayat elections with a thumping majority as the people were largely benefited by the welfare initiatives of the state government.

The minister said Chandrababu was still unable to reconcile to his party's defeat in the assembly polls in 2019. "Thus, the TDP has been raking up issues to create chaos in AP." He slammed the TD leader for his "attempts at misinterpreting the election results" and stated that the public had rejected the TDP, which got less than 10 per cent seats in the assembly.

Brushing aside the allegations of the YSRC using force to effect unanimous polls for grama panchayats, the minister said

Chandrababu was protecting Atchannaidu and Kollu Ravindra, who had "terrorised the contestants".

Minister Reddy said, "There is overwhelming response from the people of Chittoor to the good governance provided by the Chief Minister and me. The government is implementing a lot of welfare schemes. Due to this, Chandrababu's men will be defeated even in his own constituency and in the whole of Chittoor district."

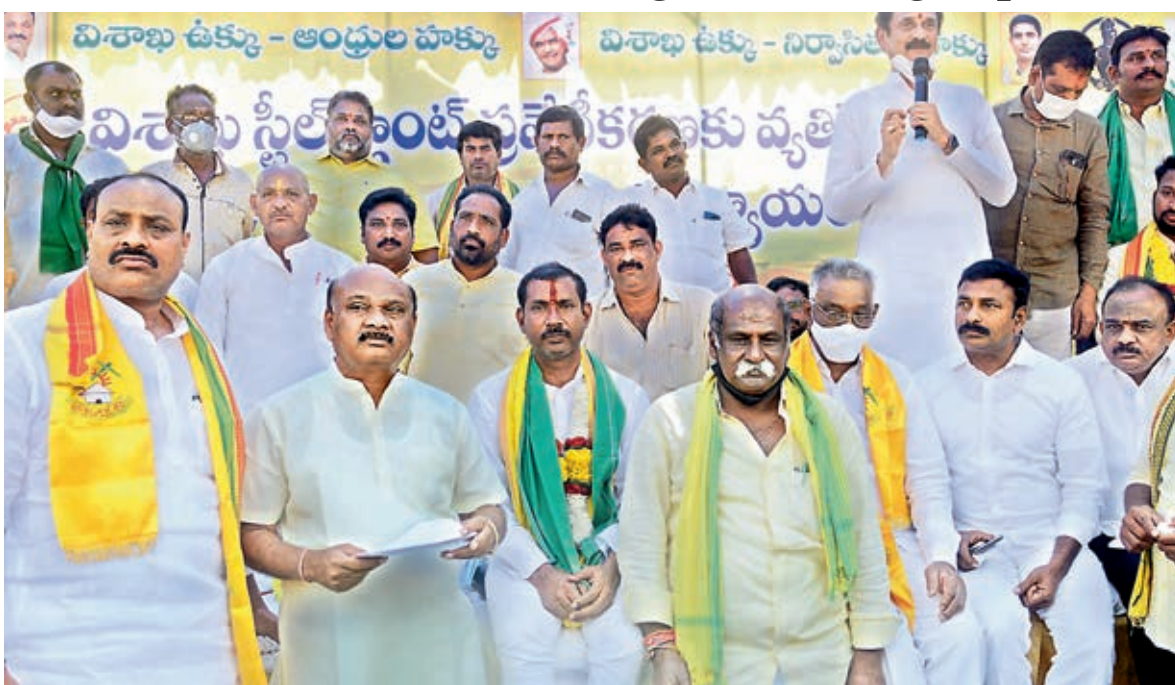
On the Visakhapatnam steel plant, the minister noted that this was a central government institution. If POSCO company wanted to have a deal, they would talk to the Prime Minister of the Union Government. "POSCO is a multinational. Its representatives met the chief minister by way of a courtesy call. The meeting had nothing to do with the Vizag steel plant."

Properties of VSP valued at
over ₹3 lakh cr: AtchannaiduDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 12

AP TD president and former minister and Kinjarapu Atchannaidu asserted that the shifting of the executive capital to the port city was not aimed at the development of the city but was part of a bigger conspiracy to "loot" industries including Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) and public assets.

Addressing the TD hunger strike camp at the party office in Gajuwaka on Friday, Atchannaidu said the properties of the VSP were valued at over ₹3 lakh crore in the open market. The Chief Minister expected that locating the capital in Vizag would further jack up the prices of the lands, after which he could take over the plant after its privatisation.

"Mere writing a letter to the Prime Minister is not



TD State Chief Kinjarapu Atchannaidu joins former Gajuwaka MLA Palla Srinivas, who sat on a hunger strike against the Centre's move to privatise the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, at Gajuwaka in Visakhapatnam on Friday.

— K. MURALI KRISHNA

● **CHIEF MINISTER** expected that locating the capital in Vizag would further jack up the prices of the lands, after which he could take over the plant after its privatisation, he said.

enough. The Chief Minister should clarify to the public whether or not he had met and held discussions with the representatives of POSCO (a South Korean company)," Atchannaidu said.

He reminded that it was then Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy who prevented the allotment of Obulapuram mines to the steel plant in 2004. The mines could have prevented the losses that VSP is facing, he added.

Another former minister and TD politburo member, Ch. Ayyanna Patrudu, alleged that the Chief Minister and Rajya Sabha member V. Vijaysai Reddy were aware of the POSCO

move and it was former chief secretary Neelam Sahney who led a delegation to New Delhi to meet central leaders on the privatisation.

He said the YSRC government has been eying maritime cities and was planning to take over Krishnapatnam and Kakinada ports as well as the Vizag Steel Plant.

Yanamala Ramakrishnudu, Leader of the House in the Legislative Council, said no new industry had come to the state during the last 21 months. He said that the YCRC's failures had made it necessary for the people to start another agitation for protecting the VSP. Other leaders said the people's representatives, employees and the general public should fight a united struggle. The workers should not fall in the trap of the ministers and YSRC MLAs as they were the ones responsible for the present plight of VSP.

Construction to resume
in Amaravati, says CM

From Page 1

The Chief Minister, according to sources, strongly believes that the state would go to the polls only in 2024 as the combined election proposal of the Centre may not materialise in the immediate future.

The CM also directed the officials to relaunch construction activity in Amaravati as per the recommendations of the nine-member committee at the earliest and create civic infrastructure to attract investments into the region. "We will approach the court with a clear plan on

protecting the interests of farmers who gave their lands for the capital and urge it to vacate the status quo on the crucial three capitals Bill that would facilitate the shifting of executive capital to Visakhapatnam," said sources.

Jagan Mohan Reddy is said to have expressed his resolve to focus on attracting investments to the state and make use of the financial assistance promised by the Centre for capital-intensive projects. The government will propose pharma, marine, IT and industrial clusters to attract investors.

Minister denies making
derogatory remarks

From Page 1

Earlier, Venkateshwara Rao on Friday denied making any derogatory remarks against the State Election Commission and

requested it to withdraw the show-cause notice served on him. He said he had high regard for and respect towards constitutional bodies and in particular the SEC.

Rice exports begin
from Kakinada
deep water portDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB. 12

In a significant development, rice exports from the deep water port began here on Friday.

The shipment of 32,250 metric tonnes of broken rice, bound for a West African port, was formerly flagged-off by chairman of Agriculture and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) M. Angamuthu.

Present on the occasion were East Godavari district collector D. Muralidhar Reddy, Joint Collector G. Lakshmisha and commerce and industries export department director G.V.S. Subrahmanyam. Angamuthu said that it was a historic moment for Kakinada port and the state. He expressed hope that rice exports from the port would grow by leaps and bounds.

He said that an action plan has been drawn to promote Indian non-basmati rice abroad. He said that the focus should be

on the quality of rice exports in order to earn the confidence of importing nations. He said that APEDA was introducing new measures so that farmers' revenue for their agricultural products would increase up to three times. During an interaction with rice exporters, he said that rice exporters from the district are sending quality rice.

APEDA would bring a global-level brand status to AP rice soon he said.

Lakshmisha said that traditionally rice is being exported through the anchorage port, but the port has a limited capacity and therefore, the state's potential could not be tapped.

But, now, there is a possibility of trebling rice exports annually from the current level of two million tonnes through anchorage and deep water port. He said that steps were being taken to ensure that employment of port workers would not be affected.

4 die as bus falls in Araku gorge

DC CORRESPONDENTS
VISAKHAPATNAM/
HYDERABAD, FEB. 12

Four persons, including a few months old baby were killed and 19 others sustained injuries when a mini-bus in which they were travelling plunged into a 100-feet deep gorge in Anantagiri mandal in Visakhapatnam district on Friday evening.

All the passengers in the bus belonged to the families of five brothers and were residents of Shaikpet in Hyderabad. They had hired the bus for a trip to Araku valley in Visakhapatnam district. They left in the bus hired from Dinesh Travels, also based in Shaikpet, on February 10 and were expected back on February 14.

According to officials involved in the relief and rescue operations at the accident site, among the dead were two men, a woman and a baby.

Officials said that the family left Borra Caves around 5.30 pm on Friday.

The driver, as he was not familiar with the road, or possibly because of brake failure, overshot a sharp bend and the bus went



Accident victims being taken to hospital on Friday.

down the gorge. Among the injured, along with several adults, were children.

As per Swamy Goud, who responded to a phone call to Dinesh Travels, three persons had booked the vehicle for a family trip to Araku. There were 26 persons in all in the bus, he said.

Meanwhile, the Hyderabad district collector was instructed to visit Shaikpet and inquire and assist in relief operations.

According to the Anantagiri district police, the bus fell into the gorge

while negotiating a hair pin bend on the hilly road between Dumuku and Tyda villages. The bus was on its way to Visakhapatnam from Araku valley and was about 100 km from its immediate destination.

Anantagiri sub-inspector K. Sudhakar said the bodies of the victims were being shifted to S. Kota community health centre, where the injured persons were taken for immediate care and treatment.

Some of those who received serious injuries were to be taken to

Visakhapatnam for better treatment.

As the police scrambled to mount relief efforts, officials reached out to any available vehicle and roped in taxi cabs to rush to the accident spot and to carry the injured to hospitals.

"The incident might have taken place around 7.30 pm and we got a call 10 minutes later. We mobilised all available vehicles including 108 ambulances and rushed to the accident spot 30 km away," said taxi driver Ramesh, from Borra Caves.

CORPORATOR
WAS BROUGHT
DEAD: DOCTORS

From Page 1

The killing of Ramesh has sent shock waves in political circles of Kakinada city. Agriculture minister Kurasala Kannababu, Kakinada city MLA Dwarampudi Chandrasekhara Reddy and Kakinada mayor S. Pavan are among those who have expressed their condolences over the death of Ramesh.

Sarpavaram circle inspector Nunna Raju said Kampara Ramesh came to the car wash centre last night and started drinking there along with his friends. The matter of Gurajana Chinna came up at the time. Following this, Ramesh phone Chinna, who reached the car wash centre along with his brother Kumar. The duo too started drinking with Ramesh and his friends.

While they were heavily drunk, Ramesh found that his car keys were missing. He then asked everybody at the place not to move until his car keys are found. This led to an altercation between Chinna and Ramesh. Following this, the inspector said, Chinna started his car and hit Ramesh repeatedly before running him over.

Chinna then fled from the spot while other friends rushed Ramesh to a private hospital at Sarpavaram, where doctors declared him brought dead. Soon after receiving information, Kakinada DSP V. Bhima Rao rushed to the spot with Kakinada rural and city inspectors. Sarpavaram police have registered a case. Security has been beefed up to check any untoward incidents in the city. The DSP said Clues and technical teams are gathering evidence and collecting CCTV footage.

According to sources, Kampara Ramesh was once the city Congress president and later became a close associate of YSRC leaders and ministers. He had also been the floor leader of Congress in Kakinada Municipal Corporation. Ramesh was involved in land settlements and reportedly settled a land dispute involving Chinna. The corporator's death is the third murder in Kakinada during the past two decades. Previously, Lorry Transport Owners Association president Abbu Chowdary and Vegulla Siva Babu, a leader of 'Truck Operators' Union, had been murdered.

CM WANTS
PRACTICAL
KNOWLEDGE
TAUGHT

From Page 1

Textbooks must be printed in Telugu and English for the convenience of students. He directed officials to draft the curriculum to create employment opportunities for the students. He said awareness on basic financial activities such as stock markets should be created among B Com students which will create scope for self-employment. He said good courses are available online and directed the officials to add those courses in the curriculum.

The CM said the introduction of unlimited internet in every village and providing laptops to all students through schemes like Amma Vodi and Vasati Devana would bring revolutionary changes in the education and skill sectors.

The CM has approved the Wi-Fi project in which Wi-Fi without internet can be provided for up to 500 users simultaneously through a remote device. The range of each remote device is 100 metre. The connection can be made through laptop, tab and TV. Devices can use that facility even after the internet facility is available.

Higher education principal secretary Satish Chandra, AP higher education regulatory and monitoring commission chairperson Justice V. Eshwaraiha, APHERMC Chairman K. Hemachandra Reddy and other officials were present.

SHORT TAKES

TIRUPATI'S BIRRD HOSPITAL TO HAVE BONE BANK

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, FEB. 12

A national level 'bone bank' is to be set up in the Balaji Institute of Surgery, Research and Rehabilitation for the Disabled (BIRRD) here in order to take up all bone-related treatments, said Dr Madanmohan Reddy, director of BIRRD.

Addressing a media conference on Friday, Dr Madanmohan informed that all works and patient treatment services that were paused due to Covid-19 have since been revived at the BIRRD hospital.

