

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | WEDNESDAY | 10 FEBRUARY 2021



NATION | 4

Sena slams Shah over CM's post issue



WORLD | 5

Iran warns of building nuclear weapons

SPORTS | 8

India lost first Test to England



deccanchronicle.com, facebook.com/deccannews, twitter.com/deccanchronicle

Vol. 25 No. 281 Established 1940 | 16 PAGES | ₹6.00

WEATHER

Max: 32.0°C
Min: 17.0°C
RH: 73%
Rainfall: NIL

Forecast: Cloudy.
Max/Min temp.
32/17 °C

COVID-19 COUNT

CASES

DEATHS

(+11,158)

(+108)

1,08,58,300

1,55,280

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+149)

(+1)

TS: 2,95,831

1,612

(+70)

(+0)

AP: 8,88,555

7,160

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

10,71,49,317

DEATHS

23,40,719

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES

219

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana

Tithi: Pushya Bahula Chaturdasi till 10 am (Thursday)

Star: Uttarashada till 2.13 pm

Varjyam: 6.12 pm to 7.48 pm

Durmuhurtam: 12.07 pm to 12.52 pm

Rahukalam: 12 noon to 1.30 pm

HIJRI CALENDAR

Jamadi- ul- Akhri 27, 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 6.31 AM

SUNSET TODAY 6.03 PM

MOONRISE TODAY 05.21 AM

MOONSET TOMORROW 05.44 PM

COUNTER POINT

Also tweet there is no pressure from anyone. All tweets are my own!

SHORT TAKES

Banks call for a two-day strike

New Delhi: The United Forum of Bank Unions, an umbrella body of nine unions, on Tuesday gave a call for a two-day strike from March 15 to protest against the proposed privatisation of two state-owned lenders. The government has already privatised IDBI Bank by selling its majority stake in the lender to LIC in 2019.

Bill on crypto currencies soon

New Delhi: The government will soon bring a bill on crypto currencies as existing laws are inadequate to deal with issues concerning them, MoS (finance) Anurag Thakur told Rajya Sabha on Tuesday. He said regulatory bodies like RBI and Sebi do not have any legal framework to regulate crypto currencies as they are not currencies, assets, securities.

No insurance for vaccine sideeffects

New Delhi: There is no provision of insurance for recipients of Covid-19 vaccine against any kind of side effects or medical complications that may arise due to the inoculation, Rajya Sabha was informed on Tuesday. The COVID-19 vaccination is entirely voluntary for the beneficiary, minister of state for health Ashwini Choubey said.

Jagan cautions volunteers against getting discredited

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 9

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Tuesday made an emotional appeal to village and ward volunteers to not fall prey to the evil designs of vested interests to bring disrepute to the noble and highly acclaimed village volunteers system through an open letter.

The Chief Minister stated that as many as 2.6 lakh brothers and sisters were appointed as village and ward volunteers in the state to get rid of earlier Telugu Desam govern-

ment's Jannabhoomi committees clutch.

He said that volunteers system was introduced to restrain corruption and bribes and appointed a volunteer for every 50 houses to render services without political, caste and religious biases.

The Chief Minister said that 99 per cent volunteers are considering their work as a service and not a job and people are giving a lot of respect to the volunteers for their relentless services.

He said that other states are also showing interest to emulate the state to

start the volunteer system in their states to render good services.

He said ₹5,000 offered to each volunteer is not salary but it is an honorarium to their services. He said that this was clearly indicated in the volunteers' handbook and asked volunteers to recheck his words. He recalled that volunteers have to door deliver Navaratnalu schemes till they get better jobs and employment and this was clearly mentioned in the handbook.

■ **Page 2: Don't spoil volunteer system, says CM**

ARMY USES DOGS TO SNIFF OUT COVID INFECTION

New Delhi, Feb. 9: The Indian Army is using its dogs for quick detection of Covid-19 to cut down time delays associated with regular diagnostic techniques.

Two dogs — two-year-old cocker spaniel Casper and one-year-old Jaya, a 'chippiparai' from Tamil Nadu — have been trained to detect Covid-19 by sniffing samples of sweat and urine, an official said.

Lt. Col. Surinder Saini, instructor at the Dog Training Facility of the Remount Veterinary Corps Centre in Meerut, said that the dogs from December are being deployed at the transit camp in Chandigarh from where troops move to large areas, including the Ladakh region. —PTI

■ **Full report on Page 4**

DEEP SIDHU ARRESTED FOR RED FORT MESS

New Delhi, Feb. 9: Punjabi actor-turned-activist Deep Sidhu, who was allegedly involved in the violence and vandalism at Red Fort during the farmers' tractor rally on January 26, was arrested by the Delhi police special cell late Monday night.

■ **Full report on Page 4**

DEATH TOLL IN GLACIER BURST RISES TO 32

Dehradun/Tapovan, Feb. 9: The death toll in the Uttarakhand disaster rose to 32 with six more bodies being recovered, officials said on Tuesday as multiple agencies trying to reach 30 workers trapped inside a tunnel at a power project site.

■ **Full report on Page 4**

YSR legacy in TS



Y.S. Sharmila greets her supporters at her Lotus Pond residence in Hyderabad on Tuesday. — R. PAVAN

■ **Reports on Page 2**

Jagan keeps off from sister's plan

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC HYDERABAD, FEB. 9

Ending varied speculations and conspiracy theories, Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has wasted no time in distancing himself from his sister, Y. S. Sharmila and her plans to float a political outfit in Telangana.

The YSR Congress supremo made it clear that he was against expanding the party in Telangana as it would hurt the interests of people of his own state and give an opportunity to political forces in the neighbouring state to widen the gap among people by raking up sentiments.

"There is a difference of opinion between brother and sister on expanding the party in Telangana. The issue was discussed for the last three months. Both are firm in their respective views and she has finally chosen her own path," said Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy, advisor to Chief Minister on public affairs.

He, however, sought to underplay the divide in the family, by saying it was "only a difference of opinion" and it would "not harm or impact their personal relationship".

■ **Page 2: It's an act of vengeance, says leader**

NORMALCY | RETURNS

Hundi collection in Jan. this year was higher than pre-Covid Jan. 2020

Long queues crawl back to Tirumala temple

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, FEB. 9

Nearly eight months since the Lord Venkateswara temple in Tirumala reopened its doors for devotees — after being closed for two-and-a-half months due to Covid-19 — the hill town is once again witnessing serpentine queues. This is also signifying a sharp rise in income from 'Srivari Hundi'.

When the hill shrine was reopened for pilgrims on June 11 last, TTD had

allowed 6,000 people for darshan. However, the temple gradually increased the darshan quota which now stood at 50,000 a day. This is roughly more than 60 per cent of pre-Covid devotee turnout.

Curiously, despite a low pilgrim footfall and the Covid-19 induced financial stress, the hundi collection is registering a steady increase. Devotees are generously offering Kanukas (cash) in the 'Srivari Hundi'.

The hundi income was

■ **WHEN THE HILL SHRINE** was reopened for pilgrims on June 11 last, TTD had allowed 6,000 people for darshan. However, the temple gradually increased the darshan quota which now stood at 50,000 a day. This is roughly more than 60 per cent of pre-Covid devotee turnout.

■ **DESPITE A LOW** pilgrim footfall and the Covid-19 induced financial stress, the hundi collection is registering a steady increase.

relatively high in the last one month as compared to the collections in the corresponding period last year.

According to official statistics, the daily hundi col-

Teary-eyed Modi praises Azad, will take his advice

PM says difficult for successor to match Azad's standards

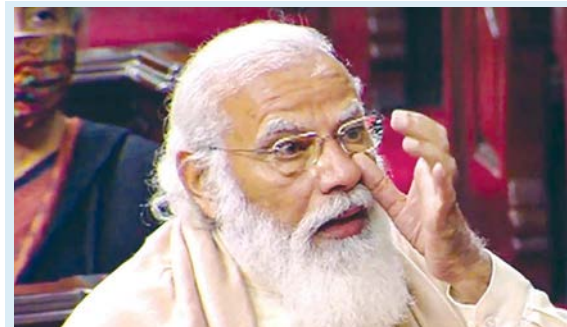
DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 9

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday bid a tearful farewell to Congress veteran and Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad, saying that he respects the Congress leader as a "true friend" and will not let him retire, and will continue taking his advice.

Mr Modi said it would be difficult for Mr Azad's successor in the Rajya Sabha to match him as he has set very high standards as an MP and as the Leader of the Opposition.

Calling himself a "proud Hindustani Muslim" who did not go to Pakistan, Mr Azad recalled how he learnt a lot from Parliament, late PMs Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi and got inspired from former PM Atal Behari Vajpayee, and prayed that militancy should end in the country.

Praising the PM, Mr Azad said Mr Modi never mixed personal context



Prime Minister Narendra Modi gets emotional during his farewell speech for Ghulam Nabi Azad in the Rajya Sabha in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

At a personal level, I would request him to not believe that he is not in the House. My door is always open for all of you. I will always expect and value your inputs.

— NARENDRA MODI Prime Minister

and his party's responsibilities and used to be among the first ones to wish him on festivals and birthdays.

"One thing I would like to say about Mr Azad that the next LoP will have a difficult time in matching

his work because he was not only concerned about his party but also about the country and the House," said the PM, and revealed how it was the Congress leader who had suggested to him to call a meeting of all party lead-

YSRC-backed candidates win majority village polls

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 9

The ruling YSRC won 1,383 gram panchayats in its favour out of 3,249 that went for polling to the gram panchayat in phase-1 on Tuesday.

District-wise gram panchayats won by the YSR Congress supported candidates for the positions of sarpanches and ward members include: Anantapur 101, Kurnool 118, Chittoor 289, Kadapa 126, Prakasam 93, Nellore 50, Guntur 178, Krishna 51, West Godavari 63, East Godavari 67, Visakhapat-

BASED ON reports, voters cast their vote in favour of the contestants supported by both the ruling YSRC, Telugu Desam and other parties even though the election was held on a non-party basis.

nam 83 and Srikakulam 164, as per the reports available at 10 pm.

As the elections were held for 2,723 positions of sarpanches and 20,157 ward members in the gram panchayats located in 12 dis-

tricts with an exception for Vizianagaram district in the state, a large number of voters turned out to exercise their franchise.

Based on reports, voters cast their vote in favour of the contestants supported by both the ruling YSR Congress, Telugu Desam and other parties even though the election was held on a non-party basis.

Out of a total number of 3,249 positions of the sarpanchs, 525 were unanimously elected and out of 32,502 positions of ward members, 12,185 were elected unanimously earlier.



An elderly woman casts her vote during the gram panchayat elections at a polling booth under Anakapalli Division in Visakhapatnam district on Tuesday. — DC

ers during the Covid-19 pandemic, when the PM was holding a meeting of the floor leaders.

Mr Modi had tears as he recalled the 2007 terrorist attack on a tourist bus carrying Gujaratis in J&K when both him and Mr Azad were chief ministers. The PM recalled how Mr Azad was the first one to call him, all teared up, and took care of the pilgrims from Gujarat as they were like his family members.

"Posts come and go but how to remain sane... is something one should learn from him. It was a very emotional time for me... I respect him as a friend. I am sure that his nature and his zeal to work for the nation will never let him rest," said the PM, while adding that his door will always remain open for Mr Azad and the other retiring members.

"I would not let you retire, will continue taking your advice," Modi said in a tearful farewell to Mr Azad in the Upper House.

PHASE-1 POLLS SEE 82% VOTE PERCENTAGE

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 9

The first phase of gram panchayat polls went off peacefully with average poll percentage registered at 81.67 in Andhra Pradesh on Tuesday.

As the polling started at 6.30 am in all 12 districts, the turnout of voters was sluggish during the initial hours and soon picked up pace and a large number of voters started to turn up at the polling booths to exercise their franchise.

Accordingly, when the average poll percentage across the state was registered at 11.28 at 8.30 am, it soon picked up pace and registered at 34.28 by 10.30 am.

By 12.30 pm, the average poll percentage was 62.02 and by 2.30 pm, it was 75.55. By 3.30 pm at which time, the polling was concluded, the state average was 81.67.

The highest poll percentage in the state was registered in Krishna district at 85.06 and the lowest was at Srikakulam at 75.77.

■ **Page 2: SEC expresses satisfaction over polls**

HC RESTRAINS POLL BODY FROM USING E-WATCH

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 9

The Andhra Pradesh High Court directed the State Election Commission not to use the newly developed software application called 'eWatch' following security concerns and posted the next hearing in the case to February 17.

A division bench comprising Chief Justice Arup Kumar Goswami and Ch. Praveen Kumar held the hearing on Tuesday on a petition filed raising objection on usage of 'eWatch' meant to keep check on poll related irregularities, as it was developed by a private agency.

■ **Page 2: APTS found tech issues with eWatch**

SHORT TAKES

COP THROWS DUNG INTO FOOD COOKED BY TD

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, FEB. 9

A Sub inspector's action went viral after he allegedly threw dung, metal and dust into the food cooked by Telugu Desam supporters at Gangavaram village in Belaguppa mandal in the district on Tuesday.

The food for at least 200 persons was thrown into the dust bin.

Sources said a group of Telugu Desam sympathisers were on election campaign for gram panchayat polls at Gangavaram village which was reserved for SCs.

Belaguppa sub inspector Anwar Bhasha visited the village following elections in the village.

He warned the TD supporters to remove the food that was cooked by them which he was in violation of election code.

Villagers alleged Bhasha got angry and threw dust, dung and waste material into the food. TD supporters alleged he not taken any action against the YSRC men who were also cooking food massively in the village.

Bhasha later in a press release ruled out allegations of throwing dust into the cooking food. He blamed the TD men for pouring dust into the food and targeted him as he asked them to vacate the place.

ADVOCATE GENERAL TO CLAR ALL GOVT BILLS FROM NOW

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 9

From now on, all government orders, policy documents and bills of the Andhra Pradesh government would go through the Advocate General for clearance before they are made public.

Hereafter, while various departments prepare GOs and formulate policies, the concerned officials will have to sit with the law department for closer scrutiny. Once the law department clears a decision, the same would be sent to the office of the Advocate General for further scrutiny.