He said that the bone bank was to help provide more specialised services to cancer patients and the hospital would perform the surgery twice a month.

He said that unlike the six to 12 months waiting for a kneecap surgery or replacement, patients can now get them done within 48 hours, he said.

He said because of Covid protocol, the number of surgeries has come down to 20-25 per day, which will now increase.

He pointed out that as their laboratory has been upgraded and specialist doctors have been appointed, there will be no need to send patients to other hospitals for a pre-anesthesia test (BP-check).

ARRANGEMENTS IN PLACE FOR PHASE-II POLLS

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, FEB. 12

Chittoor district collector M. Hari Narayanan on Friday informed that all arrangements have been for the peaceful conduct of second phase of polls in 215 gram panchayats in Madanapalle division on Saturday.

In a release, the Collector said that the around 17 mandals under Madanapalle division, which has 1,072 wards and 215 panchayats, are going to polls in the division under the second phase. In all, only one gram panchayat was exempted from the polling due to various reasons.

"Notification was released for 276 gram panchayats and 2,842 wards in the division. However, 61 panchayats, 1,734 wards were declared unanimous, while 36 wards haven't received nominations. In all, around 2,44,989 men voters, 2,46,677 women voters and 5 other voters were going to cast their vote," he said.

AP RECORDS 68 COVID CASES, ONE DEATH

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 12

Andhra Pradesh registered 68 fresh cases of Covid-19 and one death.

The state health authorities here on Friday reported that out of 30,620 samples tested, 68 persons were found infected with Coronavirus. Out of a total number of 1,34,84,025 samples tested so far in the state, 8,88,760 persons were infected with confirmed Covid and of them, 8,80,784 were recovered while 814 are still active with the virus.

Among daily cases of Coronavirus, Visakhapatnam registered the highest with 15 followed by 11 in Chittoor, nine in Guntur, seven each in Krishna and Nellore, six in Anantapur, four each in East Godavari and West Godavari, two in Kurnool and one each in Kadapa, Prakasam and Srikakulam and zero case in Vizianagaram. With regard to cumulative Coronavirus active cases, Chittoor topped the state with 165.

Unity is strength



Former minister and TD MLA Ganta Srinivas Rao, CPI National Secretary K. Narayana and minister for tourism M. Srinivasa Rao at the Visakha Ukku Parirakshana committee hunger strike camp near Steel Plant in Visakhapatnam on Friday.

— DC

ACB TRAPS EXECUTIVE TAX ASSISTANT

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, FEB. 12

Sleuths of the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) on Friday caught an executive tax assistant and an office subordinate for demanding and accepting a bribe of ₹1.30 lakh from a granite dealer, at the Commercial Tax Office-II, Ongole in Prakasam district on Friday.

According to the ACB, One Kuppala Yohan, a granite dealer from Alluru village in Kothapatnam mandal lodged a complaint with DSP, ACB, Ongole, stating that P.V. Nageswara Rao, executive tax assistant and Sk. Mohammad Rafi, office subordinate at the commercial tax office-II circle demanded and accepted a bribe of ₹1.30 lakh for avoiding CTO raids and smooth running of his business and supplying granite polishing material to exporters.

In this connection, ACB laid a trap on Friday at around 1.35 pm on the executive tax assistant and office subordinate. When the victim handed over the bribe to the officer at his chambers, the ACB officials caught him red-handed while accepting the bribe amount.

Nani confident of good show in panchayat polls

YSRC supported candidates will win 11,000 sarpanch seats

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 12

YSR Congress will win 11,000 sarpanch seats in the ongoing gram panchayat elections, claimed minister for civil supplies Kodali Venkateswara Rao (Nani) here on Friday.

Exuding confidence, he said that this was despite the false propaganda being carried by Telugu Desam to divert public attention for their political gains. He said that N. Chandrababu Naidu was never concerned about villages or public welfare, which was reflected in the first phase results.

Addressing a press conference, he said that it is Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's governance that is driving the YSRC win-spree in all local body elections. He said that the TD cadre will abandon Naidu after the results.

On the door-delivery of ration supplies, Nani stated that Andhra Pradesh is the only state to have achieved that distinction besides being the only one to distribute sor-text rice.

The minister pointed



Kodali Venkateswara Rao

out that although the Chief Minister had brought the initiative with 9,260 vehicles and had created employment for thousands of people from backward communities, TD leaders were deliberately politicising it by holding back its implementation in villages.

He claimed that the scheme was rolled out on February 1, but citing the election code, a few political parties with the support of SEC Ramesh Kumar and partisan media have stopped its implementation in rural areas.

He said that only 2,067 of 9,260 vehicles are being used to deliver supplies in urban areas.

Polls will end at 1.30 pm in Maoist areas

FROM PAGE 1

PPE kits have also been arranged for voters infected with Coronavirus to wear before exercising their franchise. Virus-affected people will be allowed to vote just one hour before closure of polling for the day.

Police are keeping a close tab for avoiding any untoward incidents during the second phase of polling, which will be held from 6.30 am to 3.30 pm. In agency areas under influence of Maoists, polling will close by 1.30 pm.

Counting of votes will start on the same day from 4 pm and results will be out by late night.

The state government has requested all voters to express their democratic spirit by participating in the second phase of gram panchayat polls in large numbers.

Polling will be held in all 13 districts of the state. In Srikakulam, it will be in 10 mandals of Tekkali and Palakonda revenue divisions, at Vizianagaram, it will be in 15 mandals of Parvathipuram; 10 mandals in Narsipatnam of Visakhapatnam district, 14 mandals in Rajamahendravaram and Ramachandrapuram of East Godavari; 12 mandals in Kovvur of West Godavari, nine mandals in Gudiwada of Krishna; 11 mandals in Naras-aopeta of Guntur; 17 mandals in Markapur and Kandukur of Prakasam, 10 mandals of Atmakur in Nellore, 13 mandals in Nandyal and Kurnool of Kurnool district, 19 mandals of Dharmavaram and Kalya-ndurg in Anantapur; 12 mandals of Kadapa, and 17 mandals of Madanapalle in Chittoor district.

SEC RECEIVES 347 PLAINTS TO ITS CALL CENTRE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 12

The State Election Commission received 347 complaints pertaining to conduct of gram panchayat polls from all over the state at its newly set up call centre in the last two days.

The state election commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar said in a statement here on Friday that on the first day, they had received 238 complaints followed by 109 on the second day. He said that the district collectors, commissioners of police, SPs and returning officers were directed to initiate necessary measures on the complaints.

The election commissioner said that the SEC was receiving complaints from the people in real time and was keeping close watch on them to initiate necessary action to solve them and added that SEC secretary K. Kannababu and additional DG T. Sanjay were keeping tab on such complaints from the office of SEC.

District wise complaints received include: Srikakulam-10, Vizianagaram-12, Visakhapatnam-31, East Godavari-42.

Polls will be held in disputed villages

FROM PAGE 1

They have missed out on the fact that panchayats elections have been held by AP in these villages for decades.

Rajanna Dora maintained that though the Supreme Court has posted the case to next Friday, panchayat polls will be held as per schedule on Saturday.

Talaganjeipadar and Phagunaseneri have already had unanimous elections. They would thus be held only in Phatuseneri.

The MLA maintained that except for three or four villages, rest of them are in favour of merging their villages with Andhra Pradesh.

The reason is that three public health centres are located in Tonam and Mokkam and one in Saluru. Even villages seeking a merger with Odisha

because of closeness to their border still depend on Similiguda PHC, which is closest to them.

Similarly, two Ekalayva Schools and two junior residential colleges have been set up by Andhra Pradesh government in addition to one in Saluru.

Rajanna Dora, however, said when it comes to infrastructure development, AP is lagging behind Odisha in these areas. The neighbouring state has laid roads in the region while a road project from Kotiya to Saluru sanctioned by Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy government in 2008 could be completed only in 2018. "The Forest Department of Odisha objects to AP government laying roads, though the neighbouring state has laid roads without approval," the MLA remarked.

7.89 lakh voters to exercise franchise

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB. 12

As many as 7.89 lakh voters belonging to 14 mandals of Rajamahendravaram and Ramachandrapuram divisions in East Godavari district will exercise their franchise during the second phase of gram panchayat elections on Saturday for electing 247 gram sarpanches and 2,806 ward members.

East Godavari district collector D. Muralidhar Reddy said webcasting will be ensured in sensitive and hyper sensitive villages. Micro observers have been deployed for supervising the polls.

Muralidhar Reddy said

there are 1,372 candidates for 230 sarpanch posts and 7,994 vying for 2,111 ward member seats in the two divisions. 2,880 polling centres have been set up and 9,446 personnel will be deployed to oversee elections. 249 hyper sensitive and 272 sensitive polling centres have been identified.

East Godavari district superintendent of police Adnan Nayeem Asmi said two additional SPs, 11 DSPs, 17 circle inspectors, 36 sub-inspectors, 535 constables, 48 women constables, 343 home guards, 97 AR personnel and four APSP and AR platoons are being deployed to ensure smooth polling.

AP releases ₹116cr for polls expenditure

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 12

State government released an amount of ₹116 crore for making arrangements for conduct of gram panchayat polls in phase-2 here on Friday.

Panchayat raj and rural development commissioner M. Girija Sankar reviewed the arrangements made for conduct of polls with the joint collectors, zilla parishad chief executive officers and others by holding a teleconference on Friday. Speaking on the occasion, he said that they

had released ₹116 crore on Friday for conduct of polls in addition to the release of ₹80 crore earlier and directed the officials to use the released funds properly and ruled out any chance to release additional funds unless warranted.

He asked the officials to make all requisite arrangements at the polling stations including lighting and food for the polling staff and laid stress to measures to avoid any untoward incidents.

He asked the officials to ensure no repeat of mistakes in conduct of polls in phase-1.

AUTORICKSHAW DRIVER ARRESTED FOR ROBBING A SANITATION WORKER

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, FEB. 12

The sleuths of Balaji Nagar Police Station on Friday arrested a person on charges of robbing and assaulting a sanitation worker in Nellore city limits on 4th of this month. The accused has been identified as Alla Nagendra, 25, an autorickshaw driver hailing from Nazir Thota in the city.

COUNTER | ATTACK

Naidu was habituated to putting the blame for his flaws

Naidu misleading on results: Sajjala

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 12

Government adviser and YSR Congress general secretary Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy said on Friday that Telugu Desam chief Chandrababu Naidu is misinterpreting the results of the panchayat elections. The TD has won only 510 seats while the YSRC-supported candidates won over 2,640 seats, he said.

Addressing the media here, Ramakrishna Reddy said Naidu was habituated to putting the blame for his

flaws on others and "there is nothing new in his recent allegations against SEC Nimmagadda Ramesh in the conduct of the gram panchayat elections."

"Chandrababu claims TD supporters won over 38 per cent of the seats in the first phase and also says the SEC had failed to conduct the elections in a fair manner. He has even written a letter seeking central observers to conduct the polls," Sajjala said and questioned Naidu as to what he would gain from making such baseless allegations.



Ramakrishna Reddy said the YSRC proved its claim by displaying the candidates' pictures on 'ysrcp-polls.in' website.

All the 2,640 candidates who won in the first phase,

● Reddy said no one would believe in Naidu's allegations against the SEC, who indeed went against the state government by misusing his constitutional powers

the pictures of 2616 candidates and details of 24 rebel candidates were uploaded on the site, he said.

He said about 90 per cent of the YSRC-supported candidates will win the panchayat elections in the next phases, as Chief Minister Jagan fulfilled every poll

Election Commissioner in the name of caste and targeted his efficiency. As a result, the SEC could not effectively carry out its constitutional duties, he stated.

The TD politburo member further demanded that SEC disqualify MLA Jogi Ramesh for openly threatening people that all pensions and benefits being made available to them by the state government will be cancelled if YSRC candidates do not win in their areas.

He said the Telugu Desam is also dissatisfied with how the commission let go minister

Peddireddy Rama-chandra Reddy even though he threatened to blacklist IAS and IPS officers if they cooperated with the SEC. He regretted that the commission did not bother to appeal against the High Court order that provided relief to the minister. He pointed out that because of this, YSRC was able to ensure unanimous elections in 69 out of 83 panchayats in Peddireddy's Punganur assembly segment.

Ramaiah said minister Kodali Nani had behaved irresponsibly by commenting against former chief minister.



SHORT TAKES

MP COPS PROVIDE SECURITY TO KANGANA

Bhopal, Feb. 12: Madhya Pradesh police have put in place thick security cover around Bollywood actor Kangana Ranaut in the wake of a threat by some state Congress leaders that they would not allow her shoot for a film if she did not apologise to farmers over her tweets, an official said on Friday.

Shooting for *Dhaakad*, Ranaut's new film, is going on in Sarni area of Betul district. Sarni City Superintendent of Police (CSP) Abhay Ram Choudhary said, "Security has been tightened for the actress after MP home minister Narottam Mishra directed Betul Superintendent of Police Simala Prasad to do so."

Police personnel equipped with batons and firearms are deployed around the coal handling plant (CHL) near a power project, where the shooting is on, he added.

"Police will man gate numbers two and four of the CHL, from where actors usually enter the shooting venue," Choudhary said.

An inspector has been assigned to oversee Ranaut's safety at the resort, located around 45 kms from Sarni town, where she is during for the shoot, he said.

"We will ensure that she does not face any disturbance during the shoot," the CSP added.

ASSAM CUTS FUEL PRICES BY ₹5, DUTY ON LIQUOR BY 25%

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, FEB. 12

Assam government on Friday announced to cut petrol and diesel prices by ₹5 and reduced the duty on liquor by 25 per cent. The new rates will come into effect from Friday midnight.

The announcement has come months before the Assembly election and especially at a time when fuel prices have been touching new highs across the country.

While presenting a vote-on-account for six months, finance minister Himanta Biswa Sarma told the Assembly that the move will result in losses of nearly ₹80 crore revenue per month.

"When the Covid-19 was at its peak, we had increased taxes on petrol and diesel. With the Covid-19 situation improving and the additional burden on the health sector reducing, the state cabinet has decided to withdraw the additional taxes on these fuels," Sarma said.

"Effective from Friday midnight, prices of petrol and diesel will decrease by ₹5 per litre. As a result, Assam will have the record of providing cheapest petrol in the country after Gujarat. Even prices of diesel would be the lowest after Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh," he stated. Sarma further announced that additional taxes of 25 per cent imposed on liquor products at the peak of Covid-19 has also been withdrawn.

INDIA RECORDS STEEP DECLINE IN COVID-19 CASES

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 12

India on Friday recorded 9,309 fresh cases and 87 deaths due to Covid-19 as the country's total active caseload saw a sharp decline, falling to 1.35 lakh.

The positive cases now comprise only 1.25% of the total cases and the day to day change of active cases in the last few weeks is showing a consistent decline, said Union health ministry officials.

The distribution of new cases in India in the last 24 hours shows a positive picture with only one state reporting over 1,000 cases while the rest of the states and UTs reporting less than 1,000 new cases. Four states and union territories have not reported any new cases in the last 24 hours. These are Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, Ladakh, Tripura and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

A significant decline in the daily deaths too has been noticed as 18 states/UTs have not reported any new deaths in the last 24 hours while 13 states/UTs have reported between 1-5 new deaths.

National Recovery Rate is 97.32 per cent, which is one of the highest globally. Officials said the continued high rise in the recoveries has led to progressively improving national Recovery Rate.



TMC Rajya Sabha MP Dinesh Trivedi pays tribute to Mahatma Gandhi after resigning as MP during the ongoing Budget Session of Parliament in New Delhi on Friday.

— PTI

TMC MP Trivedi resigns, says party no longer in Didi's hands

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 12

In yet another major blow to West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamul Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee, TMC Rajya Sabha MP Dinesh Trivedi dramatically announced his resignation on the floor of the House on Friday, saying he felt "helpless" over the political violence in his state. He added, "The kind of violence that is happening in Bengal, it is a threat to democracy. I feel very strange sitting here. I think of what I should do. I think of Rabindranath Tagore. Obey party discipline? Of course, but I feel stifled. My soul is saying I sit here and say nothing, what is the point? I resign."

He said he was feeling "suffocated" in the TMC which he said was "no longer in the hands" of Mamata Banerjee. Trivedi's resignation came two days after he endorsed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech in the Lok Sabha in which he had called for a key role for the private sector.

Trivedi, a former railway minister, announced his resignation in the Upper House during a debate on the Budget, saying he can't speak about the violence in his state. He handed over his resignation to Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu and it has been accepted. He explained to Naidu that he had resigned of his own will and there was no pressure on him to quit.

Minutes after his resignation, BJP general secretary and West Bengal in-charge Kailash Vijayvargiya said Trivedi was welcome in the party.

Trivedi said, "If you sit here quietly and cannot do anything, then it is better that you resign from here and go to the land of Bengal and be with the people. The way violence is taking place in our state, sitting here, I am feeling perplexed as to what I should do."

Talking to reporters after submitting his resignation, he said, the TMC is no longer in Mamata Banerjee's hands. It has been taken over by a corporate professional who doesn't understand politics. And there is no forum within the party to air our views."

Trivedi had endorsed

Modi's Lok Sabha speech on Twitter, saying, "I am personally in agreement with this. The way forward is to let our young talented minds innovate, create and distribute wealth. Pay Govt levies, create jobs. For that, our Govt officers (babus) too, need to encourage the youth." He was trolled for his tweet with many saying he may switch from the party.

TMC Rajya Sabha deputy leader Sukhendu Sekhar Ray said that Trivedi was "ungrateful" and had betrayed the trust of the masses. "For the last so many years he (Trivedi) did not say anything. Now all of a sudden, just months before the Assembly polls, he has complaints. This shows his true colours," Ray said.

12 workers killed, 36 hurt in fire mishap in TN factory

DC CORRESPONDENT VIRUDHUNAGAR, FEB. 12

As many as 12 workers were killed and around 36 injured in a fire accident in a cracker manufacturing unit near Sivakasi in Virudhunagar district on Friday.

The accident occurred at around 11 am when more than 120 persons were working in Mariammal Fire Works at Achankulam village near Satur. The accident is suspected to have been caused by mishandling of the chemical mixture in the process of manufacturing fancy type crackers. It damaged 20 work sheds fully, killing five persons including a woman on the spot while seven more succumbed to burns at the hospital. Around 36 injured persons were undergoing treatment at the government hospitals in Virudhunagar, Sivakasi, Satur, Kovilpatti.

Fire and rescue personnel from the fire stations at Sivakasi, Virudhuagar



Police personnel inspect after an explosion ripped through a fireworks factory near Satur in Virudhunagar district of Tamil Nadu on Friday.

— PTI

and Satur had to struggle for four hours to contain the spread of the fire further and to put it out by 3 pm, according to the district fire officer Ganesan.

District collector R. Kannan said after inspecting the accident spot that those workers who suffered more than 50 per cent burns were referred to Madurai Rajaji government hospital for further treatment. A detailed enquiry would be conducted, which will help

identify the exact cause of the fire that sparked the explosion.

The local villagers, who first rushed to the rescue of the workers on hearing the deafening sound of the blast, however, complained that eight workers were made to work in a shed against the permitted four.

This caused congestion that prevented workers from running out when the accident occurred, said a villager.

ITBP command unit in Leh likely

Spl unit will operate independently, will focus exclusively on Ladakh sector

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 12

In view of the increasing incidents of border disputes with China in the Ladakh region, the Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), which is the Indo-China border guarding force is likely to set up a special command unit in Leh.

The move is significant as this unit will operate independently of the ITBP's western command based at Chandigarh and will focus exclusively on the security situation in the entire Ladakh sector.

At present the ITBP's Western Command based at Chandigarh, is largely responsible for border areas of Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

But following recent incidents of incursions by Chinese Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) in some parts of the Ladakh sector there is a growing view within the home ministry that a separate specula command unit should be set up exclusively for the Ladakh region for ITBP as this had now become an "extremely sensitive sector."

"The special command unit based in Leh will ensure quick and timely action as a team of senior officers will be permanent stationed who can take decisions seeing the ground situation. They will not have to wait for decisions from the Chandigarh based Western command. Since the security situation in Ladakh is constantly evolving we need to take decisions according to the increasing Chinese activities in the region," a senior home ministry official said.

The 90,000 strong ITBP, with 56 service battalions and several other technical and specialised units, is responsible for the peacetime management of the 3,488-km-long Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China, with some of its posts being located at heights of 20,000 feet. During the ongoing stand-off with China, the forces bolstered its presence along the LAC, particularly in the Ladakh sector where the deployment of ITBP has been substantial enhanced.

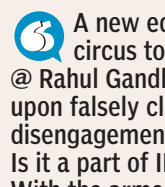
In addition, latest surveillance equipments and weapons have also been provided to the ITBP unit deployed in the entire Ladakh region.

WAR OF WORDS



Why has he asked the Defence Minister to make the statement, the Prime Minister should say — I have given Indian land to China, this is the truth. Finger-4 is our territory, that is where our post used to be. So, now we have moved from finger-4 to finger-3. Why has the Prime Minister Modi given up Indian Territory to the Chinese? This is the question that needs to be answered by him and by the Defence Minister

— Rahul Gandhi, Congress leader



A new edition of Congress circus today, again due to @ Rahul Gandhi. Why is he bent upon falsely claiming that disengagement is a loss for India? Is it a part of INC-China MoU? With the armed forces leading the disengagement strategy, isn't this an insult of our brave forces? No Indian land has been given up by the government as part of the current disengagement process. If anyone committed the sin of giving up thousands of sq km, it is one corrupt, cowardly dynasty that has broken the country to keep their power intact

— J. P. NADDA, BJP president

Army chief: China's move led to distrust

PAWAN BALI | DC NEW DELHI, FEB. 12

Indian army chief General M.M. Naravane said on Friday that the rising footprints of China in India's neighbourhood and its attempts to unilaterally alter the status-quo along "our disputed borders" have created an environment of "confrontation and mutual distrust."

"The Regional Security Environment is characterised by Chinese belligerence in the Indo-Pacific, its hostility towards weaker nations and relentless drive to create regional dependencies through initiatives like the BRI," said Army chief during a seminar on "Evolving Security Challenges in the North East and Way Forward." Gen Naravane said that the resultant Sino-US rivalry has created regional imbalances and instability.

Army Chief noted that Nepal, India's traditional long term partner, which has witnessed heavy

Chinese investment, is going through a period of political volatility.

"While Bhutan has been cautious in its approach, we have seen an upswing in our relations with Bangladesh. India is celebrating Swarnim Vijay Varsh to commemorate its splendid victory over Pakistan in the 1971 War for Liberation of Bangladesh. The sight of the Tri-Service Contingent from Bangladesh marching down Rajpath on Republic Day bodes well for our future relations, although growing radicalisation in society remains a serious concern," said the Army chief.

He pointed out that the ongoing dynamics in these neighbouring countries directly impacts the security environment in India's North East.

"A large number of initiatives are already underway to leverage military diplomacy with our Eastern Command playing the spring-board for fostering stronger bilateral relations," he said.

US welcomes India, China move

Washington, Feb. 12: The US has welcomed the ongoing efforts by India and China to de-escalate the situation in eastern Ladakh and said it would continue to monitor the situation closely as both sides work toward a peaceful resolution.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday announced in Parliament that India and China have reached an agreement on disengagement in the North and South banks of Pangong lake in eastern Ladakh that mandates both

sides to cease forward deployment of troops in a "phased, coordinated and verifiable" manner.

"We're closely following reports of initial troop disengagement. We welcome the ongoing efforts to de-escalate the situation," a state department spokesperson said. "We will, of course, continue to monitor the situation closely as both sides work toward a peaceful resolution," the spokesperson said while responding to a question on China and India pulling back their

troops from eastern Ladakh," spokesperson added.

Congressman Michael McCaul, lead Republican in the House Foreign Affairs Committee, also welcomed the disengagement of troops. It's heartening to see India stand strong in defending its sovereignty, he said in a tweet.

The Chinese Communist Party's constant territorial aggression, from the East and South China Seas to the waters of the Mekong, to the Himalayas, has no place in the 21st century, he said. — PTI

HARMFUL CONTENT

On Feb 4, Twitter was asked to take down 1,178 a/cs with links to Pak

Twitter: Won't block a/cs of journalists, leaders

New Delhi, Feb. 12: Twitter has blocked over 97 per cent of the accounts and posts flagged by the IT ministry for provocative content and misinformation around farmers' protest, sources said.

This followed a meeting between Twitter representatives and the information technology secretary on Wednesday evening where the US-based microblogging platform was issued a stern warning to comply with local laws or be prepared for action.

The ministry had questioned Twitter's delay in taking action on its order to block provocative content that could impact public law and order, whereas the American company

had been quick to crack down when a similar instance occurred at US Capitol Hill.

According to the sources, Twitter has now complied with the orders and over 97 per cent of the accounts flagged have been blocked.

Twitter did not respond to queries on the matter. On February 4, Twitter was asked to take down 1,178 accounts with links to Pakistan and Khalistan supporters that were spreading misinformation and provocative content related to farmers' protest.

Prior to that, the government had sought blocking of 257 tweets and handles in connection with the agitation by farmers over the new agricultural laws. Twitter had complied with

THE MINISTRY had questioned Twitter's delay in taking action on its order to block provocative content that could impact public law and order, whereas the American company had been quick to crack down when a similar instance occurred at US Capitol Hill.

THE GOVERNMENT had made it clear that it will not negotiate with the platforms while insisting on compliance with its orders.

the orders only to restore the accounts hours later.

Twitter on Wednesday morning had said it has suspended over 500 accounts and blocked access to several others within India, but maintained that it would not block accounts of "news media entities, journalists, activists and politicians" as doing so "would violate their fundamental right to free expression" guaranteed under the

country's law.

It, however, yielded to the orders later after the crucial meeting on Wednesday evening.

In a statement after the meeting, IT ministry had stated that the microblogging platform had been asked to take strong action against "well-coordinated" campaigns "designed to create disharmony and unrest" in the country.

Monique Meche, Twitter Vice President Global

Public Policy and Jim Baker, Deputy General Counsel and Vice President Legal, had affirmed Twitter's commitment towards following Indian laws and rules.

The executives had also requested for better engagement between the Indian government and the company's global team. Sources said Twitter's latest move to block the flagged accounts is itself a validation that the government's orders were backed by sound reasoning and logic.

The government had made it clear that it will not negotiate with the platforms while insisting on compliance with its orders as it believed that a private commercial entity in India

cannot unilaterally decide on public law and order, ignoring the democratic values of the country.

IT ministry was of the view that Twitter, being an intermediary, was required to take immediate action after receiving the government's notice to block handles, but did not move with haste to take down "atrocious" hashtags and "incendiary" content even amid a volatile situation.