The repeated defeat to the government in court cases in the past 20 months made the government do some homework and arrive at this decision. Chief secretary Aditya Nath Das issued a GO (MS No. 11) on Tuesday, directing all officials and departments to follow this procedure.

The order stated that the government has been initiating programmes for implementation in various sectors in accordance with the avowed policy of people's welfare and as per the objectives enshrined in the Constitution. The decision-making process involved consultations within the various departments. This, inter alia, included examining the legality of the processes as well as scope for their smooth and unhindered implementation.

Yet, it was noticed that several such policies were stalled via litigation, whereon the government would be called upon by courts to justify the decisions including the processes underlying those decisions.

The government felt that a formal structure should be put in place to ensure that due diligence is done on all parameters of various policy decisions, more particularly with regard to the legal framework for such governmental initiatives.

Therefore, to ensure that the policies of the government do not suffer from legal infirmities, it is decided that a procedure be in place so as to ensure that the policies are in consonance with due process and the requirements of law.

The policy decisions arrived at after due consultations within government departments will be sent to the law department for securing its opinion and then taken to the Council of Ministers as per Business Rules.

After securing clearance within the government, the concerned line department and the law department shall sit together and finalise the draft GO/Policy document and the draft legislation in consultation with the office of the Advocate General. Orders will be issued thereafter.

● **THE GOVERNMENT** felt that a formal structure should be put in place to ensure that due diligence is done on all parameters of various policy decisions, more particularly with regard to the legal framework for such governmental initiatives.



YSR congress party leaders and activists beat the drums and burst crackers at the central office near Tadepalli on Tuesday.

— BY ARRANGEMENT

Gram panchayat polls see increase in migrant voters

Highest 85.06% polling was in Krishna dist and the lowest in Srikakulam

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 9

People of rural areas showed keen interest in casting their votes during the first phase of gram panchayat elections on Tuesday.

Migrant people returned to their native places from workplaces and stood in long queues to cast their votes in Krishna, Guntur and other districts, thereby contributing to an increase in poll percentage.

Only Srikakulam and Kadapa districts registered below 80 percent voting. The highest 85.06 percent polling was registered in Krishna district and the lowest 75.77 per cent in Srikakulam district. Kadapa district recorded the second-lowest voting of 78 percent.

Polling started at 6:30 a.m. for the 2,723 sarpanch and 20,157 ward members in 12 districts of AP. In majority villages, voters could be seen arriving at polling booths from 7 am onwards. Their numbers increased after 8:30 am and the trend continued till 3:30 pm when the polling ended. Elders

SEC expresses satisfaction over completion of elections

From Page 1

District-wise poll percentage includes: Srikakulam-75.77, Visakhapatnam-84.23, East Godavari-82.80, West Godavari-80.29, Krishna-85.06, Guntur-83.04, Prakasam-80.92, Nellore-80.62, Chittoor-83.47, Kadapa-78, Kurnool-83.55 and Anantapur-82.80. The State Election Commission held polling for election of sarpanchs to 2,723 gram panchayats and also for 20,157 ward members for a total of

3,249 positions of sarpanch and 32,502 positions of ward members. The remaining positions 525 sarpanchs and 12,185 positions of ward members were elected unanimously. Election was not held for the position of sarpanch at Velicharla gram panchayat in Nellore district as no nomination was filed.

Meanwhile, state election commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar expressed satisfaction over successful completion of gram

reached polling booths with the help of relatives. Locals and policemen help them to cast their votes on a priority basis.

Ruling YSR Congress and main opposition Telugu Desam have taken the gram panchayat elections as a prestigious issue, though these polls are held

● **THE NUMBERS** increased after 8:30 am and the trend continued till 3:30 pm.

on non-party basis.

According to sources, candidates, with support from political parties, offered financial packages to small, middle and big

family for their votes. There are reports that Rs. 2,000 per vote has been paid in certain areas, apart from saarees. Those who returned from other places, including Telangana and Karnataka, for casting their vote were reimbursed travel charges and paid "bonus".

offering the sarpanch post in turns (of two-and-a-half years to each candidate) to convince party rebels into opting out of the contest. The post of vice sarpanch is being offered to rebels wherever they are agreeable," one of the YSR

SAMBUNIPALEM VILLAGE SHUNS GP ELECTIONS

Nellore: Barring a few stray incidents, first phase of Gram Panchayat elections held in Kavali division on Tuesday was peaceful in SPSR Nellore district.

Residents of Sambunipalem village in Iskukapalli Panchayat of Allur mandal boycotted election taking objection to rejection of nominations belonging to candidates of a particular community.

Election was held for 137 Sarpanch posts and 1,024 ward member posts in 137 Gram Panchayats on Tuesday. The polling percentage was 80 per cent.

As many as 2,13,688 voters have exercised their franchise out of 2,65,064 voters in these Panchayats. After visiting several villages, Election observer P. Basanth Kumar expressed satisfaction over the polling percentage even in hypersensitive polling stations.

Rebels give sleepless nights for YSRC

Nellore: YSR Congress leaders, especially legislators, are in a fix over dealing with rebel candidates of ruling party being in fray for gram panchayat elections. Particularly so after TD leaders have allegedly started backing YSRC

rebels, knowing quite well that they cannot win the election on their own. In addition, TD is also backing BJP nominees at many places to settle scores with YSR Congress.

"As part of exercise for unanimous election, we are

offering the sarpanch post in turns (of two-and-a-half years to each candidate) to convince party rebels into opting out of the contest. The post of vice sarpanch is being offered to rebels wherever they are agreeable," one of the YSR

Congress leaders disclosed. However, going by the outcome in Nellore, Prakasam and Kurnool districts, these mediations have been insufficient in ruling party's ambition to ensure unanimous polls in maximum number of panchayaths.

POLITICAL VIEWS

She made her intent clear to establish an identity for herself in politics

TS in dire need of Rajanna Rajyam, says Sharmila

It's an act of vengeance, says leader

From Page 1

Sharmila Reddy, on the other hand, tried to retain ambiguity over her brother's stand vis-a-vis her political moves. Asked if Jagan Mohan Reddy was in approval of her moves, she shot back saying, "Did he tell you (the reporter) the other way? He is my elder brother and I am of the view that I have his blessings."

It was evident from Tuesday's political developments in the YSR's fam-

ily that Sharmila took a plunge into direct politics out of anger at being neglected by her brother. She was forced to choose Telangana as she can't afford a direct confrontation with Jagan Mohan Reddy in Andhra Pradesh. A rank outsider, to be more precise an "Andhrite", she seems to be un-mindful of her success in Telangana as the real objective, it appears, is to put her brother in a tight spot.

"It seems more as an act

with green floral border, Sharmila came on to a makeshift dais to greet the people. Special arrangements were made obviously by her evangelist husband, "Brother" Anil, to

welcome her with drumbeats and by showering of flower petals.

Sources close to Sharmila said about 1000 persons had been invited for the meeting and a

AP facing issues with SEC: YSRC

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 9

The YSR Congress-led state government, facing a lot of issues and problems with the State Election Commission, is seeking a multi-member SEC to restrain its unilateral decisions which it feels is creating hurdles in the government administration.

Speaking to media here on Tuesday, Government Advisor (Public Affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna expressing confidence said that the good governance of Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy will reflect in the ongoing elections.

He said that they have proposed to make the State Election Commission (SEC) into a the multi-member body on the lines of the Central Election Commission (CEC) which would keep a check on misuse of power by any single individual.

Ramakrishna Reddy said despite the cheap politics of opposition leader N. Chandrababu Naidu, the welfare schemes of Jagan Mohan Reddy will speak for themselves in

● **SPEAKING TO** media here on Tuesday, Government Advisor (Public Affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna expressing confidence said that the good governance of Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy will reflect in the ongoing elections.

the elections which are being held on non-party basis. He said that though the TD is trying to give a distorted picture to divert the reality nothing of that sort has happened and the first phase elections was held peacefully, like never before.

Ramakrishna Reddy said that with the overtures of the SEC clearly leaning towards opposition party, the state government has sent a proposal to adopt a multi-member SEC as it was done earlier in CEC so that decisions can be taken by a majority vote.

He stated that discussions are taking place at a national level in regard to establishing a multi-member commission in the state.

APTS found tech issues with eWatch

From Page 1

Government pleader C. Suman informed the court that based on a requisition from the SEC, the Andhra Pradesh Technology Services carried out a preliminary test and noticed several security concerns in the app. He further informed the court that a source code belonged to the AP social welfare department was used

for developing the app without obtaining permission from the department for its usage. He said usage of such a source code could lead to a major cybersecurity threat to the social welfare department itself.

State Election Commission's counsel N. Ashwani Kumar said that the SEC was willing to use the cVigil app developed by the Election Commission of India if there was no objection to the state government. He informed the court that the Nigha app developed by the state government was not working properly.

The court inquired whether the state government was having any objection if the SEC intended to use the app developed by it.

The government pleader C. Suman replied by saying that the state government might not be having any objection if the SEC wanted to use such an app.

The court observed that the SEC was not supposed to use the eWatch app until it could get the security certificate from the APTS.

In a separate development, the state government informed the High Court that it could be very expensive to repaint the delivery vehicles of essential commodities under the public distribution system if they were to be permitted for door delivery in rural areas in the wake of poll code. The state government challenged the SEC's order to repaint colours of vehicles as they resemble YSR Congress party colours and influence the voters during GP polls.

Chief Minister says don't spoil volunteer system

From Page 1

The Chief Minister stated that 'volunteer' means rendering services voluntarily and can work for two to three days per week in a convenient time.

He said that volunteer work would enhance the leadership qualities, confidence and courage. He recalled that he had clearly informed the motto of the volunteer system and asked for the cooperation of the volunteers to reform the system for good administration.

He said that the society is saluting volunteers and government also felicitating volunteers for their selfless services. He stated that some forces trying to spoil the volunteer system with vested interests to restrain volunteers from getting respect in society.

Jagan emotionally said, "As a well-wisher and brother I am appealing volunteers not to fall in the trap of provocative forces and further appealing volunteers to discharge duties with service motto."

of vengeance, which normally Jagan is accused of pursuing with rival politicians," a senior party leader said, adding that at the best, she might want to prove a point to Jagan by winning from a Lok Sabha segment in Telangana, which has lots of settlers' votes as a deciding factor.

Incidentally, the first salvo against Sharmila was fired by Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee working president A. Revanth Reddy, who represents Malkajgiri

Lok Sabha segment, which has considerable settlers vote. He dared Sharmila to implead in the ongoing legal battle against the proposed Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation Scheme to prove her sincerity towards Telangana.

He also demanded that she should offer an apology to families of several people, who sacrificed their lives for separate statehood, for the tough stand taken by both her father and brother against the division of AP.

majority of them took part in the consultations. She began her interaction sessions with her followers from erstwhile Nalgonda.

Sharmila had helped her brother in poll campaigns

twice. She is believed to have fallen out with Jagan and decided to pursue her own career in politics after she was denied both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha nominations by the YSRC.

SHORT TAKES

MAHA CM VOWS
HELP TO SRIVARI
TEMPLE: TTDDC CORRESPONDENT,
TIRUPATI, FEB. 9

The Chief Minister of Maharashtra Uddhav Thackeray has positively responded towards allotment of land in Mumbai for the construction of Sri Venkateswara temple and set up the SVBC Hindi Channel, said TTD chairman Y.V. Subba Reddy.

The TTD Board Chief and Additional EO and SVBC MD A.V. Dharma Reddy formally met the Maharashtra CM in Mumbai on Tuesday and sought him for allotment of land to which the latter gave his consent. In the meeting, CEO of SVBC Suresh Kumar was also present.

In a release, the TTD Chairman stated that the CM of Maharashtra has offered to grant land for the temple at another location in Mumbai, if the present one given by the erstwhile government was not suitable. The CM also said that the Maharashtra government was also keen to extend cooperation in the setting up of a new Hindi channel of SVBC, scheduled to launch on Ugadi day on April 13, the chairman added. Meanwhile, TTD Executive Officer Dr K.S. Jawahar Reddy also participated through video conferencing in the meeting with Mumbai local advisory committee on Tuesday evening.

83.47% POLLING
REGISTERED IN
CHITTOOR DISTDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, FEB. 9

The first phase of Panchayat polls in Chittoor district went peacefully with only stray incidents reported at few places and about 83.47 per cent polling was registered at the end of polling by 3.30 pm.

In the first phase, elections were conducted in 342 panchayats located in twenty mandals under the Chittoor division. The polling has commenced early in the morning in several villages, where voters formed in long queues – adhering to Covid-19 guidelines to cast their vote.

The officials of the district administration have made elaborate arrangements for the polling. Elderly and physically challenged persons were assisted, and wheelchairs were arranged to cast their vote. The district police wing has made elaborate security arrangements to see that no untoward incident takes place. Police vigil was tightened at 117 identified problematic polling stations.

Incidentally, there was 83.47 per cent of polling recorded in the first phase. About 3,99,995 voters have exercised their franchise as against a total of 4,79,228 voters. R.C. Puram mandal registered the highest poll percentage of 88.99, and the lowest number of votes were polled at Palasamudram mandal, with 78.52 per cent.

At several panchayats, the ruling YSR Congress and opposition Telugu Desam leaders locked horns to prove their power. Supporters of both the parties were seen entering into a tussle, just after a few hours of the commencement of polling. In Kothapalli panchayat, SR Puram mandal, alert police have prevented a Sarpanch candidate Ramesh from pouring water into a ballot box. They took him into custody and registered a case.

CM: Janatha Bazaars to provide
quality items at lower pricesDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 9

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has said the state government would set up Janatha Bazaars to provide quality consumer goods at prices lower than the market rates.

The chief minister held a review meeting on agricultural activities on Tuesday and advised officials to ensure that various laws brought forward by the state for the benefit of farmers are strictly adhered to.

During the meeting held at the camp office here, the CM said the Janatha Bazaars can be set up on an area of 500 to 5,000 sqft. Janatha Bazaars would cover a population of 5,000 in the first phase and buildings should

be constructed. Quality items should be available in these outlets at lower prices.

The CM said farmers should get minimum support price for their produce and items of daily use should be made available to consumers at lower prices, benefitting both farmers and consumers.

Jagan said officials must take steps to support farmers and ensure they are not cheated. "Let us set up special police stations for farmers." The police department should coordinate with the agriculture department. Awareness should be created among tenant farmers under the Polambadi programme on cultivator rights Acts and ensure that they won't have any problem with the crop

cultivator rights card; and the posters with this information should be displayed on boards at RBKs."

The CM said hoardings should be placed at RBKs, village clinics and village secretariats with details of services being provided so that awareness will be created among the people. "Take steps for setting up an insurance company on behalf of the government for crop insurance and a special officer should be appointed for it."

Jagan asked officials to ensure release of insurance money for Kharif 2020-21. He also ordered release of the first tranche of Rythu Bharosa Scheme in May. Special focus should be laid on organic farming and the crops should be purchased under RBKs, the

CM said, and added that regular monitoring should be done.

The message that millers should come directly to RBKs to buy the crop should be strongly conveyed, the CM said, and reviewed the progress of the AP Amul Project and the setting up of Aqua hubs. He also reviewed fund pooling and the setting up of the multipurpose facility centres.

Agriculture Mission vice-chairman MVS Nagi Reddy, agriculture department special chief secretary Poonam Malakondaiah, marketing and co-operation department special secretary Y Madhusudanreddy, agriculture marketing commissioner P.S. Pradyumna, AP DDC MD Ahmad babu and others were present.

Family of suicide victim
blames college for death

Sister of Tejeswi said that they have paid ₹33,000 borrowed for interest

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, FEB. 9

Notwithstanding the denial of the management of QIS College of Engineering and Technology in Ongole over their role behind the suicide of a second year student Papisetty Tejeswi on February 5, family members have been squarely blaming the institute for the death.

It may be recalled that the girl ended her life allegedly unable to bear the pressure from the college for payment of fees. Sister of Tejeswi, Sravani told this newspaper that they have paid ₹33,000 borrowed for interest to the institute because of pressure though Tejiewi was a beneficiary of fee reimbursement scheme.

Sravani said that they came to know through her sister's friends that the College also took a letter from Tejeswini to pay the balance of nearly ₹25,000 to ₹30,000 within 10 days.

"She knew that we cannot raise the amount as already we borrowed ₹35,000 and the worry led

her to take the extreme step" grief-stricken Sravani said.

Even as Sravani was accusing the College, Principal of QIS College of Engineering and Technology C.V. Subba Rao denied the allegations of harassing Tejeswi for payment of the fee.

He said they have not applied any pressure on any beneficiary under the scheme and the girl even paid examination fee on February 5, one week before the last date, February 12.

Hinting that they would not have collected exam fee if they are after fees arrears since last 2 years, he said her mother came to pay the exam fee and the girl was very active in her studies and she was cheerful when she left the college around 4 pm.

"We came to know about her suicide on the next day," Mr Subba Rao said lamenting over the death while reiterating that they have got nothing to do with the incident.

"Although we have not received fees reimbursement after September

COLLEGES HARASS PARENTS FOR FEE PAYMENT EVEN
FROM BENEFICIARIES OF REIMBURSEMENT SCHEMEDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, FEB. 9

Even as the government ordered a probe into the recent suicide of Papisetty Tejeswi in Ongole, parent of a BBA Student, T.V. Sai Sudhakar alleged that a private college in Nellore is demanding him to pay fees dues of ₹18,000 to deliver the degree certificate of his daughter.

"The College has been claiming that they have not received fee reimbursement from the government. I am running an internet centre and not in a position to pay the amount now. We have dropped the idea of admitting her in MBA though she is very keen on pursuing higher education," Sudhakar said

lamenting over his plight.

Incidentally, Sudhakar's son is also a student of the same institute, Janaks College and they delivered his certificate but holding the one that belongs to his daughter, Sudhakar told this newspaper.

Expressing concern over the situation, AP Parents Association blamed both the College and the government for the suicide of Tejeswini. President of the Association S. Narahari accused the government of not settling the dues every quarter as promised while pointing to fees reimbursement arrears pending since March last year.

He alleged that it has become a practice for the

Colleges to harass beneficiaries of fees reimbursement scheme to pay the fees in advance.

He said the new policy of the government to transfer the fees to the accounts of parents came in handy for the Colleges to apply pressure for advance payment of fees under the plea that benefit is coming directly to them.

Reacting to allegations against the Colleges, Correspondent of a popular College in Nellore said that Colleges are forced to ask fee payment even from beneficiaries of the scheme to run the college and pay the salaries. He justified his stand pointing to the inordinate delay on the part of the government in releasing the funds.

2019, we have been paying salaries to the staff before 10th of every month from the fees paid by the B category students," Mr Subba Rao

informed.

Inspector of Police, Ongole one town, Mr Seetharamaiah said that he is personally investigating the case from all

angles. Referring to the probe ordered by the government, he said University authorities also contacted them for details.

81.19% polling recorded in Kadiri division

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, FEB. 9

Phase-I of gram panchayat polls went on peacefully in Kadiri division in Anantapur district on Tuesday.

Average of 81.19 per cent of polling was recorded in 163 Gram Panchayats in 12 mandals of Kadiri revenue division as six gram panchayats were unanimous.

Additional forces were

beefed up at all gram panchayats at all sensitive villages. SP Satya Esubabu said no untoward incidents were reported in the first phase of elections. With the migrant people came back to their villages, polling percentage reached to 81.19 per cent. The polling stations witnessed long queues since morning as 27 per cent reported at 9.30 am while reaching 57.83 per cent by

11.30 and 76.89 per cent by 1.30 pm and 79.35 per cent by 2.30 pm.

Official reports said 1,72,031 men and 1,71,380 and nine others cast their votes in the first phase. Collector Gandham Chandrudu expressed satisfaction for successful conducting of Gram Panchayat polls in 163 villages in the district. The Collector helped an old aged voter cast his vote at a polling station in Zilla

Parishad High School in Nallamada. "A big number of migrant people returned to villages to cast their votes," he said.

Meanwhile the first phase polling for 193 gram panchayat of 12 mandals in Nandyal and Kurnool division was concluded peacefully in the district.

Overall 83.58 per cent polling was registered in the polling held from 6.30 am to 3.30 pm. As many

as 2,68,567 votes polled against the total votes 3,12,312 in both divisions. There is no situation for any re-poll in first phase in the district, and the district administration heaved a sigh of relief with the peaceful conclusion of first phase polls.

Polling started on a dull note in the morning and picked up momentum after 9 am of the almost all notified gram panchayats.

East Godavari
records 82.81%DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB 9

The first phase elections was completed in East and West Godavari District with a smooth and peaceful Tuesday. The East Godavari recorded 82.81 per cent votes including 82.47 per cent for Kakinada Division and 82.81 per cent for Peddapuram Division.

The West Godavari recorded 80.29 per cent in Narasapuram Division. In Kakinada Division, Pithapuram recorded the highest poll percentage with 84.50 per cent and Rangampet in Peddapuram Division recorded 89.06 per cent. In Narasapur Division, 94.62 per cent recorded in Akividu mandal. The voters have participated in the elections with enthusiastically and most of the voters have franchised their vote by 12.30 pm.

Election observer H. Arunkumar said that the East Godavari administration has made full arrangements for conducting the gram panchayat elections and the voters have maintained social distance by following Covid-19 protocols.

He visited Gollalagunta village where the Telugu Desam leader was kidnapped and later committed suicide, after filing nomination of his wife for Sarpanch post. HE said that 90 percent of polling was recorded in Gollagunta village by 1 pm. He visited hyper sensitive villages and observed the polling pattern.

East Godavari District Collector D. Muralidhar Reddy said that the first phase elections were conducted in a peaceful manner in the first phase in the district. He visited U.Kothapalli, Thondangi and Tunimandals and he visited other polling booths.

TD REBUKES COPS FOR BACKING RULING PARTY

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, FEB. 9

TD senior leader Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy rebuked the police for their highhanded attitude in various parts of Kavali division in the first phase of the election. He came down heavily against Allur SI Balaram for maltreating the TD leaders at Amalur.

TD Nellore Assembly

Segment in-charge and former NUDA chairman Kotamreddy Srinivasulu Reddy also rebuked the SI and CI for functioning as per the directions of ruling party leaders in Allur mandal.

"They beat our men and file cases against victims," Srinivasulu Reddy alleged accusing the CI Vema Reddy and SI Balaram for the state of affairs in Allur mandal.

AP records 70
cases of CovidDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 9

Andhra Pradesh registered 70 fresh cases of Covid-19 and no death in the last 24 hours.

According to the state health authorities, out of 26,844 samples tested, 70 persons were infected with Covid-19. Out of a total number of 1,33,94,460 samples tested so far in the state, 8,88,555 persons were found infected with confirmed Coronavirus and of them, 8,80,478 were recovered during the treatment while 917 are still active with the virus.

Among the daily Covid-19 cases, Chittoor topped the state with 24 followed by 11 in East Godavari, 10 in Visakhapatnam, nine in Krishna, eight in Guntur, four in Kadapa, one each in Anantapur, Prakasam, Srikakulam and Vizianagaram while three districts

recorded no case.

Krishna registered the highest number of cumulative Covid-19 positive cases with 183 followed by 153 in Chittoor, 103 in East Godavari, 97 in Guntur, 71 in Kadapa, 70 in Nellore, 61 in Visakhapatnam, 56 Prakasam, 48 in West Godavari, 30 in Anantapur 23 in Kurnool, 12 in Vizianagaram and 10 in Srikakulam.

Among the daily Covid-19 deaths, no fresh case registered in the last 24 hours in the state with the death toll remained unchanged at 7,160.

The state health authorities discharged 115 Covid-19 patients after recovery in the course of treatment in the last 24 hours in the state.

AP conducted Covid-19 test on samples of 2,50,833 per one million population and registered a positive rate of 6.63.



Jubilarians Rev. Fr. Mallavalli Balaswami, V. Vijaya Jojibabu offer special prayers to the inauguration of the 3 days festival of Mary Matha shrine at Gunadala in Vijayawada on Tuesday.

— DC

Gunadala Mary
Matha fete beginsDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 9

The three-day annual Gunadala Mary Matha festival began on a grand note on the premises of Bishop Grassi High School on the foot of the Gunadala hill shrine at Vijayawada on Tuesday.

The celebrations began with Vijayawada Diocese Bishop T. Joseph Raja Rao led the concelebrated holy mass and Monsignor M. Prasad, Fr M. Gabriel, Fr Y. William Jayaraju, Fr P. Thomas, Fr M. Balaswamy, Fr V. Vijaya Jojibabu and others took part and offered prayers.

Speaking on the occasion, Fr Vijaya Jojibabu said that in 2018 the present Vatican City Pope Francis announced that every year on February 11 the Mother Mary feast shall be celebrated on a grand note. He said that the Mother Mary will shower blessing on people who are in difficult times.

He said that many devotees had a doubt that due to Covid-19 the three-day feast would be cancelled, however with the blessings of holy Mary there were no hurdles to the celebrations.

Bishop Raja Rao said that Gunadala Mary Matha was a shrine of wonders and lauded the services of Fr Balaswamy and Fr Vijaya Jojibabu who are celebrating their Golden and Silver jubilees. He said that as per the instruction of the government and abiding to Covid-19 guidelines the three-day feast was being celebrated.

The devotees from near and far places visited the shrine at the foot of the Gunadala hill and also ascended the hill to seek blessings and to worship the statue of Mother Mary called as 'Statue of Our Lady' installed in a grotto in 1925. Some of the devotees also trekked to the top of the hill and offered prayers at the huge cross of Christ.

MONEY | MATTERS

Non-payment of state govt share a reason

Funds delay halts Kotipally rail line

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB. 9

The South Central Railway (SCR) has taken a decision not to take up new works for Kotipalli-Narasapuram Railway Line until the Railway Board issues further orders.

According to sources, the SCR has stated non-payment of state government's share to the railway line as reason.

But, the SCR made it clear that the ongoing works are continuing without stopping. It is said that there will be a stalemate in the prestigious Kotipalli-Narasapuram Railway Line (Konasema Railway Line) due to delaying of land acquisition process and also non-payment of state government's share completely.

The Kakinada-

South Central Railway Chief Engineer issued a letter that it is decided by Railways, not to progress with the project till final decision by Railway Board except works which are in advanced stage and cannot be stopped technically

Narasapuram Railway Line was sanctioned in 2000 on a cost-sharing basis with the state government agreeing to share 25 per cent of the total project costs and the Railway line was constructed up to Kotipalli in 2004 and thereafter construction works came to a grinding halt but, due to the agitations of the people, the Union government sanctioned ₹1,760 crore for the project over the past five years from 2015 to 2020 and the Central Government

released ₹798.88 crore till December 2020.

Konasema Railway Sadhana Samiti convener Dr E.R. Subrahmanyam said that the Union finance minister has spared ₹187 crore only from out of the deposit amount in the current budget.

He said that the constructions works of the three major railway bridges across the Gowthami, Vainateya and Vasista rivers are under different stages of progress, but the land acquisition for the 57 kilometres long Railwayline has been completed only up to Amalapuram and on the other side of the Vasista river.

Land at Pasarlapudi for the Vainateya Bridge has not been handed over to the Railways so far and similarly, land acquisition has

not been completed for pillar No.1 of the Vasista bridge on the East Godavari side. He said that alignment of the track between Amalapuram and Peruru has not yet been finalised.

However, sources said a major hurdle for the project works has come by way of the SCR not to go ahead with the project till a final decision is taken by the Railway Board due to the non-payment by the state government.

The Konaseema Railway Sadhana Samiti led by Dr Subrahmanyam submitted a representations to the Amalapuram Sub-Collector Himanshu Sukla for expediting the land acquisition process and also the Sadhana Samithi urged the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to release the funds of state's share.