IT minister Ravi Shankar Prasad had recently emphasised that the government is all for freedom of speech and expression and that it remains investor-friendly, but disrespecting democratic values is not acceptable. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

DANISH INTEL
ARRESTS 14 FOR
TERROR PLOT

Copenhagen, Feb. 12: Fourteen people arrested in Denmark and Germany suspected of planning an attack with explosives had "militant Islamist" motives, Danish intelligence services said on Friday.

Thirteen people were arrested at the weekend in a suburb outside Copenhagen, Denmark's PET intelligence service said Thursday, confirming another arrest had been made in Germany.

"The operation took place due to suspicions that a terror attack motivated by militant Islamism was being prepared," PET said in a statement.

The 13 arrested in Denmark were remanded in custody suspected of "planning one or more terrorist attacks or being accessory to attempted terrorism," PET said.

TIANWEN-1
PROBE SENDS
VIDEO OF MARS

Beijing, Feb. 12: China's space agency released video footage from its spacecraft circling Mars on Friday, two days after it successfully entered the planet's orbit in Beijing's latest ambitious space mission.

In the video, published by state broadcaster CCTV, the surface of the planet is seen coming into view out of a pitch black sky against the outside of the Tianwen-1, which entered the orbit of the Red Planet on Wednesday.

White craters are visible on the planet's surface, which fades from white to black through the video as the probe flies over the course of one Martian day, said official news agency Xinhua.

The five-tonne Tianwen-1 — which translates as "Questions to Heaven" — includes a Mars orbiter, a lander and a solar-powered rover and launched from southern China last July.

UK DEVELOPS
TEST TO DETECT
WOMB CANCER

London, Feb. 12: British scientists announced on Friday they had developed a test to detect womb cancer using urine samples, explaining the method could replace a painful and invasive procedure currently in use.

At present, clinicians diagnose the cancer by taking a biopsy, a process which requires a narrow telescope called a hysteroscope, to examine inside of the uterus and remove cells. Nearly a third of women who undergo the procedure have the process repeated because of technical difficulties or intolerable pain, the research showed.

Thousands of women in Britain who do not have womb cancer also undergo the procedure, with huge financial implications for the country's state-run National Health Service (NHS).

The study from Manchester University has developed a new detection tool which examines urine or vaginal samples that can be collected by women on their own at home.

The findings, published in the journal Nature Communications, showed analysis of the samples correctly diagnosed 91.7 percent of women with womb cancer.

18 BAGS OF
HACKED-UP BODY
PARTS FOUND

Mexico City, Feb. 12: Prosecutors in the western Mexican state of Jalisco said that police have found 18 plastic bags full of hacked-up body parts on the outskirts of the city of Guadalajara. Police found one human limb near a highway overpass, which led them to the heap of taped-up bags in a gully nearby, the agency said late Thursday. The severed limbs are being examined to determine how many corpses the parts belonged to.

In November, authorities recovered 113 bodies and additional human remains from a secret grave in the town of El Salto, just outside Guadalajara. A total of 189 corpses were discovered in the town throughout 2020.

The state is home to the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, one of Mexico's most violent and powerful. More bodies have been found in secret graves there than in any other state in recent years. The cartel has been fighting a breakaway faction in and around Guadalajara for years.

Myanmar protests swell as
US sanctions coup leaders

Over 23,000 prisoners released as part of prison amnesty, no word on Suu Kyi

Yangon, Feb. 12: Huge crowds thronged cities around Myanmar to demand the return of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Friday for a seventh straight day of protests, after Washington announced sanctions on the generals behind last week's coup.

A torrent of anger and defiance has brought hundreds of thousands of people out in nationwide rallies demanding the country's generals relinquish power.

Demonstrations have so far largely been peaceful, but police fired rubber bullets on students while dispersing a sit-down protest in the city of Mawlamyine, arresting at least five.

With teachers, bureaucrats and air traffic controllers among the government employees walking off the job to demand an end to junta rule, the country's new military leader Min Aung Hlaing told striking workers to return to their offices.

"Those who are away from their duties are requested to return to their duties immediately for the interests of the country and people without focusing on the emotion," he said, in a speech reported by state media.

The new US sanctions target Min Aung Hlaing and other top generals, after President Joe Biden



Protesters holding signs with the image of detained Myanmar civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi take part in a demonstration against the military coup in front of the Chinese embassy in Yangon on Friday.

announced his administration was cutting off the military's access to \$1 billion in funds.

Ahead of another day of mass rallies, state media announced the release of more than 23,000 inmates as part of a prison amnesty. Friday was a public holiday in Myanmar and mass pardons to empty the coun-

try's overcrowded prison system are common on significant local dates.

More than 260 people have been detained in the days since the coup and about 20 released, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners monitoring group.

But there was no indication that Suu Kyi or any of

her allies were among those set to be freed.

"There is a serious concern that the sudden release... is to clear space for the detention of political prisoners," the AAPP said. Massive rallies were back underway in the commercial hub of Yangon on Friday, including a contingent of Premier League fans who

put aside their club rivalries to protest the coup.

"I hate the military coup more than Manchester United!" read one sign.

But further east in the port city of Mawlamyine, police moved quickly to clear a sit-in protest by university students, and footage showed officers hauling away several demonstrators.

Trump impeachment trial
lawyers to urge his acquittalTwitter suspends pro-Trump
activist group for violations

Washington, Feb. 12: Lawyers for Donald Trump take the Senate floor on Friday to rebut the Democratic-led impeachment of the former president for inciting insurrection, with Republican lawmakers then widely expected to vote to acquit.

Democratic impeachment managers rested their case on Thursday after two days of often emotional presentations.

Now the Republican property tycoon's lawyers will get a chance to respond. They are expected to make arguments brief, hastening the Senate verdict.

"There's no reason for us to be out there a long time. As I said from the start of this thing, this trial never should have happened," one of the lawyers, David Schoen, told Fox News.

The impeachment team charged Trump with stoking an insurrection after losing re-election to Joe Biden on November 3.

According to the case against him, the former president began to lay the groundwork for the riot within weeks of refusing to concede with claims

San Francisco, Feb. 12: A conservative activist group notorious for its use of undercover footage and publicity stunts was permanently suspended from Twitter on Thursday, after the group reportedly violated the platform's policies on sharing private information.

Project Veritas, a brash team of right-wing activists which has long been one of former US President Donald Trump's most fervent backers, was banned for "repeated vio-

lations of the companies anti-doxing policies", the group's founder James O'Keefe said in a tweet.

The suspension came a day after the group posted a video in which its journalists confronted Guy Rosen, Facebook's head of integrity and security, outside his home.

In a statement shared to multiple US outlets, Twitter said the group had been "permanently suspended for repeated violations of Twitter's private information policy", but

did not specify which tweets had broken those rules. The group had over 7,00,000 followers on Twitter at the time of its suspension.

O'Keefe's account was also removed from the platform, though it returned after only a few hours. Project Veritas and O'Keefe came to prominence for their provocative sting efforts aimed at exposing "corruption" among progressive activists or liberal elected officials.

— AFP

officer and a woman shot during the unrest, died as a result of the mayhem.

Impeachment managers insist that Trump, who has never expressed remorse for his encouragement of the violent crowd, is so dangerous he should be barred from holding office again.

But the former presi-

dent's lawyers are set to argue that his speech was rhetorical and that he cannot be held responsible for the actions of the mob.

They also argue that the trial itself is unconstitutional because Trump is now out of office, although the Senate rejected this claim earlier this week.

— AFP



Alexei Navalny

NAVALNY BACK
IN COURT OVER
DEFAMING PUTIN

Moscow, Feb. 12: Russia's main Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny was back in court Friday for allegedly defaming a World War II veteran, after being ordered to prison in another case that sparked global outrage and mass protests in his country.

The hearing came a little over one week after the 44-year-old opposition leader, a persistent thorn in President Vladimir Putin's flesh, was sentenced to serve nearly three years in jail.

The anti-corruption campaigner appeared in a glass cage for defendants at Moscow's Babushkinsky district court wearing his trademark blue hoodie, an AFP journalist reported.

Heavily-armed riot police surrounded the court and set up cordons outside.

— AFP

seen," the official said, adding they had created "an ecosystem of violence".

"It is clearly intended, I think, to demoralise citizens... to add to doubts that people have about their government and to add to the aura of inevitability of (a Taliban) victory," he added.

— AFP

Americans to be
vaccinated with
200 mn doses

Washington, Feb. 12: US President Joe Biden announced plans to vaccinate most Americans by the end of July with the help of 200 million newly acquired doses, as the country's inoculation campaign kicked off a new phase in drugstores and supermarket pharmacies, some of which will offer shots as of Friday.

Even as the Biden administration inked deals to acquire "100 million more Moderna and 100 million more Pfizer vaccines" and Covid-19 cases fall in Europe, the World Health Organisation warned against rash reopenings, in a sobering reminder of the long global battle ahead in taming the pandemic.

"The decline in cases conceals increasing numbers of outbreaks and community spread involving variants of concern," said WHO Europe director Hans Kluge.

"At this point, the overwhelming majority of European countries remain vulnerable," he added, pointing out the "thin line between the hope of a vaccine and a false sense of security."

More than a million cases are still registered every week across the 53 member states in the UN agency's European region, which includes several Central Asian countries.

With the latest vaccine purchases, the United States — the world's hardest-hit country with more than 4,70,000 deaths — is on track "to have enough supply for 300 million Americans by the end of July," Biden said, meaning enough inoculations for all eligible people.

He made the announcement Thursday after touring the National Institutes of Health near Washington, with a million previously acquired vaccine doses already headed to around 6,500 drugstores and supermarket pharmacies.

The US immunisation

OZ ORDERS CITY
WITH 6 MILLION
INTO EMERGENCY
LOCKDOWN

Melbourne, Feb. 12: Australia ordered more than six million people into an emergency Coronavirus lockdown on Friday, throwing a showpiece tennis tournament into disarray as the pandemic's economic cost was laid bare in badly hit Britain.

The decision to confine the people of Melbourne and surrounding areas to their homes for five days illustrates the tough choices faced by many nations as they struggle to balance reopening and keeping infections under control.

"It's rough. It's going to be a rough few days for everyone," said tennis star Serena Williams, reacting to the lockdown news moments after her latest victory.

The move comes as the Covid-19 death toll heads towards 2.4 million, with 107 million people sickened since the virus emerged in China a little over a year ago.

— AFP

campaign got off to a shaky start in December, and even as recently as Thursday, Los Angeles moved to temporarily close five major inoculation centers including its giant Dodger Stadium site, due to vaccine shortage.

Mass Covid-19 vaccination programs are being ramped up in many countries in the race against more contagious variants, and governments are urging populations to continue to cope with closures as the inoculation campaigns move forward.

Worldwide deaths now stand at nearly 2.4 million, with the Middle East surpassing 1,00,000 fatalities on Thursday.

— AFP

Ex-EU banker to
be Italy's new PM

Rome, Feb. 12: With almost all the political parties behind him, Mario Draghi on Friday entered the final straight in his bid to form a new government to lead Italy through the Coronavirus pandemic.

The former European Central Bank chief, called in after the outgoing centre-left coalition collapsed, could visit President Sergio Mattarella as early as Friday evening to be officially named prime minister.

Draghi has spent the last nine days assembling a government of national unity to manage the deadly pandemic that hit Italy almost exactly one year ago, triggering a deep recession.

After securing the support late Thursday of the final key player, the populist Five Star Movement (M5S), Draghi has almost all the main parties on board, from leftists to the far-right League.

"The Draghi government is born," headlined Rome-based daily Il Messaggero, while Milan's Corriere Della Sera added: "Draghi in

the home stretch." The 73-year-old economist must present a list of ministers when he visits Mattarella, but he has kept extremely coy, speaking in public only once since being asked to form a government.

With the outgoing government due to hold one last cabinet meeting on Friday, there was speculation that Draghi might wait until Saturday before heading to the presidential palace.

Italy has high hopes for its new leader, dubbed Super Mario after vowing to do "whatever it takes" to save the euro single currency in the 2010s debt crisis.

Mattarella asked him to step in on February 3 after outgoing premier Giuseppe Conte resigned following weeks of political turmoil in his M5S-led coalition.

The president emphasised the urgency of moving quickly to fill the political vacuum as Italy's Covid-19 death toll approaches 1,00,000 and the country battles its worst recession since World War II.

— AFP

COVID | IMPACT

Match, the group says it added more than a million users in the last quarter of 2020

Online dating apps on front line of loneliness

Paris, Feb. 12: Dating apps are booming in lockdown — no longer just a way of hooking up but also of simple interaction at a time when the Coronavirus inflicts loneliness on millions.

Rodrigo, 18, had never considered joining a dating app until the months of lockdown boredom finally forced his hand.

"At the start, we told ourselves the crisis will pass, that we just have to have a

bit patience. But when temporary becomes permanent, you have to try new things," he said.

With school mostly online and limited options for going out with friends, "I had the feeling I was spending my entire life with my parents," Rodrigo now visits dating apps every day. More than just chasing the thrill of a hook-up, they have become a place to simply hang out.

He has made friends with

four people his age through the apps and chats with them daily — a way of "relieving the stress and frustration" of the pandemic, he says.

"It's all we have left," he sighs, especially since Portugal was plunged back into lockdown last month. Match, the group that includes several leading apps such as Tinder, Hinge and Meetic, says it added more than a million users in the last quarter of

2020, up some 12 percent to around 11 million worldwide.