SHORT TAKES

TIGER FOUND DEAD IN TADOBA-ANDHARI RESERVE

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, FEB. 9

A tiger was found dead in a buffer range of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) in Chandrapur district of Maharashtra on Tuesday. This is the seventh death of the big cats recorded in Maharashtra since the beginning of the new year.

The carcass of the male tiger, aged around three years, was recovered from Mudholi beat of Moharli buffer range of the reserve, field director of TATR Jitendra Ramgaonkar said.

The carcass was intact, but bore signs of external injuries, said the officials. According to them, the death might have been caused due to a fight with another tiger.

The actual cause of death will be ascertained after post-mortem. All procedures are being carried out as per the standard operating procedures of the National Tiger Conservation Authority, said officials.

In 2021, seven instances of tigers' deaths have been registered in Maharashtra, which is the highest in the country. In two separate incidents, a tiger and a tigress with her three cubs were poisoned by the locals in Umred-Karhandla-Paoni Wildlife Sanctuary (UKPWS) early this year.

According to officials, a local has admitted that he had poisoned the carcass of his cow when he found that his livestock was killed by the tigress. The feline was a resident of the sanctuary and was about 4-5 years old while the cubs were about 5 months old.

On January 27, a tiger was found dead under Bhadravati forest range of Chandrapur district. In the last two years, 40 tigers have died in Maharashtra.

PRO-KHALISTAN TERRORIST'S AIDE ARRESTED IN U.P.

Lucknow, Feb. 9: A joint team of Punjab and UP police has arrested an accomplice of pro-Khalistan terrorists here, police said on Tuesday.

Jagdev Singh alias Jagga was arrested from Vikas Nagar area of the city on Monday, they said.

The accused is linked to pro-Khalistan terrorists Paramjit Singh Pammah and Maltani Singh, they said, adding, Paramjit is currently in the UK while Malatani is in Germany.

Both of them are accused of carrying out anti-national activities in Punjab and trying to promote terror and harm peace and religious tolerance, police said.

According to the police, Paramjit and Maltani were allegedly preparing Jagdev Singh to carry out anti-national activities and with the money provided by them, he along with his partner Jagroop Singh bought guns and cartridges from Madhya Pradesh.

Punjab Police had arrested Jagroop on Sunday. Jagdev, who hails from Ferozepur district of Punjab, was arrested earlier in 2019 and 2020.

SENA SLAMS SHAH OVER CM'S POST ISSUE

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, FEB. 9

The Shiv Sena on Tuesday slammed Union home minister Amit Shah over his remarks that he never made any closed door promise to share Maharashtra CM's post with the Uddhav Thackeray-led party.

The Sena said that the BJP leader is making such comments only because his party failed to form the government in Maharashtra. It also argued that Shah had himself stated in his previous "sponsored interviews" that it is not his sanskar (culture) to reveal what was decided in the closed door meeting.

In an editorial in its mouthpiece *Saamna*, the Shiv Sena claimed that the BJP is misleading people. It advised Shah to focus on matters like the Uttarakhand flash floods and the farmers' agitation against contentious three farm laws.

Referring to the statements by Shah that he does everything openly, the editorial said, "There is a similarity in style of functioning between Amit Shah and Shiv Sena. The Sena also does everything openly... if this was not the case, the Sena would not have openly joined hands with the Congress and NCP and formed the government with them."

In Uttarakhand, it's a race against time

ITBP deploys drones, dogs to detect 170 people missing since disaster struck the Chamoli region

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency input NEW DELHI/LAKHIMPUR KHERI (UP), FEB. 9

Ten years back, Nathu Lal's elder son Subhash drowned. Now, he is waiting for news on the fate of his younger son, missing since Sunday after the deluge in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district.

Dharamendra, a labourer at the Tapovan power project, had called their home in Bhulanpur village here last Friday, just two days before the flash flood that was possibly triggered by a glacial burst or an avalanche.

The death toll in Uttarakhand's glacier burst tragedy reached 31 as security agencies were racing against time to pull out more people from slush and two blocked tunnels where construction workers are trapped. ITBP has deployed drones and dogs to detect about 170 people still missing since the disaster struck the Chamoli region on Sunday.

"A joint team of ITBP, NDRF, SDRF and other agencies conducting rescue operations used drone cameras to see feasibility to enter beyond the cleared site inside Tapovan tunnel. They have not been successful so far. Machines have been deployed to clear slush," an ITBP official said.

Uttar Pradesh relief commissioner Sanjay Goyal said about 70 of the total missing people are from the state, most of them from Lakhimpur Kheri district.

This includes 34 from Lakhimpur Kheri, nine from Saharanpur followed by five from Shravasti," he said on Tuesday.

Nathu Lal, who has three married daughters, told visitors that Dharmendra decided to try his luck in Tapovan as a labourer when he saw his fellow villagers earning a decent wage there.

He left home on January 6 or 7 to begin work there.

In Ichhanagar, another village in Lakhimpur Kheri district, three families hover between hope and despair. There has been no contact since the calamity with 15 people, all of them workers at the same hydel project.

At least five of them are related Shrikrishna (50), his son Raju (22), close relative Jagdish (40) and his son Umesh (21), and another relative Ramtirtha (35).

Tears rolled down the face of Shrikrishna's wife as she told media persons that Raju had talked to the family on the phone just hours before the calamity.

Raju's marriage is scheduled in April and his mother and three younger sisters now pray for his return.

Ichhanagar's Azim told his family that he survived as he had left the Tapovan site for a higher location on Sunday to get the refill for an LPG cylinder. Muzeem from Mirzaganj had also come with him.

But there is no news of their co-worker Bhalbhal, also from Mirzaganj.

Eighteen people from Bhairampur village worked at the Tapovan project. Ten of them had stayed away from work on Sunday and are safe. There has been no contact with the remaining eight, villagers said.

Santosh Bhargava, head of Maanjha panchayat, which incorporates Ichhanagar and Bhairampur villages, rushed to Tapovan when reports of the tragedy came in.

He talked with the managing director of the private construction company, which had recruited labourers from the area.

Bhargava said that the MD has assured all help possible for the victim's families.

"All the Kheri people were engaged as casual labourers at the Tapovan project and most of them worked at a depth of nearly 40 metres at the site, he said.



Neema Devi, wife of Mithilesh Mahato, a worker at Tapovan-Vishnugad hydel project who went missing after the glacier burst in Chamoli district, and her children sit outside their house waiting for his return in Chaunkad village in Ramgarh district on Tuesday. Mahato along with four other villagers from Ramgarh district are missing since the glacier burst at Joshimath in the Dhauli Ganga river on Sunday.

— PTI

In-depth safety audit of major infrastructure projects on cards

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 9

In view of the Uttarakhand glacier tragedy home ministry's National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) will conduct a fresh "safety and security audit" of all major infrastructure projects in high altitude and hilly areas and suggest corrective measures.

Home ministry sources said there was considerable concern in the government regarding the safety of infrastructure being carried in hilly terrain particularly after the

● **HOME MINISTRY** sources said there was considerable concern in the government regarding the safety of infrastructure being carried in hilly terrain particularly after the Uttarakhand glacier burst.

● **EXPERTS FROM NDRF** and even external agencies like IIT, Indian Institute of Science and others would be roped in for this exercise.

Uttarakhand glacier burst. So this incident is being used as an opportunity to do an in-depth safety audit.

Officials said all projects being carried in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and the North-Eastern states would be

thoroughly reviewed. A detailed report and analysis would be submitted within the next two months.

"As of now this survey would be conducted in hilly states as they are more vulnerable to such disasters as was witnessed in Uttarakhand," a senior

ministry official said.

Experts from NDRF and even external agencies like IIT, Indian Institute of Science and others would be roped in for this exercise. A number of power projects, dams, roads and bridges are being constructed in these states which would be examined. Ministry sources said NDRF teams with assistance from the SDRF would be deployed close to these infrastructure projects so that immediate relief and rescue operations can be carried out in case of any future disasters.

R-Day violence: SC stays arrest of Tharoor, Sardesai & others in FIRs lodged for tweets

New Delhi, Feb. 9: In a major relief to Congress MP Shashi Tharoor and six journalists including Rajdeep Sardesai, the Supreme Court on Tuesday stayed their arrest in connection with the FIRs lodged against them for their allegedly "misleading" tweets on the violence during the farmers' tractor rally here on the Republic Day.

The apex court, in the proceedings lasting five minutes, granted protection from any possible coercive action by police of states like Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Karnataka to Tharoor as also Sardesai, Mrinal Pande, Zafar Agha, Paresh Nath, Vinod K. Jose and Anant Nath.

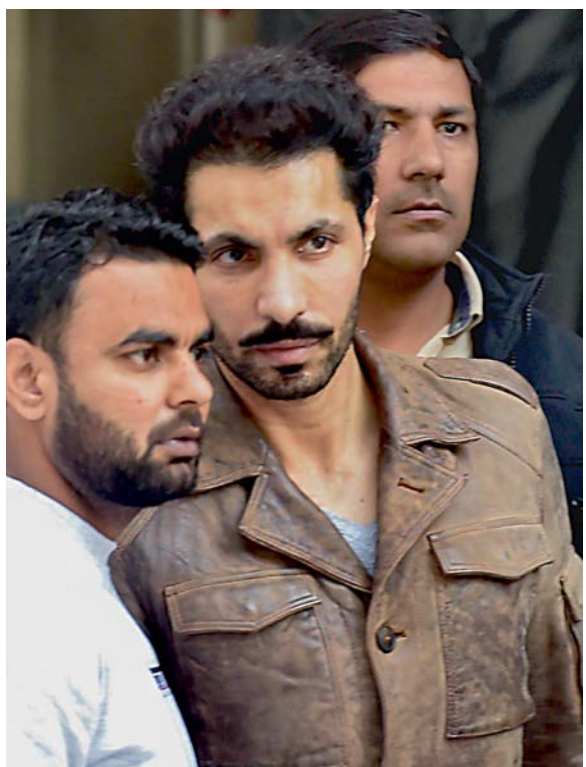
Issue notice returnable in two weeks. In the meantime, there shall be stay of arrest of the petitioners, the bench headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde noted in its order after senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the lawmak-ers from Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala, expressed the looming danger of danger arrest.

When the bench said it was issuing notice in the matter, Sibal vehemently pleaded that an order with an effect that no coercive action be taken against them in the meantime be also passed.

Nothing is going to happen. Where is the danger, said the bench, also comprising Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian.

Sibal objected and said Solicitor General Tushar Mehta is appearing for Delhi Police and the cops of other states might knock at my doors and arrest me in the meantime. "Kindly protect us in the meanwhile," Sibal said, prompting the bench to ask the law officer whether the police was planning to arrest Tharoor and others.

Mehta, seeking to argue the case on Wednesday, alleged horrendous tweets



Actor Deep Sidhu, accused in the violence on Republic Day during a farmers tractor rally, arrested by Delhi Police special cell in New Delhi on Tuesday.

— PTI

have been made, the law officer said, adding, I can show you what horrendous effect these tweets have with such lakhs of followers.

The bench asked Mehta, Are you going to arrest them? The solicitor general said, I am before your lordships. Please hear it tomorrow.

The bench then asked Mehta whether he was appearing for all the concerned states. I will appear for all, he said.

Sibal, while arguing that petitioners should be protected, said, What prejudice will it cause if this protection is given? We will hear you after two weeks and stay the arrest in the meanwhile, the bench said.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for one of the journalists, said no religious sentiment has been hurt. — PTI

Sidhu remanded to 7 days custody

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA | DC NEW DELHI, FEB. 9

Punjabi actor-turned-activist Deep Sidhu, who was allegedly involved in the violence and vandalism at Red Fort during the farmers' tractor rally on January 26, was arrested by the Delhi police special cell late Monday night. On Tuesday, a Delhi court remanded Sidhu to seven days' police custody.

Sidhu was produced before metropolitan magistrate Prigya Gupta. The police alleged he was one of the main instigators of the violent incidents at the Red Fort. Sidhu's counsel, however, claimed that he had nothing to do with the violence and was at the wrong place at the wrong time.

According to Sanjeev

Kumar Yadav, DCP (Special Cell), he was arrested from the Karnal Bypass at 10.40 pm on Monday. "Sidhu was wanted in connection with the case of instigating the crowd at the Red Fort on Republic Day. The Crime Branch will investigate his role in detail," said the DCP.

Asked where he was hiding after the January 26 violence, Yadav said the investigation was in an initial stage.

A source said Sidhu was waiting for someone on the road when he was nabbed. "Meanwhile, it was also revealed that Sidhu was in contact with a woman friend who lives in California. He used to make videos and send it to her, and she used to upload them on his Facebook account," said the source.

SHIVRAJ GOVT SHOWERS SOPS ON FARMERS

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, FEB. 9

A week after declaring to waive interest on crop loans in Madhya Pradesh, Shivraj Singh Chouhan government on Tuesday decided to amend its revenue relief code to provide compensation to farmers for the damage of the crops by wild animals.

The state cabinet which met here under the chairmanship of chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan approved the proposal to change revenue relief code to release compensation to the farmers.

Briefing reporters after the cabinet meeting, state medical education minister Viswas Sarang said the farmers have hitherto been deprived of compensation for damage to their crops by wild animals due to the absence of the provision in the existing revenue relief code.

The state cabinet approved the proposal to make necessary amendments to the revenue relief code to remove the bottleneck in releasing compensation to the farmers for this, he said.

Mr Sarang said a necessary amendment to the revenue relief code has also been made to ensure compensation to the farmers for loss of their crops due to various natural calamities.

Earlier on February 2, the state cabinet decided to write off interest on crop loans taken by the farmers from the state cooperative banks.

The crop loan interest waiver decision comes in the wake of the release of ₹4,000 crore to 22 lakh farmers under the Chief Minister's Kisan Kalyan Yojana by the government.

COLLAPSE OF ROCK MASS LIKELY THE REASON, SAY SCIENTISTS

New Delhi, Feb. 9: A rock mass, weakened due to years of freezing and thawing of snow, may have led to the creation of a weak zone, triggering its collapse that resulted in flash floods in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district on Sunday, initial observations by scientists of the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology (WIHG) suggest.

The crashing rock mass also brought earth and mounds of snow with it. The friction may have resulted in heating, which could have caused the floods, the observations suggest.

Scientists from the institute conducted a helicopter survey of the area to find clues as to what led to the deadly flash floods that swept everything in its way.

Kalachand Sain, Director of the WIHG, said the glaciers where the incident occurred feed the Rishi Ganga river that ultimately joins the Dhauli Ganga.

"This region has a very steep gradient. Our observations suggest that the rock mass may have weakened due to freezing and thawing. This sometimes leads to the development of a weak zone and fractures."

"As the rock mass weakened, the glacier and snow came down crashing, it resulted in flash floods," he said.

The steep slopes of the mountains in the region further increased the intensity of the crash.

Two teams of the WIHG comprising five glaciologists left for Joshimath on Monday to ascertain the reason behind the incident. — PTI

AZAD HOPES FOR RESTORATION OF PEACE IN J&K

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 9

Calling himself proud Indian Muslim, outgoing leader of opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Ghulam Nabi Azad on Tuesday prayed militancy to end from the country and hoped for the restoration of peace in Jammu and Kashmir and the return of Kashmiri Pandits back to the valley.

In his farewell speech, Azad recalled his association with several leaders, including stalwarts from other parties, which helped him learn many things and got emotional while recalling the 2007 terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir and how it was one of those rare occasions that he could not stop himself from crying in the public. Earlier Prime Minister Narendra Modi had also teared up while recalling the incident when he was bidding farewell to Azad and three other MPs.

The former Union minister said he is among those "lucky" people who have never gone to Pakistan. "When I read about the state of affairs in Pakistan, I feel proud that I am a Hindustani Muslim," he said adding that Muslims in India should have pride for themselves as they have kept away from the evils that are there in the neighbouring countries.

However, he also added "The majority community should also take two steps forward."

Remembering his tenure as the chief minister of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, Azad said he had convened his first public meeting in the troubled Sopore district, which is unthinkable even today. "I had said my government would be a government of the people of Jammu and Kashmir and if any minister worked on the basis of religion and party, I would be ashamed," he said.

SHORT TAKES

MILITANT ATTACK
KILLS FOUR GOVT
STAFF IN AFGHAN

Kabul, Feb. 9: Militants shot dead four government employees in central Kabul on Tuesday, police said, in the latest rush-hour violence to rock the capital as Afghanistan's spy agency said it had busted a "terrorist cell" involved in targeted killings.

The Afghan capital has seen near-daily attacks during the busy morning commute, targeting prominent figures including politicians, journalists, activists, judges, and religious scholars.

Kabul police spokesman Ferdaws Faramarz told reporters that gunmen had opened fire on a vehicle carrying staff from the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, killing four.

SUPREMES
SINGER MARY
WILSON DIES

Washington, Feb. 9: Motown singer and the Supremes co-founder Mary Wilson has died, US media reported on Tuesday. She was 76.

She founded the US group aged 15 while living in a Detroit housing project, according to Variety, and continued with the band long after lead singer Diana Ross' departure, eventually going on to be inducted into the 1988 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

"Mary Wilson was extremely special to me. She was a trail-blazer, a diva and will be deeply missed," said Berry Gordy, founder of Motown records who were behind many of the band's hits.

She died at her Las Vegas home on February 8, her publicist Jay Schwartz told ET News.

Only two days ago Wilson uploaded a short clip to YouTube celebrating Black history month and announcing: "exciting news about The Supremes, Florence Ballard and unreleased materials." The circumstances around her death have not been released, her publicist said.

UK'S WINCHESTER
COLLEGE TO ADMIT
GIRLS FOR 1st TIME

London, Feb. 9: Winchester College, one of Britain's oldest and most prestigious private schools, will open its ancient doors to girls for the first time in its six-century history, it announced on Tuesday.

The school, founded in 1382 in Hampshire, southern England, said the move was part of "a new vision and significant programme of change".

Britain's other famous top fee-paying schools such as Eton and Harrow still only admit boys and have faced calls to change the policy.

Winchester, which counts finance minister Rishi Sunak among its former students, currently educates around 700 students who are so-called "boarders" living on-site.

Girls will only be admitted to the sixth form — the final two years of school, for 16 to 18-year-olds. They will be able to choose between sleeping on site or attending as day pupils.

The first female day pupils will arrive by September 2022, with boarders following by 2024.

NAVALNY AIDES
PUSH EU FOR NEW
RUSSIA SANCTIONS

Moscow, Feb. 9: Aides of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny said they have pushed the EU to sanction prominent members of President Vladimir Putin's circle including business tycoons to ramp up pressure on Russia.

The move comes after the tit-for-tat expulsion of several European and Russian diplomats as tensions run high over the Navalny affair.

The head of Navalny's regional network Leonid Volkov and another associate, Vladimir Ashurkov, made the calls on Monday during a video conference with EU states dedicated to the bloc's "next steps" on Russia.

The call was hosted by Poland and included envoys from the United States, Canada, Britain and Ukraine, Poland's mission in the EU wrote on Twitter.

Volkov wrote on the Telegram messenger late Monday that he and Ashurkov had discussed "personal sanctions" against billionaires Roman Abramovich, the owner of Chelsea football club, and Alisher Usmanov.

WHO fails to find source of Covid-19

Mission rules out Donald Trump's propagated Wuhan lab-leak theory

AstraZeneca shot should not be dismissed: WHO

Wuhan, Feb. 9: The WHO mission to China to uncover the origins of the Coronavirus has failed to identify the source of the pandemic but the team on on Tuesday ruled out the Wuhan lab-leak theory propagated by Donald Trump.

Experts believe the disease — which has killed more than 2.3 million people worldwide — originated in bats and could have been transmitted to humans via another mammal.

World Health Organisation foreign expert Peter Ben Embarek said identifying the animal pathway remains a "work in progress", and the absence of bats in the Wuhan area dimmed the likelihood of direct transmission.

It was "most likely" to have come from an intermediary species, he said. He also backed up China's position that there was no evidence of "large outbreaks" in Wuhan before December when the first official cases were recorded.

Animals such as rabbits, ferrets and bamboo rats could be the intermediary,

Geneva, Feb. 9: The World Health Organisation insisted that the AstraZeneca vaccine was still a vital tool in the global fight against the coronavirus pandemic, after South Africa delayed the start of its inoculation program over concerns about the drug's efficacy against a virus variant.

As concerns rose over the AstraZeneca shot, the United States said it had lost its first sitting member of Congress to the virus, 67-year-old Texas Republican Ron Wright, who had also been battling cancer.

another team member Marion Koopmans added, saying they might be an "entry point" for further investigations.

Liang Wannian, head of the China side of the joint mission, said animal

President Joe Biden called Wright a "fighter who battled bravely against both cancer and Covid-19." His death came after a 41-year-old Republican House member-elect lost his life to the disease in December, just days before he was to be sworn in.

In South Africa, alarm was raised when a trial at Johannesburg's University of Witwatersrand concluded the AstraZeneca vaccine provided only "minimal" protection against mild to moderate Covid-19 caused

by the variant first detected in South Africa.

That was bad news for many poorer nations counting on the logistical advantages offered by the AstraZeneca shot.

But Richard Hatchett, head of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), said it was "vastly too early to be dismissing this vaccine." "It is absolutely crucial to use the tools that we have as effectively as we possibly can," he said, speaking at the WHO's regular bi-weekly press briefing on the pandemic. — AFP

demic.

"The laboratory incident hypothesis is extremely unlikely," he said. It "is not in the hypotheses that we will suggest for future studies".

The mission was a diplo-

■ AS NEW, more transmissible variants of the coronavirus spread, experts say it's time to consider using a medical-grade respirator, or wearing a surgical and cloth mask together.

matically knotty one — presaged by fears of a whitewash — with the US demanding a "robust" probe and China firing back with a warning not to "politicise" the investigation.

The WHO experts spent a month in China including two weeks in quarantine. Liang said studies showed the virus could be "carried long-distance on cold chain products", appearing to nudge towards the theory the virus was imported — an idea that has abounded in China in recent months.

Ben Embarek said "the virus can persist and survive in conditions that are found in these cold and frozen environments".

"But we don't really understand if the virus can then transmit to humans and under which

conditions this could happen," he said.

Beijing is desperate to defang criticism of its handling of the chaotic early stages of the outbreak. It has tried to refocus attention on its handling and recovery while floating the theory that the virus emerged abroad and was brought into China possibly via frozen foods.

Koopmans said the next steps could include searching for "earlier circulation" of the virus.

Reporters were largely kept at arms' length from the experts during their closely-monitored visit, but snippets of their findings crept out via Twitter and interviews.

Questions have been asked about the relevance of some of their activities to their stated aim of finding the virus source — including a visit to a propaganda exhibition celebrating China's recovery from the pandemic.

The group spent just an hour at the seafood market where many of the first reported clusters of infections emerged over a year ago. — AFP

FRANCE PATROLS
SCS, LIKELY TO
ANGER BEIJING

Paris, Feb. 9: A French nuclear attack submarine was among two navy ships that recently conducted a patrol through the South China Sea, its defence minister announced, in a move likely to anger Beijing, which claims most of the strategic waters as its territory.

The SNA Emeraude was accompanied by support ship BSAM Seine for the passage, Defence Minister Florence Parly said on Twitter.

"This extraordinary patrol has just completed a passage in the South China Sea. A striking proof of the capacity of our French Navy to deploy far away and for a long time together with our Australian, American and Japanese strategic partners," she tweeted along with a picture of the two vessels at sea.

China lays claim to nearly all of the South China Sea while Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam all also claim parts of the region, believed to hold valuable oil and gas deposits. — AFP

Snow brings chaos to Germany



A man pulls his child on a sled in the gardens of the Charlottenburg Palace in Berlin on Tuesday. Freezing drivers were stranded for hours in traffic jams in Germany and Covid-19 vaccination centres were shut in Britain on Tuesday as Europe was pummeled by the heaviest snow in years. Some parts of Germany were cloaked in up to 50 centimetres (20 inches) of snow by Tuesday afternoon, according to local media reports.

Trump's impeachment trial begins



Ren Zhengfei

HUAWEI CEO
HOPES FOR
'OPEN POLICY'
FROM BIDEN

Taiyuan, China, Feb. 9: The CEO and founder of Chinese telecom giant Huawei called on Tuesday for a reset with the United States under President Joe Biden, after the firm was battered by sanctions imposed by Donald Trump's administration.

In his first appearance before journalists in a year, Ren Zhengfei said his "confidence in Huawei's ability to survive has grown" despite its travails across much of the western world where it is maligned as a potential security threat.

The comments come as the firm struggles under rules that have effectively banned US firms from selling it technology and other critical components, citing national security concerns.

Insisting that Huawei remained strong and ready to buy from US companies, Ren called on the Biden White House for a "mutually beneficial" change of tack that could restore its access to the goods. — AFP

Washington, Feb. 9: The US Senate puts Donald Trump on trial for inciting insurrection on Tuesday, charging into unprecedented constitutional territory and laying bare the national trauma inflicted in the former president's attempt to overturn his re-election defeat.

The gavel will come down at 1:00 pm (1800 GMT) in the Senate, opening a trial expected to rivet much of the nation.

Inside the ornate building, Democratic prosecutors will lay out a case heavily supported by video evidence that Trump deliberately stoked rage over his election loss to Joe Biden in November, fed the country lies that the vote was rigged, then incited a mob to storm Congress on January 6.

It will make uncomfortable viewing for senators, including the many Republicans making clear they will not convict Trump, but who had to flee to safety when the violent crowd surged through the Capitol that day.

Outside, thousands of National Guard troops deployed in the aftermath of the January 6 debacle



Donald Trump

able viewing for senators, including the many Republicans making clear they will not convict Trump, but who had to flee to safety when the violent crowd surged through the Capitol that day.

Outside, thousands of National Guard troops deployed in the aftermath of the January 6 debacle

■ DEMOCRATS HOLD 50 of the 100 Senate seats and Vice President Kamala Harris is able to cast votes to end tiebreaks. But it would take a two-thirds majority for a conviction, meaning at least 17 Republican senators would have to join.

continue to patrol, while hastily thrown up fences barricade the area from ordinary Americans — visible proof that the aftershocks of the Trump era continue to rumble.

Trump becomes the first president ever to face two impeachment trials — he was acquitted in 2020 of abuse of office — as well as the first in history to be tried after leaving office.

For Democrats leading the case against the pop-

ulist real estate tycoon, Trump's crime is also a first — the "most grievous constitutional crime" in US history.

But his legal team is resting its case largely on the procedural argument that a former president cannot be tried, calling the Senate trial "absurd."

A second acquittal is all but certain for Trump, who is holed up in his luxury Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida and, after being barred from Twitter, has spent the weeks since leaving office in near silence.

Democrats hold 50 of the 100 Senate seats and Vice President Kamala Harris is able to cast votes to end tiebreaks. But it would take a two-thirds majority for a conviction, meaning at least 17 Republican senators would have to join. — AFP

— AFP

Worldwide, air pollution shortens lives by more than two years on average

Fossil fuel causes one in five deaths globally

Paris, Feb. 9: Fossil fuel pollution caused more than eight million premature deaths in 2018, accounting for nearly 20 percent of adult mortality worldwide, researchers reported Tuesday.

Half of that grim tally was split across China and India, with another million deaths equally distributed among Bangladesh, Indonesia, Japan and the United States, they reported in the journal Environmental Research.

The toxic cocktail of tiny particles cast off by burning oil, gas and especially

coal was responsible for a quarter or more of the mortality in half a dozen nations, all in Asia.

"We often discuss the dangers of fossil fuel combustion in the context of CO2 and climate change and overlook the potential health impacts," co-author Joel Schwartz, a professor of environmental epidemiology at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, said in a statement.

The potential to avoid millions of premature deaths should be a powerful additional incentive for

policymakers to drive down greenhouse gas emissions and hasten the global shift from brown to green energy, he said.

Worldwide, air pollution shortens lives by more than two years on average, earlier research has shown. Worst-hit is Asia, where average lifespan is cut 4.1 years in China, 3.9 years in India, and 3.8 years in Pakistan. In some regions of these countries, life expectancy is reduced by twice as much.