"It sounds like a cliché, but the apps have really kept me from sinking," said Sebastian, a 19-year-old student in France.

"When we can't go to college, and the bars, restaurants, and cinemas are all closed, we spend entire days on our own, stewing. It's horrific," he said.

Exchanges start by text before moving on to video

chats — a function that dating apps have increasingly focused on since the pandemic ruled out the usual next step of a physical date. Martha, a 41-year-old Londoner, has found Zoom dating a bit of a slog, even if it saves her having to bother with perfume.

"The biggest challenge I found with Zoom dating... was how strange it is to watch yourself talking and laughing," she said.

— AFP



A Valentine's Day decoration, signed by first lady Jill Biden, sits on the North Lawn of the White House, on Friday, in Washington.

— AP

DECCAN Chronicle

13 FEBRUARY 2021

Go slow on peace thrust, up the ante during talks

Once the breakthrough was achieved after several rounds of talks at various levels, the India-China agreement on disengagement at Pangong Tso in Ladakh is only a promising start towards peace. Surprisingly speedy the process of China moving back its armour from the shores of the lake may seem, but India would have to be most cautious on how the de-escalation exercise works out because it will be surrendering a lot of leverage in giving up the Kailash range heights for securing just the Pangong Tso disengagement in the north and south banks.

Given the history of fraught relations exacerbated by border tensions over the last few years since China's intrusion in 2017, it should be considered fortunate if this initial pullback leads to lasting peace. India would do well to remember how disadvantageous the narrow agreement seems right now because armed Chinese soldiers can be present at Finger 8 while India will be confined to its Finger 3 base and will be unable to patrol up to the Chinese perception of LAC, which used to be east of Finger 8 prior to April 2020.

The disengagement is indubitably positive but India must monitor the progress closely and also press for the resolution of all remaining issues, which are many considering the number of hotspots in Ladakh and further east, including the Depsang plateau where China has held Indian territory of around 1,000 sq km and the PLA has also been stopping the Indian troops from patrolling traditional points. Obviously there is far more to do in terms of tough negotiating in military commander level talks that are to be held within two days and in higher-level negotiations afterwards.

The border situation cannot be dealt with in isolation as China seemed to demand in its call to set right ties, including trade even as talks went on about de-escalation. The point to ponder is whether China is aiming for a larger resetting of ties in a global sense in view of the change in the White House, which Joe Biden signalled with a tough sounding phone call to Chinese President Xi Jinping. It would be a great development for world peace if indeed China is willing to negotiate even from its stronger position post-Covid vis-a-vis economic recovery from worldwide lows imposed by the pandemic.

The trust deficit, including between China and its largest trading partner, the United States, has been enlarged by suspicions over the origin of the coronavirus being Wuhan. A sliver of hope is to be spotted in China seeking peace while agreeing to try and resolve the border issue, even if it did so only on facing India's strong position on its capturing of the Kailash range heights. Doubts will remain over whether China will remobilise quickly as it has the advantage over India in terms of infrastructure capabilities, which is why abundant caution is advised as well as the highest vigil on friction points beyond Eastern Ladakh. Negotiations over easing punitive economic actions taken by India can wait until it is established that the push for peace is real.

Kamal's black humour

There is never a dull moment in Tamil Nadu's political scene, particularly when the state gears up for an Assembly election. But when a celebrated actor like Kamal Haasan tickles the funny bone, the entire realm turns a theatre of the absurd. When the general council of Mr Haasan's party, named differently as the Makkal Needhi Maiam (People's Justice Centre), made him the 'permanent president' by passing a resolution, his detractors, who never miss an opportunity to pick holes in whatever he does or says, raised serious questions, quite out of sync with the prevailing mirth.

What's that general council? How were those members elected? By whom? So wondered the dirty disparagers without realising that it's an internal matter of the party that others should not poke their noses into. They also asked if someone could remain permanently on a high pedestal in a domain where there are no permanent friends or enemies. But Mr Haasan, who hails from a world of make-belief, perhaps believes in the juxtaposition of surrealism with harsh political realities, hoping that it would provide relief from the ennui caused by the ubiquitous harangue and pageantry.

Whatever it was, he made the people laugh though they had heard of even 'permanent chief ministers', as hailed in the rhetoric of fawning sycophants, in the past. Displaying a similar sentiment, those who inherited the mantle of running the government from the late J. Jayalalithaa accorded her the exalted status of 'permanent general secretary' of the AIADMK posthumously and kept the post vacant 'permanently' after throwing out V.K. Sasikala, who had succeeded her. Perhaps it was the spectacular return of Ms Sasikala to reclaim the post that inspired Mr Haasan to look for permanency in the party president's job. Anyway, the same general council's resolution to make Mr Haasan the chief minister of the state did not evoke any laughter.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

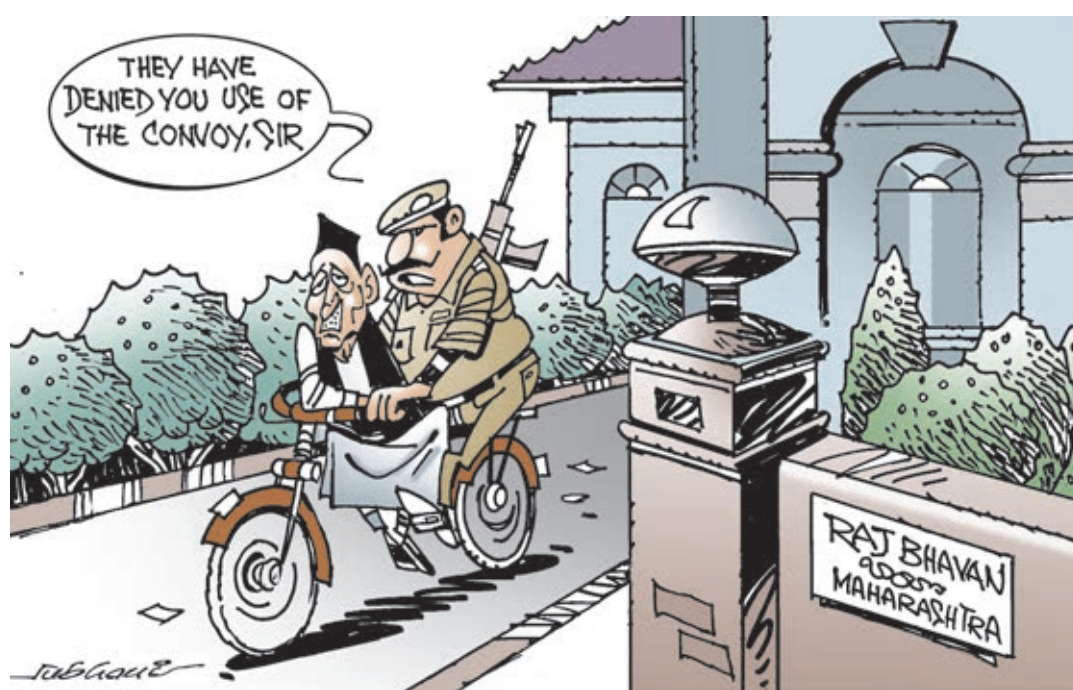
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Subhani



Why China 'disengaged': Always carry a big stick

Syed Ata Hasnain

After nine rounds of talks at the military theatre level which appeared to be tapering off without any results, we find a positive development announced by the Raksha Mantri in Parliament on Thursday: a decision to disengage between the Indian Army and China's People's Liberation Army in the over nine-month-long standoff in eastern Ladakh. The issues worth examining are the triggers which created a positive sentiment, the modalities involved in the disengagement and the strategic dynamics for the future.

Why has China accepted a mutual disengagement? There is speculation that its strategic objectives having been met, it was willing to disengage; but this many not entirely be true. The objectives have been analysed to a great extent. My belief veers on the coercion theory; that India's soaring strategic confidence through the past five years deeply worried China. The feasibility of India actually becoming a part of military equations and thus upsetting the strategic balance in Asia was not too appealing for China. India's talk about regaining all territories of J&K was perceived as becoming a national obsession, emboldening beyond acceptable limits. Limited military coercion to force India back to the starting line was felt necessary. However, China was surprised by India's push-back and deep sense of resolve to stick it out. A border conflict or even general war was not the intent as it was unwinnable for China without a major redeployment. It couldn't afford creation of near permanent voids elsewhere. A continuing standoff gave

no real advantage to China except the projection of threat of a two-front war for India, which too sounded hollow given Pakistan's precarious internal economic, political and social health.

With the world slowly recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic, shaking into a reset and a potential new order emerging, China cannot miss the opportunity to draw favourably from it. Remaining in confrontation mode with committed troops paid no real dividends. By agreeing to disengage it is attempting to project a sense of reason and political maturity; in reality it is an exit that is giving it face. No one should expect that the agreement to disengage will be achieved overnight or that conflict resolution is on the cards. There are likely to be many revisits, especially because India just cannot trust China to implement what it has agreed upon.

The Indian government invested in a new strategy of trusting its military leadership to undertake negotiations which were really in the political-diplomatic-military domain. In nine rounds, the military stood its ground well, reflecting an intellectual and pragmatic approach. Of course, it runs the risk of coming up against obstacles in implementation. The last time it tried implementing what was agreed upon in theatre level border meetings, it led to the Galwan incident. The Indian Army is not one which will simply move back to implement an agreement with a country with whom there is virtually zero trust. It will verify and verify, just like its officers and soldiers did in June 2020, which led to Galwan. With caution and the lessons learnt, that procedure has to be implemented all over again.

It is unlikely we have

seen anything close to a final agreement. I do perceive it is incomplete at present as it primarily relates only to the northern and southern banks of Pangong Tso. While the actions in north Pangong Tso have been spelt out more specifically, the same is absent in relation to the south. The details of this will need to be probably thrashed out when the stage for the pullback of forward deployed infantry comes up. Limits have been put on patrolling north of the lake to avoid physical contact between the troops of both sides. The theatre-level military-diplomatic talks will at some stage have to come down to border meetings at lower levels to restore trust and confidence.

What India should be insisting upon is the physical delineation of the LAC without prejudice to anything permanent. It will get rid of the one issue which is the bone of the LAC's management: that is, the perception about where ours or the Chinese claim line exists. This is unlikely, of course, but must remain the pressure point on the Chinese side as a terminal objective of the current talks, the tenth round of which is likely to come up soon. The Raksha Mantri in his Rajya Sabha statement laid it out clearly: "The House should also know that there are still some outstanding issues with regard to deployment and patrolling at some other points along the LAC in eastern Ladakh. These will be the focus of further discussions with the Chinese side". The reference was to other areas in contention, especially Depsang, where a much greater threat exists to our defences, as also an

opportunity for us to threaten the main Chinese highway to Xinjiang. Without an operational-tactical advantage, if this is vacated at the Kailash heights, it is difficult to foresee any further concessions by the Chinese. Perhaps there is more to it and will emerge in due course as understandably full transparency on military operational issues is not currently possible.

Progress on the agreement and subsequent moves towards more positive signs is not contingent upon only the events in eastern Ladakh. Everything here is linked to geopolitical issues relating to Chinese and Indian interests elsewhere in South Asia; relations with countries such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka being an example. It would be helpful if India can detach the developments in eastern Ladakh from the dynamics of Sino-Indian relations elsewhere. India will find itself under increasing pressure from China regarding its strategic equations with the Quad nations. Having come thus far and also having received fair importance from the United States in its perception of India's role in the Indo Pacific region, New Delhi may feel it's in a dilemma. However, its interests clearly lie where it has established greater trust and identified commonality of interests. It cannot afford to be seen to be submitting unreasonably to Chinese demands. The inevitability in India's approach towards the emerging situation should be to waste little time in enhancing its conventional military capability through the self-reliance route towards modernisation. As far as its northern borders are concerned, all disengagements and de-escalation will always be a temporary phenomenon. While remaining positive in its stance, India will always need to carry a big stick, as big or bigger than all its adversaries.

The writer, a retired lieutenant-general, is a former GOC of the Srinagar-based 15 Corps

LETTERS

RESTORE TRAINS

Most express trains and passenger trains have not been restored. In the absence of passenger trains, the college going students and others are suffering. The bus journey is expensive and uncomfortable. It may be noted that roads in AP are bad beyond description. May we request the railways to come to the rescue of common man.

P. Ramakrishna
Rajahmundry

NAIDU'S TANTRUMS

N. Chandrababu Naidu, who claimed victory in 38 per cent sarpanch candidates supported by his party in the first phase of GP polls, is now demanding fresh polls alleging electoral malpractices by the ruling party apart from 'criticising' AP SEC for its failure to control YSRC from committing electoral offences. *Uta chor kothul ko daante* is the Hindi proverb that fits aptly in this regard.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

VIZAG STEEL PLANT

The idea of selling the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant is nothing but vengeance against Andhra people for not giving the BJP any space in the state. It must be remembered that the plant is the soul of the people and thousands of people are employed and thousands indirectly eke out a living. In fact a township has sprouted in the vicinity. If the plant is privatised, the lives of the dependants directly or indirectly will turn topsy-turvy. Hence a rethink is needed.

D.S.P. Rao
Kakinada

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

India is on the threshold of change: Indira

NEW DELHI, February. 12

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi opined that in India today "there is a conflict between the forces of change and of the 'status quo'".