In Europe, it is shortened by eight months on average.

■ HALF OF that grim tally was split across China and India, with another million deaths equally distributed among Bangladesh, Indonesia, Japan and the United States, they reported in the journal Environmental Research.

The new study nearly doubles previous estimates of the number of people killed by fossil fuel pollution.

The World Health Organisation says that air pollution — including indoors — kills seven mil-

lion people per year, with 4.2 million of those deaths due to ambient, or outdoor, pollution.

The most recent Global Burden of Disease study — the most comprehensive catalogue of why people die — advances roughly the same numbers.

Both of these estimates relied on satellite data and surface observations to determine concentrations of the smallest — and most deadly — calibre of pollution, known as PM2.5.

But they cannot determine whether these microparticles come from

burning fossil fuels or, say, dust and wildfire smoke, according to co-author Loretta Mickley, an expert in chemistry-climate interactions at Harvard.

"With satellite data, you're seeing only pieces of the puzzle," she said.

To get a more fine-grained picture of where particle pollution comes from and its health impacts, Mickley and colleagues used a 3-D model of atmospheric chemistry, known as GEOS-Chem, that divides Earth's surface into 50-by-60-kilometre (30-by-36-mile) blocks. — AFP



DECCAN Chronicle

10 FEBRUARY 2021

Sasikala the ‘X’ factor in TN’s soap opera politics

The red carpet reception was more like those given to pop singers in star-struck declarations of adulation. Ex-convict V.K. Sasikala, who came home after serving a four-year jail sentence under the Prevention of Corruption Act, was elevated to demigod status in a 22-hour car journey that was more a procession pandering to the blind loyalty of lumpen political party elements. As a social phenomenon, it defies decoding; as a person convicted of stealing from the government treasury is elevated to the status of a neta who can bring deliverance to the people. This is not restricted to cinema-obsessed Tamil Nadu as the phenomenon encompasses Lalu Prasad Yadav and many a charismatic netas suspected of being as corrupt.

Ms Sasikala’s impact on Tamil Nadu politics is not to be dismissed though she is ineligible to stand for election. Her nephew T.T.V. Dhinakaran’s disinformation campaign cannot change the law. Her role as a backroom manipulator in Jayalalithaa’s regime when she virtually picked people for plum Cabinet posts and even made or unmade chief ministers had made her a force to be reckoned within the AIADMK

The Dravidian major AIADMK, which has alternated in power after breaking away from the DMK in 1972, is feeling anxious about the return of the power of Poes Garden, which had housed two misanthropes who manoeuvred adroitly in a domain that was a distinctly male preserve before Jayalalithaa broke the chain. The party MGR founded and Jayalalithaa nurtured may face the biggest threat with Ms Sasikala claiming it as her own despite having been summarily removed on her going to jail in

Bengaluru. Lengthy legal challenges to her being stripped of the post of general secretary may be in the offing but that does not change the electoral scene except that an AIADMK split by loyalty calls may be playing right into the hands of DMK, which pollsters are favouring to emerge victorious in the summer of 2021.

The people of a state, who were in such a thrall of cinema that they allowed it to play a larger-than-life role in the making of netas, are far more forgiving of corruption, which has historically been rampant in the 54 years of Dravidian regimes. Ms Sasikala, who has never been in electoral politics, can be expected to play only the role of a disruptor as she seeks the Jayalalithaa legacy and her party. Time is not on her side in her emergence too close to the Assembly polls to build anew her nephew’s breakaway AMMK party. Her journey to Chennai that occupied nearly 24 hours was stretched out to play to a television gallery in the highest traditions of the state’s soap opera politics. What happens from here is in the people’s court.

Pay heed to ex-judge’s plea

Justice Madan Lokur, who retired as a judge of the Supreme Court just over two years ago, has in public remarks expressed his “disappointment” with the manner the top court has conducted itself in the discharge of its constitutional functions, and has recently even called upon the apex court to adopt an “interventionist” approach to check the “rampant misuse (even abuse) of the country’s criminal justice system.

A hands-off approach by the Supreme Court in the matter of a spate of FIRs for the same presumed violation encourages those who take advantage of the law to trouble fellow citizens, the retired judge observed.

Making a direct reference in this regard to the growing tendency on the part of some to file multiple FIRs, Justice Lokur drew attention to the case of prominent journalists, including several well-regarded editors, and an MP, Shashi Tharoor, being subjected to harassment through the filing of near-identical FIRs in several states, accusing them of sedition and causing social harmony. In the case of Mr Tharoor and the journalists, their initial tweets on the cause of the death of a farmer in the course of the recent agitation had led to the spate of FIRs being lodged — clearly by the people of the same motivation or persuasion.

Justice Lokur contrasted the above case with those of two television anchors — Arnab Goswami and Amish Devgan. The case of the first was heard within 15 hours of the top court being approached. His prayer to club the FIRs was instantly heeded. The other anchor was also given some relief. But the senior journalists charged with sedition, and Mr Tharoor, have not had the same luck. The former judge has, therefore, urged the Supreme Court to be “interventionist” and “lay down the law” in the case of multiple FIRs with the same content.

Criticisms of Supreme Court judgments by retired members of the top judiciary are not unknown. Nor is the failure of the top court to take action, as in constitutional matters concerning Kashmir, CAA, and habeas corpus — issues on which Justice Lokur has also expressed himself. But urgings to be “interventionist” from a retired member of the top court bench do appear novel. In this lies their freshness and historical value.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

K. SUDHAKAR
Printer & Publisher

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:

Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad - 500 003, Ph: 040-27803930/4; Fax : 040-27805256
Vijayawada: No.C-3 & 4 Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.), Ph: 0866-2555284/2555287; Telefax: 0866-2555234

Visakhapatnam: Survey No.1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017 (A.P), Ph: 0891-2552333/2552334; Fax: 0891-2755285

Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawaleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208

Anantapur: Thapovan colony, Bangalore By-Pass Road, Anantapur - 515004, Ph: 08554-276903; Fax: 08554-276904

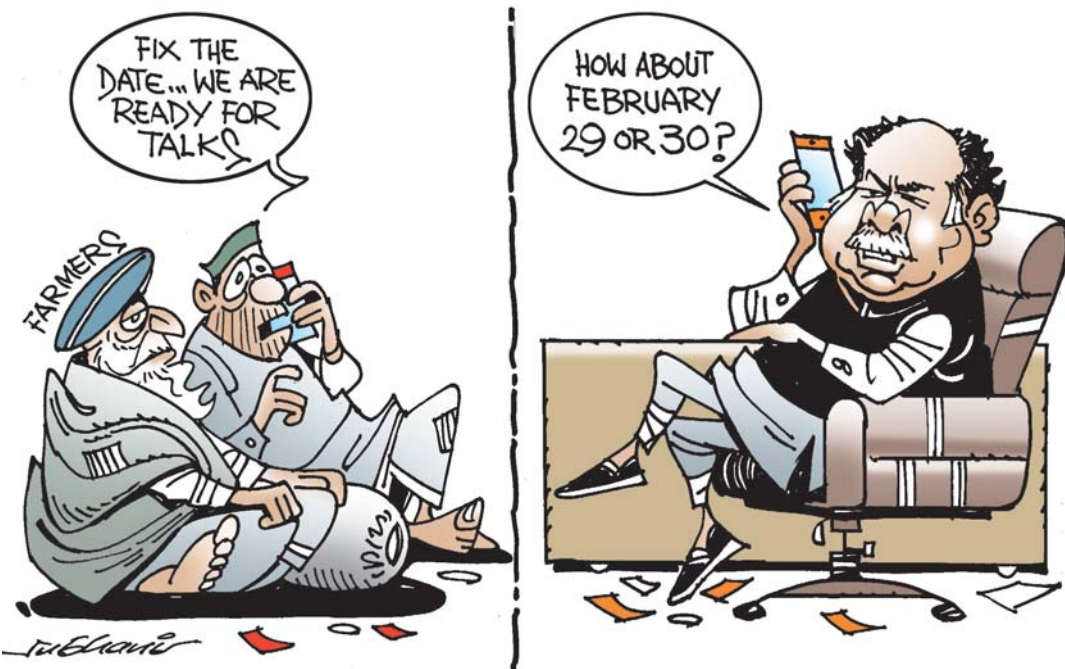
Karimnagar: Survey No.1341, Vavilalpalay Colony, Jagityala Road, Karimnagar - 505 001, Ph: 0878-2228908; Telefax: 0878-2220433

Nellore: Survey No.527/2, Burrupur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chennudugunta Panchayat, Nellore, Ph: 0861-2348581/82; Telefax: 0861-2348580

Chennai: SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032, Ph: 044-22254747/48/50/51; Advt Fax: 22254765/22254766/42305325

Coinbatore: 77, Vivekananda Road, Ramnagar, Coimbatore - 641 009, Ph: 0422 2231255
Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. H/SD-348/2006-08

Subhani



Playing with God’s world: ‘Growth’ has a high price



Sanjeev Ahluwalia

Senior BJP leader Uma Bharati’s first reaction to the terrible news of the Chamoli glacier break/avalanche disaster on Sunday — “I told you so” — fully aligns with the reservations of all those who put a higher value on conservation than on the development of natural resources for economic growth.

On Sunday, a part of the Nanda Devi glacier broke off and avalanched down, causing a flash flood in the Rishiganga and Dhaulinganga — the upper riverine stretches of the Alakananda, which feeds into the mighty Ganga — washing away back-to-back dams diverting water into a privately-owned hydro project on the Rishiganga stretch and seriously damaging an under-construction government-owned power generation project at Tapovan.

As minister for water resources in the first BJP government of Narendra Modi, Ms Bharati had dragged her feet on the development of the upper reaches of the Ganga in Uttarakhand — much to the dismay of gung-ho advocates of development and growth. Conservationists cite the “fragile” structure of the Himalayas to caution against over-exploitation of the riverine system for electricity generation.

Others go so far as to blame the recent much-publicised widening of the highways connecting the Char Dham — the four pilgrimage shrines in Garhwal — Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamnotri. Construction of roads is still done the old way, by simply carving additional road width out from the mountain side, causing significant soil erosion both above and below the road. Measures to bind the exposed mountainside using nets or by planting fast-growing

ground cover are only a sideshow, rarely given prominence, in already overloaded road construction budgets.

But then, isn’t it always “the growth-wallahs” who stick their necks out by measuring risk versus rewards, even in the playground of the gods — as the Himalayas are believed to be. On the other hand, it is “safe” to be a conservationist, simply because there are so few downsides to the belief that only the sparing use of natural resources is sustainable. Multiple alternative sources of growth do remain unexploited, like higher productivity in the use of existing resources or the use of alternative “clean” technologies for power generation, like solar or offshore wind.

At times like the present one, in the immediate aftermath of a human tragedy, calculating the trade-off between lives cruelly snatched away from loved ones and the potential economic gains from development seems particularly pointless.

It is also unclear to what extent the disaster is the outcome of over-exploitation of resources in the back-to-back construction of dams to divert water into tunnels to run turbines for electricity generation. The shearing-off of glaciers, causing an avalanche and a flash flood in downstream riverine systems, is a natural calamity. After all, avalanches do happen, and lives are lost.

Doubtless, lessons must and will be learnt, with respect to continuous monitoring of the higher reaches for signs of fragility. Assessing the geological safety of hill development — extending road access, urban sprawl and related projects — is no longer a choice. Coupled with the depredations of climate change, already fragile ecosystems could tumble over the edge much faster if the rate and style of

intrusive development is not carefully regulated.

How much of a say should local communities have in large projects being created in their midst is another vexed question — on which there are no clear answers. The “wisdom and public interest orientation” of NIMBY (not in my backyard) communities varies and is often romanticised. In comparison, centralised planning is easy to vilify as representing the cruel, uncaring impositions of rules made by “outsiders”. Ultimately, help must come from science in guiding the government on project site selection and regulations for risk minimisation and occupational safety for project workers.

In 2013, PM Narendra Modi made history as chief minister of Gujarat by arranging transport for Gujarati pilgrims stranded in the Kedarnath flash floods. In a similar vein, within a day of the incident, R.K. Singh, Union minister for power, visited the damaged NTPC-owned Tapovan hydro generation project.

VIP visits are a tradition, albeit a much-reviled, device for speeding up the release of funds for relief work and energising those engaged in the onerous on-site task of rescue, relief distribution and rehabilitation. But it is a tradition that a politician ignores only at his peril — after all “we are like that only”. Happily, the minister, previously a civil servant who retired as India’s home secretary — did more than just that.

He was on the button when he commented that the structural safety of glacier formations around large project construction sites in mountainous regions should be monitored for geological stress, much more so than they are done now. Early advan-

ce warnings of incipient trouble can enable the evacuation of workers, at the very least.

Adroit operational steps to minimise the downstream damage also mitigated the scale of the disaster. Reportedly, emergency measures to release water stored in downstream dams at Rishikesh and Srinagar helped create the required space to absorb the upstream water shock. All these actions speak to our improving capacity for the safe operation of large water systems. To the credit of the civil administration, households along the affected stretch of the river, potentially under threat from flood waters, were reportedly evacuated as a precaution, though the waters subsided subsequently.

National Disaster Management Authority personnel were also visibly in attendance, although it is unclear whether more boots on the ground, in an area chock-a-block with the security forces, is of additional value. The NDMA, sadly, remains a neglected cousin of the military and the police in terms of their technical capacity, rescue equipment and surge capacity for assisting the local civil authorities.

The bulk of the casualties are of on-site contract workers — mostly migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Hopefully, once these two hydro projects are completed, the memories of those who laid down their lives during their completion will be commemorated in a suitable manner.

The CM of Uttarakhand announced ₹4 lakhs as relief for the families of each of the victims. An additional ₹2 lakhs each would be given from the Prime Minister’s Relief Fund.

The question which remains unanswered, however, goes far beyond the welfare of the families of the deceased. The jury is still out on what is an acceptable societal trade-off between the risk of mortality and morbidity and the compulsions of economic development.

The writer is adviser, Observer Research Foundation

LETTERS

UTTARAKHAND

The enormity of devastation of a deluge caused by a glacier burst, leaving scores of people dead, hundreds missing and two power projects washed off in Uttarakhand is shocking. The sudden surge of water due to avalanches, glacier bursts and glacial lake floods there are said to be unusual in this season. The constitution of dams in Himalayan region of India and China is dissuaded by scientists as they pose threat to ecosystem. The climate change due to global warming has been throwing new challenges by accelerating the melting of glaciers. It’s time to heed the alarms from the nature and take steps to protect and be protected.

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao
Vizianagaram

KCR AND BJP

On Y.S. Sharmila’s point of view it is right to start a new political party that too in her father’s name as she could not get justice from his brother CM Y.S.Jagan Mohan Reddy. It is good for the Telugu people of both the Telugu-speaking states as the effect of new party compel ruling governments to do something good for the common man. Nobody knows whether Sharmila will succeed or not but surely makes a mark in the politics of both the Telugu states.

Panchakarla.Govardhana Rao
Kankipadu

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Apollo-14 splashes down

BOARD USS (NEW ORLEANS), February. 9

The Apollo-14 spaceship splashed down in the South Pacific at 2.35 a.m. from its flight to the moon. The spacecraft was in an upright position as the rescue helicopters circled overhead.

Millions of television viewers spotted the spacecraft with its three massive parachutes before it plummeted into the sea about eight kilometres from the recovery ship, “New Orleans”, reports DPA.

Skand Tayal



US-Russia ties, already rocky, get worse after Navalny jailing

The fraught relationship between the United States and Russia has come under further strain after the alleged poisoning and recent sentencing of prominent Russian Opposition leader Alexei Navalny. On Feb. 4, US President Joe Biden, in his first articulation of foreign policy after assuming office, had some harsh words for President Vladimir Putin. Mr Biden “made it clear that the days of the US rolling over in the face of Russia’s aggressive actions — interfering with our elections, cyberattacks, poisoning its citizens — are over”. Castigating Russia for “the politically motivated jailing of Alexei Navalny”, President Biden cautioned Moscow that the US “will not hesitate to raise the cost on Russia”, alluding to possible additional sanctions.

Ignoring diplomatic niceties, President Biden said: “The politically motivated jailing of Alexei Navalny and the Russian efforts to suppress freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are a matter of deep concern. He should be released, immediately and without conditions.”

On February 2, after Mr Navalny was sentenced to more than two years in prison on rather flimsy charges, new US secretary of state Anthony Blinken tweeted: “We reiterate our

call for the Russian government to immediately and unconditionally release Mr Navalny, as well as hundreds of other Russian citizens wrongfully detained in recent weeks for exercising the rights.”

Such public criticism is likely to deeply offend Mr Putin, the strong leader of a proud country. Russia would be loath to taking any action under outside pressure and the chances of the Russian State showing any leniency towards a high-profile dissident may have simply vanished.

Besides the persecution of Mr Navalny, the Biden administration takes office with a deep-rooted suspicion towards Mr Putin’s Russia. The Democratic Party holds Russia’s involvement in the leaking of presidential candidate Hillary Clinton’s emails responsible for her defeat in 2016 by Donald Trump. In a signed *Foreign Affairs* article in March 2020, Joe Biden had declared solidarity with “Russian civil society, that has stood up against President Vladimir Putin’s kleptocratic authoritarian system”. Laying down his future policy, candidate Biden wrote that “to counter Russian aggression, we must keep (Nato’s) military capabilities sharp”, and threatened to “impose real costs on Russia for its violation of interna-

tional norms”.

Incoming national security adviser Jake Sullivan added to the chorus by declaring that “unlike the previous administration, we will be taking steps to hold Russia accountable for the range of malign actions Russia has taken”.

America’s penchant for conducting critical bilateral relations in the full glare of media publicity may win the Biden establishment accolades from internal constituencies but are unlikely to lead to effective outcomes.

The United States is no longer the world’s undisputed economic and military power, with China snapping at its heels. Its grip on alliances like Nato has also weakened. In the backdrop of the Covid-linked economic downturn, much of the democratic world puts national interests first. In this dynamic and uncertain international environment, it is doubtful that other key powers will stand by the US if it tries to impose more punitive sanctions on Russia. The US, however, certainly has the capacity to impose unilateral sanctions isolating Russia from the global financial and banking network, that would adversely hit the Russian economy.

In his February 4 address at the state department, Mr Biden assured a wary

world that the US will act “not to meet yesterday’s challenges, but today’s and tomorrow’s” and to “take on directly the challenges posed... by our most serious competitor China”. Mr Biden declared that “we will confront China’s economic abuses; counter its aggressive, coercive actions; to push back on China’s attack on human rights, intellectual property and global governance.”

At his confirmation hearing, Mr Blinken had also clearly identified China as “posing the most significant challenge of any nation-state in the world for the United States”.

The Biden administration would be well advised to take a hard look at America’s declining influence in the world and prioritise adversaries and challenges. Russia now has a shrinking footprint on the global strategic map. It’s no longer an expansionist power. In 2008, Russia was severely provoked by Nato’s offer of membership to Ukraine and Georgia. Mr Putin had clearly warned at that time that Nato’s expansion towards Russia “would be taken in Russia as a direct threat to the security of our country”. Russia’s annexation of Crimea and action in Donbas, South Ossetia and Abkhazia were a riposte to the aggressive intentions of Nato.

President Putin had a career in the KGB in the days of the Soviet empire. He has firm control over all the levers of power in Russia and is popular among citizens. With Mr Putin at the helm, Russia is not an ideology-driven country, like the erstwhile Soviet Union. Russia is now obsessed with internal stability and external security. Outside support to vocal Opposition leaders is seen by the Kremlin as a West-inspired attempt to destabilise the country.

Russia poses no future challenge to the United States or the West, be it economic or technological. The West lacks any levers to soften the harsh internal system in Russia. Public criticism of a proud nation will only harden positions and genuine concerns are best conveyed behind closed doors.

For America’s own future primacy, the real challenge is from China and its demonising of Russia will only push the Kremlin into the Dragon’s embrace, immeasurably adding to China’s clout and aggression. The Biden administration needs a pragmatic foreign policy, overcome its prejudices and arrest the slide of US-Russia ties on this slippery slope.

The writer is a retired Indian diplomat and a former ambassador

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	51,329.08	-0.04
Nifty 50	15,109.30	-0.04
S&P 500*	3,915.38	-0.01
Dollar (₹)	72.89	0.10
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.41	-0.39
Euro (₹)	87.99	-0.26
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,559.495	0.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	61.11	0.91
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.074	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.146	-0.013

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Gross NPAs of PSBs decline to ₹6.09 L cr in Sept.

Gross non-performing assets (NPAs) of public sector banks declined from Rs 8.96 lakh crore in March 2018 to Rs 6.09 lakh crore in Sept. 2020 due to various government measures, minister of state for finance Anurag Singh Thakur informed the Rajya Sabha. There was record recovery of Rs 2.54 lakh crore during March 2018-Sept. 2020 and 11 out of 12 PSBs reported profit in the first half FY21 amounting to Rs 14,688 crore.

IOB posts net profit of ₹213cr in Dec. quarter



Indian Overseas Bank (IOB) reported a net profit of Rs 212.87 crore for the December 2020 quarter as provisions for bad loans declined. IOB had posted a net loss of Rs 6,075.49 crore in the year-ago quarter. It had posted a net profit of Rs 148.14 crore in the Sept. quarter. Total income rose to Rs 5,786.51 crore from Rs 5,197.94 crore YoY. Gross NPAs fell to 12.19 per cent of gross advances from 17.12 per cent.

Govt to close two pharma PSUs, disinvest in three

The Centre has decided to close two pharma sector undertakings and disinvest in the other three. "The Department of Pharmaceuticals has five public sector undertakings. Out of the five PSUs, the government has taken a decision to close two pharma PSUs, namely Indian Drugs & Pharmaceuticals Ltd and Rajasthan Drugs & Pharmaceuticals Ltd," minister of chemicals and fertilisers D. V. Sadananda Gowda said.

German exports see biggest dip since 2009

Germany's exports plunged by 9.3 per cent last year as the pandemic dragged down demand, the biggest drop since the financial crisis in 2009. Imports dropped 71 per cent. That also was the steepest decline since 2009, when exports fell by 18.4 per cent and imports by 17.5 per cent. The US remained the single biggest destination for German exports despite a 12.5 per cent drop, at 103.8 bn euros (\$125 bn).



Workers to be briefed on rights, concerns Wistron to restart riot-hit iPhone unit

SARITHA RAI
FEB. 9

Apple Inc's manufacturing partner Wistron Corp will hire workers and restart operations in its Narasapura factory outside Bengaluru after a violent protest shut the iPhone-manufacturing facility last December. Apple's teams and independent auditors have been working with Wistron over the past eight weeks to put the necessary systems and processes in place, the Cupertino-based iPhone maker said in an emailed statement on Tuesday. However, the Taiwanese contractor will continue to face scrutiny. "A comprehensive set of corrective actions has now been completed and Wistron has restructured their recruiting team and



enhanced training and support for workers," Apple said in the statement. "Wistron remains on probation and we will monitor their progress closely." Apple had suspended new orders to Wistron in December after workers who had been hired on monthly pay of about \$200 stormed the factory and rioted over unpaid salaries, destroying furni-

ture and equipment leading to losses worth millions of dollars. All workers in the facility will undergo a new training programme to ensure they understand their rights and how to raise concerns, Apple said in the statement. Its representatives will remain on site to validate that the new processes are effective. —Bloomberg

Pak to seek debt relief from China

FASEEH MANGI
FEB. 9

Pakistan plans to ask China for relief on payments for power projects Beijing financed over the past eight years, the latest developing nation that's struggling to repay debt under President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative. In informal talks, Pakistan and China have discussed easing terms on the repayment of debt on about a dozen power

plants, according to a person with knowledge of the matter, who said Islamabad hasn't made a formal request yet. The parties have canvassed Beijing's willingness to stagger debt payments, as opposed to lowering equity returns, the person said, requesting anonymity as the plan is private. An enormous build-out of Chinese-financed power plants in Pakistan, which was originally intended to solve its electricity shortages, has

resulted in a surplus that Islamabad isn't able to afford. Infrastructure projects funded by China's initiative in other developing nations, such as Sri Lanka and Malaysia, have suffered issues ranging from heavy debt loads to corruption. China has denied US criticism that the initiative leads to debt traps, while acknowledging that countries have had difficulties repaying loans due to the pandemic-induced global recession. —Bloomberg

INDIA ENERGY DEMAND TO SEE FASTEST GROWTH, TO OVERTAKE EU

New Delhi, Feb. 9: India's energy demand will increase more than that of any other country over the next two decades, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said on Tuesday, forecasting that India would overtake the European Union as the world's third-largest energy consumer by 2030. An expanding economy, population, urbanisation and industrialisation will result in India's energy needs growing at three times the global average under today's policies, said the IEA's India Energy Outlook 2021. "India has arrived at the centre of the world energy stage," said Fatih Birol, the IEA's executive director. Energy use has doubled since 2000, with most of that demand met by coal and oil. This is set to grow about 35 per cent until 2030, down from 50 per cent before the coronavirus pandemic. India will see the addition of 13 new Mumbais in urban population, boosting demand for cement, steel, electricity, he said. IEA saw primary energy consumption almost doubling to 1,123 million tonnes of oil equivalent as the GDP expands to \$8.6 trillion by 2040. India at present is the fourth-largest global energy consumer behind China, the United States and the European Union. —PTI

LIC IPO to reserve 10% shares for policyholders

New Delhi, Feb. 9: Up to 10 per cent of the LIC IPO issue size would be reserved for policyholders, minister of state for finance Anurag Thakur said on Tuesday.



Nirmala Sitharaman said the initial public offering (IPO) of Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) would be launched in the next financial year, beginning April 1. The LIC Amendment Act has been made part of the Finance Bill, thereby bringing the required legislative amendment for launching IPO of the country's largest life insurer. The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management

(Dipam), which manages the government's equity in state-owned companies, has already selected actuarial firm Milliman Advisors for ascertaining the embedded value of LIC. Deloitte and SBI Caps have been appointed as pre-IPO transaction advisors. The Budget 2021-22 has set a disinvestment target of Rs 1.75 lakh crore, higher than the Rs 32,000 crore estimated to be garnered in the current fiscal. Of the Rs 1.75 lakh crore, Rs 1 lakh crore is to come from selling government stake in public sector banks and financial institutions, and Rs 75,000 crore would come as CPSE disinvestment receipts. —PTI

Market received Budget well: FM

New Delhi, Feb. 9: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said the stock market has received the Union Budget 2021-22 with "positivity" with an 11 per cent increase in equity indices over the past week.



Nirmala Sitharaman

She said the Budget, which was presented in Parliament on February 1, has set the tone for greater play of the private sector, gave space for entrepreneurship, has come clean on the spending intent and unveiled a policy highlighting areas the government wants to stay away from. "We have now come over to the 10th day after the Budget was read out. Markets for the first time, I

understand, have completely for a whole week kept the pace up with a sense of positivity. "Earlier markets being positive and going up for a few hours, would itself be a good message," Sitharaman said an Indian Chamber of Commerce event. She said the government has taken steps to instill confidence in taxpayers. It has not put any additional burden on taxpayers by way of increasing taxes to fund the stimulus, Sitharaman said. "We are staying away from burdening the taxpayer any further, while simultaneously easing compliance, record keeping," the minister added. The minister said the time bar for reopening of past assessments has been cut down to three years in the Budget, from six years earlier, because the intent of the tax department is not to bother a regular taxpayer. —PTI

Teens drive civil behaviour online

FC BUREAU
HYDERABAD, FEB. 9

Microsoft on Tuesday said fewer people in India experienced negative online interactions or encountered online risks in 2020 compared to the previous year, thanks largely to positive interactions by India's teens. Unveiling results from its annual study, "Civility, Safety, and Interactions Online - 2020" along with findings from its 2020 Digital Civility Index (DCI), Microsoft said India's score in online civility had improved to 68 this year from 71 in 2019. The DCI survey covered 16,000 respondents. The survey found that the improvement in online experience was contributed by the positive approach of teenagers aged 13-16. The online experience among adults in 16 and above age group remained relatively poor. The measure of online civility among teenagers is 67 compared to a lower rank of 69 for adults. "It's heartening to see our next generation take the lead in driving posi-

Dos for safer internet

- Act with empathy, compassion and kindness. Treat everyone with dignity & respect
- Appreciate cultural differences. Engage thoughtfully & avoid personal attacks
- To pause and think before responding. Do not post anything that could hurt others
- Tell someone when feeling unsafe. Offer support to those who are targets of online abuse or cruelty

tive interactions online, and to witness digital citizens come together to uplift online communities during the pandemic," said Keshav Dhakad, group head & general counsel, Microsoft India. "Nonetheless, threats such as hate speech, together with other uncivil behaviours, continue to pervade society." Online risks such as hate speech doubled from 2016.