Mrs Gandhi, in an interview to the French national radio, also affirmed her party's belief in democracy and said, "we are trying to give it greater meaning". "We believe the interests of the people are best safeguarded in a democracy, because a democracy is perhaps the only system which strengthens people themselves".

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



"Oh Bachchoo let's have due regard for the story-telling genius of Scheherazade Who over a thousand and one nights Scaled creation's narrative heights

She held a king under her spell Assuring him there was more to tell And so, with each inventive breath Do story-tellers stave off death."

— From **Lambey Laments** by Bachchoo

To: UK Home Office, 2 Marsham Street, London SW

My dear Priti Patelti, I am writing to apply for the post of Chief Speechwriter for which you advertised this week.

Your advertisement specifies that "the successful candidate will be someone who can imitate the Home Secretary's personal style".

Let me start by saying, Pritiji, that I have closely followed your career, from the time you were thrown out of your job by the then PM Theresa May, for attempting unofficial deals and private contact with Israeli officials and businesswallas, to when you favoured

hanging and capital punishment, to your generous policies regarding police pay, illegal entrants to Britain and your speeches attacking anti-terrorism and the Covid crisis.

I am sure that, being a Parsi with a knowledge of fluent Gujarati, I am best qualified for the job. Please tear up and bin any applications from Goras, Punjabis, Pakistanis, Bengalis, etc. None of them will understand the prejudices you have imbibed as a child of immigrant shopkeepers from Uganda. I must confess never having been to Uganda or kept a shop, but as a writer of stage plays, etc, I constantly think myself into the mentality, prejudices, and styles of thought and speech of different characters. I am sure you will consider this my Trump card (I know you got the joke. Ha ha!)

Of course, I don't expect you to call me instantly and offer me the job without testing my abilities to deliver superb text in your voice, so I am setting out some samples below:

The first is a sample address to the Tory Conference.

"Comrades, Lords and Ladies, I stand before you as your new Home Secretary appointed by our brilliant

elected Prime Minister Doris Bronson who has very perceptively recognised my fantastic talents for this job. I am fully aware of the heavy responsibility that this places on my head such as keeping the wogs out of the country (loud cheers and standing ovation), making the police more effective by cutting their numbers and pay (shuffling in the audience), zero tolerance for criminals with a lock-up-and-throw-away-the-key approach, with the building of five thousand more jails and bringing back hanging (second standing ovation) — er um... I didn't mean by ropes, I meant hanging as in suspending people, like my Chief Civil Servants if they express any opinions...."

I guarantee Pritiji, these thoughts of yours which I have humbly attempted to put into words will get you to be PM after this fellow —whose name you characteristically forget.

Secondly, here is a sample address to the Police Federation as you are now in charge of all PC Plods.

"My brave and dedicated servants of the law, let me start by announcing that I intend to immediately boost police pay (huge applause and cat

calls). I have instructed my office to see that every police officer gets paid at least £3 and 12 shillings per week (total silence). This is in recognition of the fantastic work your forces are doing in fighting and combatting anti-terrorism, which must be wiped off the face of this planet. (Huge cheers from Islamicist policemen)...."

And next, Pritiji, your address to the House of Commons on immigration.

"Mr Speaker, the gravest crisis facing this country is not the shortage of grave-diggers caused by the Covid virus, but the illegal entry of immigrants and so-called asylum seekers across our land-borders with Europe. The previous Labour government under Terrestrial May lived up to its Prime Minister's name by declaring that these criminals *May* use the *Terrestrial* tunnels to enter our country (Here you pause for the laughter that will certainly follow this joke!). I propose, Mr Speaker, to build a wall across these borders with barbed wire on top to stop people coming in. We shall have a Ugandan and Cayman Island style immigration policy by which all Asians will have to leave the country and only tax-

doggers and drug lords will be admitted to the free ports declared by our hedgey-boy chancellor Wishy Anorak. Doris has already told me that he will get the Norwegians to pay for this wall...."

And then perhaps Pritiji, the PM may ask you to take to the TV lectern to address the nation on the Covid crisis and the government's efforts to combat it in accordance to the science. So, here's what you might say:

"It is with great sadness that the statistics today reveal that Britain has suffered 66 million deaths in the last 24 hours. My thoughts and condolences go out to all these deaths' families. Now despite some mother lovers opposing lockdown, what the epicologists, etc tell us that not only is lockdown a good thing, we should also have lock-up — which means anyone who tests positive for Covid should be locked up and the key thrown away. And if any scientist or civil servant opposes my sane policies they can bloody-well F-off and die — effing wankers — I know where you live...."

Your future ventriloquist, Obsequiously, Farrukh Dhondy

How to apply for a job to home secy of Blunderland!

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	51,544.30	0.02
Nifty 50	15,163.30	-0.07
S&P 500*	3,924.27	0.20
Dollar (₹)	72.74	0.17
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.42	0.38
Euro (₹)	88.14	0.27
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,847.661	1.41
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	62.35	1.98
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.990	0.47
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.195	0.037

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Inflation slows to 16-month low of 4.06% in Jan.

Retail inflation eased to a 16-month low of 4.06 per cent in January mainly on account of softening of food and vegetable prices. It is for the second consecutive month that retail inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) has remained within the target range of RBI which is 4 per cent (+/-2 per cent). The retail inflation stood at 4.59 per cent in December 2020 and 7.59 per cent in January 2020.

Kumar is advisor to Kotak's \$1-bn bad assets fund



Former SBI chairman Rajnish Kumar was appointed as the exclusive advisor to a \$1 billion-stressed assets fund floated by the Kotak Mahindra Bank Group. Kumar retired from SBI in October last year. Kotak Investment Advisors said Kumar will be the "exclusive advisor for its \$1 billion special situation fund". It had announced a fund raise of \$1 billion in August 2019, anchored by \$500 million from Abu Dhabi Investment Authority.

SC rejects plea against Franklin schemes' wind-up

The Supreme Court rejected the objections to the result of e-voting process and held that unitholders have given their consent by majority to wind up the six mutual fund schemes of Franklin Templeton. The SC, which said that winding up and disbursement of funds to unitholders would be in terms of its previous directions, directed that disbursement can be made in tranches without waiting for liquidation of all assets.

Jewellers hail role in gold monetisation

The Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council welcomed the changes in the Gold Monetisation Scheme (GMS) and said the scheme is a win-win for all. The government's decision to include jewellers as collection and purity testing centres and the introduction of SoP for retailers under GMS is a welcome move, it said. The Centre issued the revamped Gold Monetisation Scheme on Wednesday.



India keeps trade share in pharma, loses in apparels

Global trade recovers in December quarter

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 12

Global trade recovered in the last quarter of 2020, reducing the overall decline for the year to about 9 per cent, finds an Unctad study. Some of the less competitive countries lost their market share during the pandemic while competitive ones improved their share in global trade. The recovery of Q4 2020 was largely driven by the trade of goods from and to developing countries, especially by the very strong performance of East Asian economies, including China, Taiwan and South Korea. The effect of Covid-19 on global trade was most severe during the first half of 2020, with a drop in value of about 15 per cent. Global trade began to recover in Q3 2020 and more strongly in Q4 2020. The recovery in the second half of 2020 was largely due to the rebound of trade in goods rather than in services.

During the pandemic, Vietnam, Uganda, China, Switzerland, Turkey and Taiwan experienced relatively better export performance. In contrast, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Colombia and Nigeria performed relatively worse.

India lost its global trade share in apparels and minerals, while it managed to retain its share in pharmaceuticals and chemicals during the pandemic. India did not improve its trade share in any of the sectors in one of its most



INCENTIVES SOUGHT FOR SEZs IN FTP

New Delhi, Feb. 12: The Trade Promotion Council of India (TPCI) on Friday suggested the commerce ministry to announce measures such as incentives for special economic zones (SEZs) in the next foreign trade policy (FTP) with a view to boost the country's exports. FTP (2020-25) is under formu-

lation by the ministry.

It said there is a pressing need to allow certain tax incentives in line with the global practice to the exports to Domestic Tariff Area. It also suggested a separate nodal agency as a one-point contact of all queries related to uncleared or rejected Indian shipments. —PTI

challenging years.

India, which had 3.4 per cent share in the global apparel trade in 2019, seems to have lost it significantly during 2020. India is among the top countries in apparels to have lost their competitiveness or market share by more than one per cent. Among India's competitors, Vietnam, Malaysia, Turkey and Cambodia increased their market share during the pandemic and Bangladesh and Indonesia managed to retain their share.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's (Unctad) global trade report assessed the competitive-

ness of different economies by measuring the change in market share between 2019 and 2020. Economies that lost and gained competitiveness saw changes in market share larger than 1 per cent.

Despite the export growth recorded in pharmaceuticals, India could not improve upon its market share and its global share remained unchanged. In chemicals, too, the country could only retain the trade share.

The report does not find India having gained share in any sector. India had increased agri-food exports during the pandemic. Most of the cereals, including rice and wheat, had witnessed significant

growth in exports. However, this could not improve its share by more than one per cent to find a place in the list. Canada and Mexico are the top two countries to have increased their share in the category.

The report also finds that among India's top export sectors, minerals de-grew by 23 per cent and lost its market share. Various machinery exports too de-grew by 11 per cent.

More worryingly, in 'export volatility' ranking, which indicates exports vulnerability of a country, India is among the worst performers at 0.75 points, with Ethiopia slightly better at 0.74 and Peru and Cameroon worse at 1.05 and 1.27, respectively. In contrast, Indonesia and Taiwan have a strong score of 0.03 each, followed by Australia and Singapore having 0.04 points each. This points to the huge ground that India has to cover on stabilising its exports over the medium-to long-term.

China, meanwhile, improved its share in global trade in different sectors, including chemicals, various machinery, metals, pharmaceuticals, precision instruments, road vehicles, textiles and transport equipment.

The report also noted that exports of services from China and to a lesser extent from India appeared to have fared relatively better than other major economies throughout 2020. —PTI

ISRO, MAPMYINDIA JOIN HANDS TO TAKE ON GOOGLE MAPS, EARTH

Bengaluru, Feb. 12: Indian Space Research Organisation and location and navigation technology solutions provider MapmyIndia announced an initiative to partner together to offer India's best, and fully indigenous, mapping portal and geospatial services.

It combines the power of MapmyIndia's digital maps and technologies with ISRO's catalogue of satellite imagery and earth observation data, according to MapmyIndia's CEO and executive director Rohan Verma.

Verma termed it a path-breaking milestone in India's journey towards 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat', wherein Indian users would not be dependent on foreign organisations for maps, navigation and geospatial services, and leverage made-in-India solutions instead.

"You don't need Google Maps/Earth any longer", Verma said in an article on LinkedIn.

According to ISRO, the Department of Space (DoS) has joined hands with MapmyIndia to combine their geospatial expertise and build holistic solutions by leveraging their geoportals.

The DoS entered into an MoU with geospatial technology company CE Info Systems Pvt Ltd, which owns MapmyIndia, on Thursday.

Under the partnership, the combined geospatial expertise of the DoS and CE Info Systems would be leveraged through their respective Geoportals, according to Bengaluru-headquartered ISRO.

—PTI

Clogged courts: Gogoi says only corporations ready to try luck at SC

UPMANYU TRIVEDI
FEB. 12

Former chief justice of India Ranjan Gogoi says he won't go to the Supreme Court with his grievances because he would have to wait endlessly for a verdict, a comment that lays bare the nation's clogged legal system.

"You want a \$5 trillion economy but you have a ramshackled judiciary," said Gogoi, who retired as chief justice in November 2019 and is now a member of the Rajya Sabha, at an event.

Gogoi's remarks calling for an overhaul of the judiciary's capacity and efficacy highlights the country's troubles with delayed verdicts and enforcing contracts. Court systems in Asia's third-largest economy are clogged with over 43 million cases and a shortage of judges means that some cases can end up taking years, even decades, to find a resolution. Companies invested in India have a tough time once entangled in a legal dispute.

Only corporations, willing to take chances with their millions of rupees



Ranjan Gogoi

go to the Supreme Court, he said. "If you were to go to the court, you'd be only washing your dirty linen in the court. You won't get a verdict. I have no hesitation in saying it," Gogoi said.

Gogoi made the remarks responding to a question whether he plans to sue a politician who alleged that he presided over a matter that heard allegations of sexual harassment against him during his tenure as the chief justice. The member also alleged that Gogoi was made a parliamentarian after his retirement after he ruled in favour of Hindus seeking a centuries-old disputed site and rejected a probe against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government in graft allegations involving the purchase of fighter jets. —Bloomberg

INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION GROWS 1 %

New Delhi, Feb. 12: The Index of Industrial Production grew by 1 per cent in December, entering the positive territory after a month's gap, mainly due to better performance of the manufacturing sector;

official data showed on Friday. The manufacturing sector—which makes up 77.63 per cent of the IIP—recorded a growth of 1.6 per cent in December 2020. Mining sector output fell by 4.8 per cent. —PTI

LUFTHANSA FIRES 103 INDIAN FLIGHT ATTENDANTS

Mumbai, Feb. 12: Lufthansa has terminated the services of 103 India-based flight attendants after they allegedly sought "job assurance" from the management while the German airlines group had offered them leave without pay option for two years, sources close to the developments said.

These employees had been working on a fixed-term contract with the airline and some of them were with the carrier for more than 15 years, the sources added. In a statement to PTI, a Lufthansa spokesperson said that severe financial impact of the coronavirus pandemic leaves it with no choice but to restructure the airline and as part of that "it will not be extending the fixed-term employment contracts of its Delhi-based flight attendants".

According to the spokesperson, Indian cabin crew with unlimited contracts remain unaffected from restructuring as it "was able to reach individual agreements with these flight attendants." —PTI

India gifts 62 L vaccine doses to 13 countries

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 12

The government has gifted 62.7 lakh doses of Covid vaccine to 13 countries and commercially supplied 105 lakh doses to 8 countries.

Covid vaccine is largely being supplied to neighbouring countries, some of the Asian countries, Middle East countries and African countries. Of the total 167.7 lakh doses exported in January and February, 62.7 lakh doses have been supplied as grants and 105 lakh as commercial supply, Ashwini Kumar Choubey, minister of state for health and family welfare informed the Lok Sabha.

External supplies have been made bilaterally through gifts by the government and commercial sales by the manufacturers, he said.

Bangladesh is the largest recipient of Indian vaccines. It has received 20 lakh doses as grant and 50 lakh doses through commercial purchase. Among the countries which have received the vaccine as a grant, Myanmar was given

15 lakh doses, Nepal 10 lakh doses, Sri Lanka 5 lakh, Afghanistan 5 lakh and Bhutan 1.5 lakh doses. Maldives, Mauritius, Bahrain, Oman and Barbados have received 1 lakh doses as grant, Dominica 0.7 lakh and Seychelles 0.5 lakh doses.

Brazil and Morocco are the largest buyers from India. They have purchased 20 lakh doses each from India, South Africa 10 lakh, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates two lakh each and Egypt and Algeria 0.5 lakh doses each.

"External supplies of vaccines are being undertaken with due regard to domestic production and adequate availability for the national vaccination programme," the minister said.

India is a member of Covax facility, which is created by Gavi-Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, CEPI-Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations and WHO, and is both a recipient of vaccines from the facility as well as a supplier of vaccines.

GMR INFRA REPORTS ₹1,120 CR LOSS

Hyderabad, Feb. 12: Hit by global lockdown, GMR Infra-structure Limited's consolidated loss for the December quarter widened to Rs 1120.51 crore from loss of Rs 280.74 crore in the year-ago quarter, a filing from the company with the bourses said on Friday.

The consolidated total income for the quarter was down to Rs 1,673.53 crore against Rs 2,297.65 crore, it said.

Revenues from the Airports segment was down to Rs 816.19 crore during the quarter. It was Rs 1,636.14 crore during the corresponding period in FY20.

The segment incurred a loss of Rs 455.17 crore in the quarter.

APOLLO HOSPITALS' Q3 PROFIT UP 49%

New Delhi, Feb. 12: Apollo Hospitals on Friday reported a 49 per cent rise in its consolidated net profit at Rs 134.16 crore for the December quarter on account of a reduction in expenses. The company had logged a net profit of Rs 89.95 crore in the year-ago period. Apollo Hospitals Enterprise said in a regulatory filing.

Revenue from operations stood at Rs 2,759.84 crore against Rs 2,911.74 crore a year ago.

Total expenses were Rs 2,595.54 crore as against Rs 2,776.46 crore.

"The third quarter of the year saw robust growth as we increased focus on non-Covid-19 patients, especially non-communicable diseases, which pose a substantial risk to the health of the people."

"This was also a result of our successful efforts in educating our patients on the risks of ignoring symptoms and addressing their fears of visiting a hospital during the pandemic," Apollo Hospitals Group chairman Prathap C Reddy said.

PANDEMIC | PROFIT

Litigation funders buy disputed insurance cases at a discount

Investors eye windfall from rejected Covid claims

LUCCA DE PAOLI &
JEF FEELEY
FEB. 12

A growing market niche where investors profit from others' legal troubles is getting a boost from Covid. Distressed-investing funds and litigation-finance boutiques are likely to be spoiled for choice after a landmark UK court ruling last month rejected pleas from insurers looking to dodge pandemic payouts. They're looking to finance or buy denied Covid-19 insurance claims for policyholders without the means or stomach for taking their insurers to court.

"This is going to be huge," said Steve Cooklin, chief executive officer of London-based litigation



funder Manolete Partners Plc, whose biggest shareholder is veteran distressed investor Jon Moulton. "It's hard to say at this stage how big exactly this issue is, but it's probably going to be in the hundreds of millions of pounds."

Insurers have warned that Covid-19 coverage claims could top as much as \$100 billion-potentially the industry's largest loss in history. Business-inter-

ruption coverage, which protects against losses when companies have to shut for a period of time, has been one of the most costly and contentious policy lines in the pandemic. UK virus-related claims, including on business-interruption policies, could exceed \$2 billion.

For investors in a zero-yield world of spiralling stock prices, the insurance payout battles present opportunities that can pay

off regardless of how debt and equity markets perform — they're "uncorrelated," in the jargon of the trade.

Assets held by litigation funders in the UK hit a record high of 1.9 billion pounds (\$2.6 billion) last year, an analysis by law firm Reynolds Porter Chamberlain LLP shows. It's a market that has lured hedge funds, including DE Shaw & Co, Fortress Investment Group and Elliott Management Corp.

"Sustained tailwinds" are in store for litigation funders, according to Bloomberg Intelligence analyst Tamlin Bason.

"The uncorrelated, counter-cyclical nature of those returns could make litigation finance an attractive hedge during periods of

market volatility."

A trade can work like this: First, a company that had business-interruption coverage is rebuffed by its insurer, which argues the policy excludes coverage of pandemics or doesn't cover the type of damages sought. A judge often must parse the policy, and that can take years and hundreds of thousands of dollars—if not millions—in legal fees. Making a pitch to save policyholders time and money, litigation funders offer to immediately buy the Covid-19 claim at a discount, sometimes for less than a third of the total value. The funds make money by taking the dispute to court, betting the ultimate payout will dwarf the purchase price. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES



Amritha (left) and Srihitha Mandava pose with their trophies at the Boulder Hills Golf and Country Club in Hyderabad.

Mandava sisters bag golf titles

Hyderabad: Hyderabad girls Srihitha and Amritha Mandava won the age group titles at the Young Master Southern India Classic golf tournament played at the Boulder Hills Golf and Country Club in Hyderabad. Srihitha tallied 231 over 36 holes with round scores of 78, 73 and 80 to take the top spot in the Girls 12-13 years category ahead of Anvithi Gangisetty (271) and Riya Jadon (281). Amritha got a total score of 242 over 36 holes in three rounds (79, 81, 82) to emerge winner in the Girls 14-15 section. Lavanya Jadon (249) and Amishi Jain (300) were second and third respectively. Drishti Karumbaya was the best in Girls 16+ with a score of 220 (73, 72, 75) ahead of Jasmine Sachdev (234 — 77, 78, 79) and Vidushi Keni (236 — 77, 78, 81).

Aarya Goyal and Sanjana took the first and second spots in the Girls 7-9 category.

State cue sports from Feb. 22

Hyderabad: The Telangana Cue Sports Association is organising the Telangana State Ranking Snooker & Billiards Championship (Junior and senior) from February 22 to March 7. The top five players in senior snooker and finalists in junior snooker, senior and junior billiards will represent Telangana at the Nationals. Himanshu Jain, Nabil Lakdawala, Md Ghouse, Khizar Rafoof, D. Arvind Kumar (senior snooker); Mushtaq Hussain, Vishwanath and Vibhas (junior snooker & billiards) are among the top players participating in the championship.

Rashmikaa in singles final

Hyderabad: Hyderabad girl Shrivalli Rashmikaa entered the final of the singles event at the MPTA AITA Open Women's Tennis tournament being played at Chennai. In the semifinals played on Friday, Rashmikaa defeated Pooja Ingle of Maharashtra in straight sets at 6-4, 6-1.

Hyderabad FC hold East Bengal 1-1

Vasco: Aridane Santana scored a last-gasp equaliser to help Hyderabad FC hold SC East Bengal to a 1-1 draw and dent the Kolkata side's hopes of making it to the playoffs of the Indian Super League here on Friday. Bright Enobakhare scored in the 59th minute for SC East Bengal, who seemed to be cruising towards the win until the stoppage-time leveller from Santana. The result extended the Nizams' unbeaten run to nine games. With the draw, Hyderabad are at third spot with 24 points from 17 matches. — PTI

Live on TV

TENNIS

Australian Open: First round matches from 5.30 am on Sony Six, from 1.30 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

CRICKET

India vs England: Second Test, Day One, from 9.20 am on Star Sports 1

Pakistan vs South Africa: Second T20 from 6.30 pm on Sony Ten 1

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Leicester City vs Liverpool from 6 pm; Crystal Palace vs Burnley from 8.30 pm; Manchester City vs Tottenham Hotspur from 11 pm; Brighton vs Aston Villa from 1.30 am (Sunday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

Italian League: Napoli vs Juventus from 10.30 pm; Spezia vs AC Milan from 1.15 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

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Indian captain Virat Kohli during a practice session at the Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Thursday.

— BCCI

PITCHED BATTLE

Chepauk surface in focus again as India look to hit back

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR | DC CHENNAI, FEB. 12

The wound hasn't healed. And the dust is yet to settle. Four days after being battered by the visiting England team in their own den, India have the unenviable task of lifting themselves for yet another 'pitched' battle at the same venue. Round two starting here at the M.A. Chidambaram stadium on Saturday will be a test of character for Virat Kohli & Co.

India find themselves in an unexpected situation. It's only the second time this decade that India have started a bilateral series (minimum three Tests) at home on a disappointing note. When it happened last time, against Australia in February 2017, they roared back with vengeance to clinch the series 2-1 eventually.

Much like in the opening game, the focus will once again be on the pitch. A different strip with black clay on the top layer will be used this time around. With just a three-day gap, the groundsmen didn't have much time. Both teams know what to expect — the track will turn from day one.

England skipper Joe Root has already shown the ideal way for countering spin in subcontinental conditions. But this pitch is expected to pose a bigger challenge to Root.

Annoyed with the flat surface, Kohli had blamed his supporting spinners Shahbaz Nadeem and Washington Sundar for leaking runs. But he backed Ajinkya Rahane despite his poor run of form. Rohit Sharma, who has just one half-century



Rohit Sharma plays a shot during a practice session at the Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Thursday.

— BCCI

in his last eight innings, hasn't faced much scrutiny either. Kohli still felt "all was well" in his batting unit. If not for the brilliant first innings knocks from Rishabh Pant and Washington, India would have slumped to further embarrassment.

With allrounder Axar Patel deemed fit and set for his Test debut, Shahbaz is back in the standby players' pool. If the team management decides to retain Washington for his batting ability, Kuldeep Yadav will continue cooling his heels. He hasn't played a Test since he took

a five-for at Sydney in January 2019.

England, on the other hand, have made four changes in their team. James Anderson who used reverse swing to rattle the Indian top-order has been rested. With Jofra Archer too being ruled out with an elbow injury and off-spinner Dom Bess to be replaced by Moeen Ali, England's bowling attack will sport a new look. In Anderson's absence, another experienced campaigner, Stuart Broad, will spearhead the attack. Fast bowlers Olly Stone and Chris Woakes will fight for the final spot.

DC CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI, FEB. 12

"I am sure it will turn from day one," India vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane said it loud and clear. The flat pitch that offered no assistance to bowlers was one of the talking points after India's eight-match winning streak at home came to a halt in the opening Test against England earlier this week.

As India prepare to bounce back in the series, it's no surprise that "the wicket looks completely different."

"However, we have to wait and see how it behaves in the first session. We have to forget what happened in the first Test and focus on the job at hand. We know these conditions really well, so we have to put our best foot forward and move on," said Rahane.

Rahane's average of 37.35 in 28 Tests at home is not as impressive as his away numbers — 44.44 in 42 Tests. His last two innings of 1 and 0 have put him under the scanner. However, the Mumbai batsman doesn't want to read too much into the stats.

"We are playing at home after two years. The last big home Test series was against South Africa. If you take the records out, I'm sure you will find something there. And, it's not about individuals, it's always about the team. My focus is always on con-

tributing to the team's success. If you take out the last 10-15 Tests, you will see my performance. I don't worry about what happened in the first Test. I only worry about what the team wants from me," said Rahane.

England batsmen not only looked comfortable, but also played efficiently by employing sweep shots against the Indian spinners, but the same cannot be said of the hosts.

"It (shots that we play) depends on how they bowl. We play according to their line and length. England have come up with a plan to play sweep and reverse sweep. It's not necessary we have to copy them," further added Rahane.

When queried about the team's negative body language in the first Test, Rahane said: "There are moments when you don't have that energy but that doesn't mean it has happened because of a change in captaincy. As I have said earlier, Virat is our captain and will remain our captain. If you are trying to dig and find some masala, unfortunately you will not get it."

The second Test will allow 50 per cent spectators in the 45,000 capacity stadium. Rahane is excited to have the crowds back.

"We know how much that means for us. I hope people will come enjoy the cricket," added the seasoned Test batsman.

Hazare selection turns hazardous

DC CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD, FEB. 12

Muck at the Hyderabad Cricket Association continues to fly after the flawed selection of State squad for the upcoming Vijay Hazare Trophy triggered tempers that have boiled over beyond cricket corridors.

After a memorandum was submitted to the Telangana State Human Rights Commission on Thursday, urging chairman Justice Gunda Chandraiah to look into the 'Murder of talent and grave violations of human rights by HCA' the secretaries of affiliated clubs whose players have been ignored despite consistent performances, are organising a protest at the Gymkhana grounds — Hyderabad's cricket cradle — at 11.30 am on Saturday.

The protest is "against the illegalities and autocratic decisions of select office bearers in selecting the team by violating all norms and constitutional obligations and in utter violation of Supreme Court approved registered Constitution," a note being circulated, read.

For the record, only one batsman from the Top 10 scorers in the League matches that were conduct-

ed to select State sides, has made Hyderabad's Vijay Hazare squad.

Mir Jaweed Ali of Budding Star, No.6 on the list, is the odd man out.

The bowling selection is even more baffling. Leg-spinner G. Arjun of Balaaji Colts leads the list with 45 wickets in 5 matches but has been surpassed by No.2 Ashish Srivastava who has 36 wickets against his name in 6 matches. Both are leg-spinners.

Arjun has also conceded fewer runs, has a better strike rate and has been more economical... he didn't see a googly coming. All this leaves a bad taste in the mouth and drags the Gentleman's Game through muddied streets. It's time the HCA administrators played with a straight bat.

Aspiring players had risked contracting Covid to turn up for the local league matches after they, along with their parents, had to sign declarations stating they would not hold the HCA responsible should they catch the dreaded virus.

Turns out that there were no first aid facilities at the grounds to treat players who got injured during the course of play.

Now, this selection snub has hurt them even more.

HYDERABAD'S TOP 10 BATSMEN

Player	M	Inn	Runs	Best	Ave
1. A. Varun Goud	7	11	788	227	87.56
2. Rohit Rayudu	8	13	741	165	61.75
3. P. Akshath Reddy	7	13	726	176	60.50
4. Yash Kapadia	7	12	706	194	70.60
5. Md Junaid Ali	7	12	704	170	58.67
6. Mir Jaweed Ali	6	10	697	237	77.44
7. M. Abhirath Reddy	5	8	694	222	115.67
8. M. Pratyush Kumar	8	16	673	119	44.87
9. A. Takshith Rao	6	11	631	151	63.10
10. Sarthak Bharadwaj	5	9	625	159	78.13

(Tabulated as matches played, innings batted, total runs scored, highest score, average)

Hurt Djoker hints at exit from Open

Melbourne, Feb. 12:

Defending champion Novak Djokovic admitted his Australian Open might be over after an injury-hit win on Friday as fans were kicked out ahead of a state-wide Coronavirus lockdown.

In the now-empty stadium, a grimacing Djokovic, who needed repeated treatment on an abdominal injury, recovered from losing the third and fourth sets to beat Fritz 7-6 (7/1), 6-4, 3-6, 4-6, 6-2. "I know it's a tear, definitely, of the muscle so I don't know if I'll manage to recover from that in less than two days. I don't know if I'm going to step out on the court or not, I'm just very proud of this achievement tonight," said the Serb.

Meanwhile, Russian qualifier Aslan Karatsev pulled off the biggest shock when the world number 114 blitzed eighth seed Diego Schwartzman into sub-mission 6-3, 6-3, 6-3.

Karatsev is making his Grand Slam debut at Melbourne Park and is incredibly yet to drop a set.

Meanwhile, ice-cool Dominic Thiem rallied from two sets down to tame flamboyant Nick Kyrgios 4-6, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-4.

In women's singles, Naomi Osaka had to deal with a butterfly landing on her nose but was otherwise little bothered as she breezed into the last 16.

The third seed clinched an easy 6-3, 6-2 victory over Tunisian 27th seed Ons Jabeur in 1hr 18min.

In another match, Serena Williams she wore down Anastasia Potapova 7-6 (7/5), 6-2. — Agencies

Tanay, Mickil, Karthikeya, Ritwik, Vamshi on top

Mujaheed, Raheem, Gunawith, Haji, Ayub and Sachith lead performers in A-2 division league

DC CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD, FEB. 12

Tanay Thyagarajan scored his second successive century to lift Budding Star to a four-wicket victory over R. Dayanand in the Hyderabad Cricket Association's A-1 Division one-day knockout tournament.

Tanay scored 118 in 101 balls with the help of 12 fours and four sixes as Star replied to Dayanand's 209 with 213 for 6 in 38.1 overs.

Mickil Jaiswal also continued his run scoring spree. The MP Colts batsman cracked 170 in 151 balls smashing a dozen boundaries and an equal number of sixes to set up his side's 29-run win over Sporting XI, for whom speedster Karthikeya Kak took 5 for 49. Tanmay Agarwal was unfortunate to miss the century mark by two runs — the Sporting batsman fell on 98.

In the A-2 Division, G. Ritwik and Vamshi Ramavath topped the performers' list. Ritwik took 8 for 42 as SK Blues beat Saint Sai while Vamshi's



Mickil



Karthikeya



G. Ritwik



Vamshi



Mujaheed



Raheem



Ayub Khan



Rahman



Khalid



Varun Tej



Vasistha

238 boosted Noble to 551 for 8, a total Mayura found just too hard to overcome. Mujaheed Khan (7 for 32) of Azad CC, Md Abdul Raheem (7/75) of Team Speed, Hyderabad Cricket Academy's Gaddam Gunawith (6/17), Syed Haji (6/38) of Sri Shyam, Md Ayub Khan (166) of Vijaypuri Willowmen and Sachith Naidu (145) of Abhinav Colts were the other top performers in the two-day league matches.

Brief scores:

A-1 DIVISION ONE-DAY KNOCK-OUT TOURNAMENT

■ MP Colts 279 in 50 overs (Mickil Jaiswal 170 — 151b, 12x4, 12x6, 6 Rahul Radesh 55, Karthikeya Kak 5/49 — 10-1-49-5) bt Sporting XI 250 in 48.3 overs (Tanmay Agarwal 98, G. Sadhan 53, Karthikeya Kak 34, G Gireesh Goud 4/45).

■ R Dayanand 209 in 47.3 overs (K. Nitesh Reddy 68, Nishanth Yadav

42, Manish Rai 3/29) lost to Budding Star 213/6 in 38.1 overs (Tanay Thyagarajan 118 — 101b, 12x4, 4x6, Bhavesh Seth 57, C. Hitesh Yadav 4/53).

■ Gemini Friends 265 in 49.3 overs (M. Abhirath Reddy 46, Tilak Varma 66, Maruthi Reddy 58, Yash Gupta 63) bt SCRA 222 in 45.5 overs (Shyam Sunder 37, Suresh M 46, Sudhakar 35 n.o., Tilak Varma 4/50).

A-2 DIVISION (TWO-DAY) LEAGUE

■ Saint Sai 160 in 55.2 overs (Arjun 50, G. Ritwik 6/42 — 17-2-3-42-3) lost to SK Blues 164/5 in 39 overs (Ibrahim Khan 84). Points: SK Blues 5, Saint Sai 0.

■ Noble 551/8 in 90 overs (Vamshi Ramavath 238 — 142b, 35x4, 8x6, Y Akash 57, Krishna Kant T 53 n.o., B. Ambarish 52, Shabaz 3/109) bt Mayura 90/7 (all out) 36.5 overs (Adeeb 53, Rahul Reddy 4/77). Points: Noble 5, Mayura 0.

■ Anu CC 87 in 31.5 overs (Mujaheed Khan 7/32 — 14-2-32-7) lost to Azad CC 90/3 in 25.1 overs (K. Ganesh Kumar 4/45). Points: Azad CC 5, Anu CC 0.

■ Team Speed 340 in 62.2 overs (M. A. Jayanth 91, Deepanshu Chowhan 85, Md Abdul Raheem

7/75) bt Elegant 187 in 66.5 overs (Shaik Abdul Razzaq 86 n.o., Rohan Prem 5/54). Points: Team Speed 5, Elegant 0.

■ Hyderabad Cricket Academy 295 in 77.4 overs (K. Pranav 77, Sahil Parikh 57, Shaik Zaher Abbas 39, Ch Anvit Reddy 37) bt Shanti XI 182 in 54.2 overs (S. Venkatesh 39, Prateek Raj 44, Gaddam Gunawith 6/17 — 8-2-37-6). Points: Hyderabad CA 5, Shanti 0.

■ Sri Shyam 145 in 63 overs (Mujaheed 3/29) bt Bharath CC 289 in 67.1 overs (Prateem Reddy 35, Sai Revanth Rahul 102 — 122b, 16x4, Varun Tej 5/36 — 18-3-36-5, Harish Reddy 3/49). Points: Abhinav Colts 5, Bharat 0.

■ Kishorens CC 124 in 59.1 overs (Surya Prakash 36, Mihir Dange 5/32 — 11-1-32-5) lost to Rushiraj CC 127/4 in 42.5 overs (P. Sunil 53, A. Nikshit 30, B. Sai Chandra 35 n.o.). Points: Kishorens 0, Rushiraj 0.

■ Secunderabad Gymkhana 285 in 89 overs (Md Adil 103 — 161b, 14x4, 1x6, A. Sai Prachotan 30, Anuj Singh 55, N. Saketh Reddy 3/60) bt Warangal District 213 in 49.2 overs (Banoth Kumar 115 — 116b, 17x4, 2x6, Bandari Suresh 36, P. Ravi 5/27 — 8-0-27-5). Points: Gymkhana 5, Warangal 0.

■ Ours 310 in 87.3 overs (Kaushik Chevendra 58, B. Pranav Reddy 123 — 181b, 12x4, 1x6, K. R. Dhanush 40, P. Sai Karthik 4/44) bt National 226 in 82.5 overs (G. Karthik 42, Ram Pranav 91, D. Manish 3/36, Koushik 3/33). Points: Ours 5, National 0.

■ Lords 183 in 52.2 overs (Md Azheruddin 62, Harish Jasper 42, Shrinilith Reddy 5/52 — 15-2-0-52-5) lost to RJCC 185/5 in 43.1

overs (Akshay E 121 — 124b, 18x4, 2x6). Points: RJCC 5, Lords 0.

■ Sunshine CC 178 in 59.2 overs (Syed Ali 51, Vasistha Karthikeya 5/41 — 16-3-41-5) lost to International CC 182/1 in 39.4 overs (Vashist Karthikeya 69 n.o., Ankil Kumar 91 n.o.). Points: International 5, Sunshine 0.

■ Vijayanand 360/9 in 90 overs (Abhinav 69, Ravi Teja 117 — 109b, 17x4, 1x6, Akshar 41, Chakravarthi 39 n.o., Praveen 4/61) bt Manikumar 91 in 35.5 overs (Charan 4/20). Points: Vijayanand 5, Manikuma 0.

■ HBCC 295 in 58.5 overs (Md Khalid 110 — 90b, 13x4, 6x6, Kaushik 46, Apratim Tiwari 32 n.o., B. Sujun 3/53) bt PKMCC 268 in 73.2 overs (S. Raj Navaneeth 39, Aditya Singhal 94, K. Harsha Vardhan 38, N. Shashank Yadav 33). Points: HBCC 5, PKMCC 0.

■ CCOB 316 in (Abdul Rahman 109 — 181b, 16x4, Sai Kiran 41, Arham Kothari 3/41, P. T. Sai Krishna Murthy 3/30) bt Crown 268/7 in 90 overs (P. T. Sai Krishna Murthy 65, Siddharth Jain 62 n.o., Arham Kothari 54). Points: CCOB 5, Crown 0.

■ Ashams XI 145 in 36.1 overs (Shashank Reddy 40, Imam Shareef 44, S. Prajwal Rao 4/48,

Gautam 3/4) lost to XI Masters 149/2 in 15.3 overs (S. Prajwal Rao 106 n.o. — 53b, 21x4, 2x6. Points: XI Master 5, Adams 0.

■ WMCC 196 in 38.5 overs (SV Aditya Varma 58, Vilash Reddy 37, Karthik Kumar 3/44, Vikranth Reddy 3/43) lost to HUCC 199/5 in 39.3 overs (Laxmi Sree Madhan 102 n.o. — 113b, 16x4, 1x6, Nikun Patel 40, Anish Reddy 4/27). Points: HUCC 5, WMCC 0.

■ Shalimar CC 135 in 36.2 overs (Abhid Ali 4/40) lost to Adilabad District 138/2 in 19.1 overs (L. Mahesh 62, D. Venkatesh 56 n.o.). Points: Adilabad 5, Shalimar 0.

■ Mega City 101/9 (all out) in 37 overs (Jai Kiran 35 n.o) lost to Nizamabad District 105/3 in 28.3 overs (Dama Ajith 56 n.o.). Points: Nizamabad 5, Mega City 0.

■ Venus Cybertech 147 in 57.5 overs (Divesh Bajaj 45) lost to Rakesh XI 148/6 in 56.2 overs. Points: Rakesh XI 5, Venus Cybertech 0.

■ Pasha Beedi 198 in 72.2 overs (Kush Jog 37, Faiz Ahmed 34 n.o., Raghava Pattapu 4/48) vs Deccan Wanderers 200/3 in 46.5 overs (Jawad Khan 68, Aawez Ahmed 40, Raghava Pattapu 55 n.o.). Points: Deccan Wanderers 5, Pasha Beedi 0.

■ Acrylic CC 128 in 43 overs (Arvind G 46, V. Sai Teja 4/16) lost to Karimnagar District 132/3 in 14.2 overs (P. Rishwanth 50, A. Raju 53). Points: Karimnagar 5, Acrylic 0.

■ Tirumala 182 in 73 overs (Vishal K 62, Jayant Reddy 56, R. Rohit 4/55) lost to Swastik Union 183/3 in 61.5 overs (D. Abhiram 54, R. Alankrith 73b). Points: Swastik Union 5, Tirumala 0.