Murdoch Jr., Uday Shankar plan venture to acquire media firms

BAIJU KALESH & ANTO ANTONY
FEB. 9

James Murdoch's investment company Lupa Systems and Uday Shankar, former president of Walt Disney Asia Pacific unit, are weighing a plan to raise funds through a special purpose acquisition company (Spac), people familiar with the matter said. Murdoch, former CEO of 21st Century Fox Inc, and Shankar are seeking a blank-cheque vehicle to acquire Asian companies in sectors, including media and technology, the people said. The joint venture is sounding out advisers as well as potential investors in the Spac. They are considering listing the vehicle in the US, one of the people said. Deliberations are at an early stage, and details of the potential Spac, including venue may change, the people said. Shankar and a representative for Lupa declined to comment. Lupa and Shankar announced a partnership in January to look for growth avenues across



Uday Shankar



James Murdoch

emerging markets. The 48-year-old son of billionaire Rupert Murdoch resigned from the board of News Corp in July last year, citing differences of opinion with the publishing company. Lupa entered India less than two years ago and has built a portfolio of technology investments, according to the statement. Murdoch and Shankar previously worked together at Star India, which became the country's largest media company before Walt Disney's takeover of a swathe of 21st Century Fox's assets, including Star, in 2019. Shankar worked for the Asia-Pacific unit of Disney after the deal, but left in December last year.

EQUITY MF REDEMPTIONS UNABATED IN JANUARY

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, FEB. 9

The mutual fund industry's average assets under management (AUM) hit an all-time high of Rs 31.84 lakh crore in January. However, the net AUM fell to Rs 30.50 lakh crore in January on profit booking from Rs 31.02 lakh crore in December, monthly data released by the Association of Mutual Funds in India (Amfi) showed. Equity mutual funds continue to witness outflows as record gains in the equity market in January led retail investors to book profit, with equity-oriented schemes seeing outflows worth Rs 9,253.22 crore. Equity-linked savings schemes and other equity schemes also witnessed outflows worth Rs 2,940.96 crore. The hybrid schemes witnessed net inflows worth Rs 2,141.3 crore while the debt fund category witnessed outflows worth Rs 33,408.76 crore. Equity ETFs, index funds, gold ETFs and fund of funds investing overseas in total witnessed combined inflows worth Rs 7,966.82 crore. "Equity-oriented mutual funds continued to witness net outflows for the seventh month in a row. The continuation of net outflows from equity funds could be attributed to profit booking/portfolio rebalancing as markets continue to touch new highs," said Himanshu Srivastava, associate director-manager research, Morningstar India. "Though on an overall basis, the net outflow was lower than the previous month, yet in terms of absolute quantum, it continues to be on the higher side," he said.

AGGREGATORS | ON PROWL | Mom-and-pop sellers being aided to scale up business

Wall St. investing billions to scale up Amazon sellers

SPENCER SOPER
FEB. 9

Some of the biggest names on Wall Street and in Silicon Valley-JPMorgan Chase, Advent International, Khosla Ventures among them—are pumping billions of dollars into mom-and-pops selling everything from tea kettles to jock itch remedies on Amazon.com Inc. Investment banks, venture firms and private equity shops are backing so-called Amazon aggregators—often led by e-commerce veterans—that are betting they can take up-and-coming sellers, who often operate out of their garages, and transform them into global brands.

The aggregators say they have the expertise to select strong products and avoid faddish ones that flame out before they have a chance to grow. The latest entrant, Branded Group, said on Tuesday it had purchased 20 houseware and leisure brands. Formed last summer and flush with \$150 million raised by venture firm Target Global, Branded will be run by Pierre Poignant, who previously led the southeast Asian online marketplace Lazada, and Michael Ronen, who spent almost 20 years in mergers and acquisitions at Goldman Sachs and also worked for SoftBank's Silicon Valley venture division.



About 40 Amazon aggregators have emerged in the past few years, according to people following the trend, with most of them still quietly seeking deals behind the scenes. Eight have announced fundraising rounds totalling more than \$2.5 billion since 2019. Thrasio, launched in 2018, has the deepest pockets and has already purchased 90 companies with

\$1.75 billion in funding and debt from backers that include the PE firm Advent International. Perch, founded in 2020, has raised \$130 million and gobbled up almost 30 brands. Several PE firms have launched websites to court Amazon sellers. The demand for Amazon mom-and-pops reflects the maturation of the e-commerce giant's third-party marketplace, which accounts for more than half of all products sold on the site. The web store has grown so large that deep-pocketed investors can prospect for tomorrow's big hit among the millions of merchants competing on the site. "The emergence of these companies

reflects how selling with Amazon offers small businesses powerful opportunities to build their brands and reach millions of customers," an Amazon spokesperson said. Aggregators look for consistent money-makers with annual sales up to about \$10 million; they generally offer three to four times a target's annual profit, including the salary the owners pay themselves. The buyers don't focus on specific categories and are content to jam together a potpourri of brands. Perch, for example, sells maternity belts, auto upholstery tools, peppermint-based athlete's foot cures and virtual-reality headsets. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Olympic qualifying marathon in Delhi

New Delhi: The New Delhi National Marathon 2021, a qualification event for the Tokyo Olympics and recognised by Athletics Federation of India, will be held here on March 7. Rashpal Singh and Jyoti Gawte won the men's and women's titles respectively in the 2020 edition with timings of 2:23:29s and 2:50:37s. "The New Delhi National Marathon 2021 stands recognised by Athletics Federation of India and it will be held on 7th March 2021 in New Delhi," the AFI said. "The performance of athletes of Full Marathons in this Marathon will be considered for selection/participation in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games provided they achieve the qualifying standard as fixed by World Athletics."

The Tokyo Olympics marathon qualifying timings for men and women are 2:11:30s and 2:29:30s respectively. — *PTI*

Bamford stars as Leeds sink Palace

Leeds: Patrick Bamford scored his 100th career goal as Leeds United cruised to a 2-0 win against Crystal Palace on Monday.

Marcelo Bielsa's side took the lead through Jack Harrison's early strike at Elland Road. Bamford reached his century after the interval to seal Leeds' third win in their last four Premier League games. His 12th goal of the season was a sweet moment for Bamford, who had a miserable loan spell at Palace in 2015-16 while on the books at Chelsea. Leeds are up to 10th place and their impressive first season back in the top-flight could yet feature a late push for a Europa League berth.

A first clean-sheet since December 29 was another welcome boost for Bielsa after six games without keeping the opposition at bay. — *AFP*

Suarez scores but Atletico stumble

Madrid: Atletico Madrid slipped up in La Liga for the first time in nine games on Monday as Celta Vigo snatched a late equaliser to deliver a ray of hope to Barcelona and Real Madrid.

Luis Suarez scored twice to overturn Santi Mina's opener for Celta, with Atletico on course to restore their 10-point lead at the top of the table. But Facundo Ferreyra slid in to score in the 89th minute to earn a deserved 2-2 draw for the visitors, meaning Atletico's advantage at the end of the weekend is reduced to eight, still with a game in hand. Atletico still have a considerable cushion but after Madrid and Barca beat Huesca and Real Betis respectively, there is at least room for encouragement for the chasing pack. — *AFP*

No hugs, high-5s at Tokyo Games

Tokyo: No socialising, no handshakes and definitely no hugs — that's what athletes at the coronavirus-postponed Tokyo Olympics can expect this summer, according to a virus rule-book released on Tuesday by organisers. The 33-page document — the last in a series of "playbooks" drawn up in a bid to ensure the Games can go ahead safely — also warns athletes they could be kicked out of their events if they break strict anti-virus rules. Under the guidelines, athletes will be tested for the virus at least once every four days, and will be barred from competing if they return a confirmed positive test. Their time in Japan will be "minimised to reduce the risk of infection," and those staying at the Olympic Village will be expected to "avoid unnecessary forms of physical contact." — *AFP*

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

FOOTBALL

FA Cup: Fifth round — Swansea vs Manchester City from 11 pm; Leicester City vs Brighton from 1 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 1, HD; Everton vs Tottenham Hotspur from 1:45 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

Regd. No. H/SD/509/2021-23

Printed and Published by **K. Sudhakar** on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at Deccan Chronicle Press situated at Rajamahendravaram, Rajamahendravaram Rd., Rajamahendravaram, Dhawaleswaram Rd., Rajamahendravaram, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208. RNI Registration No. 3081/1957. Editor: Kaushik Mitter

CHECKMATE

Warhorse Anderson hands a rare home defeat to king Kohli's India

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR
CHENNAI, FEB. 9

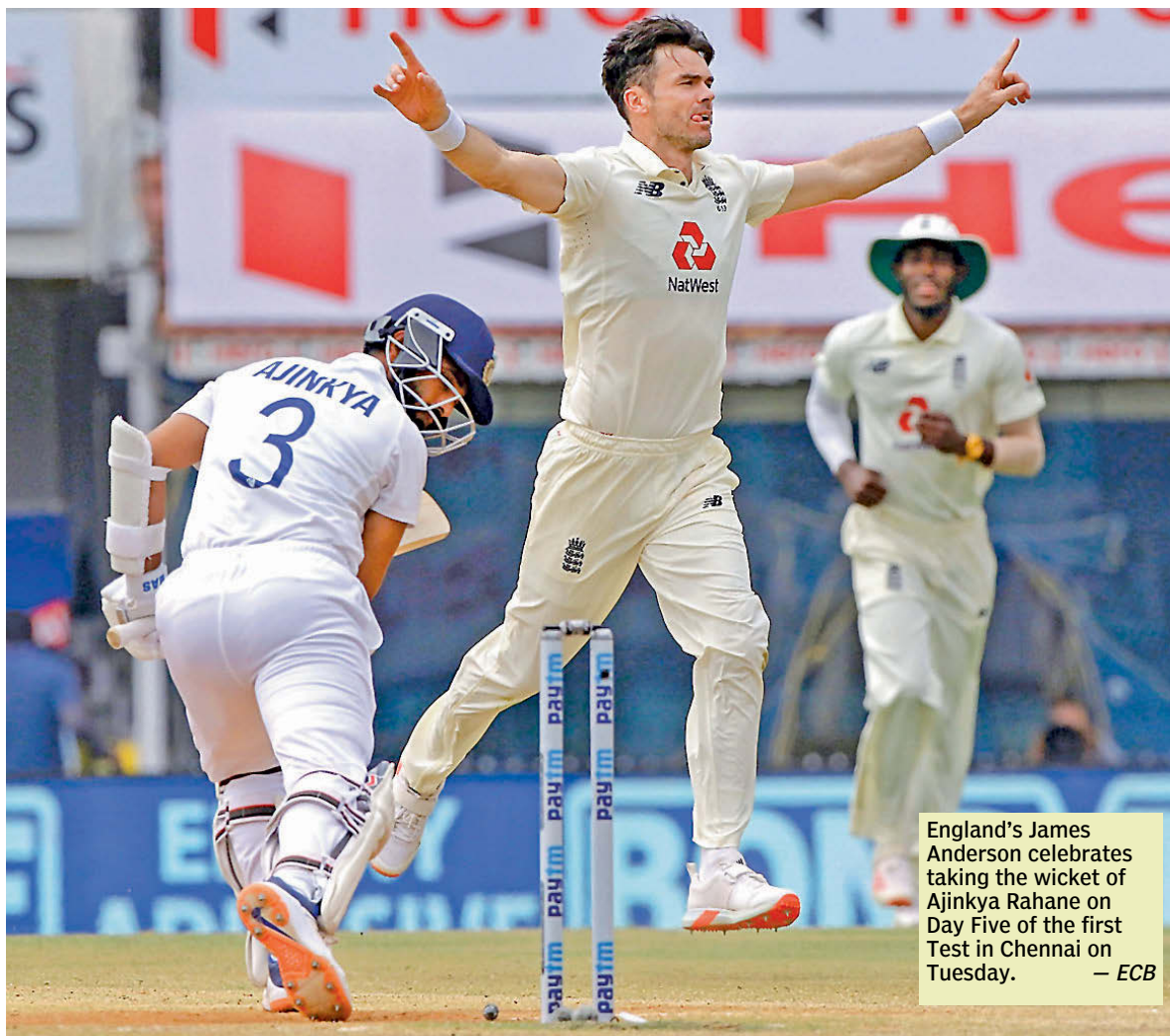
What started as an ambitious chase of 420 turned into mere survival in just about an hour. And the faintest of hopes to save the Test was dashed much before tea. The inevitable was delayed a little by a near-flawless innings from skipper Virat Kohli (72).

A clinical bowling performance earned England a thumping 227-run win over India for a 1-0 lead in the four-match series. While it dented India's prolific home run — only their second defeat since 2012 — England continued their brilliant 'away' streak by making it six on the trot. Within a fortnight of the dizzying high of breaching the Gabbatour, India slumped to their first defeat in the new millennium at fortress Chepauk.

Now, India need at least two wins and a draw in the remaining three matches to qualify for the World Test Championship final to be held at Lord's in July. Left-arm spinner Jack Leach, who had a forgettable outing in the first innings, broke open India's fancied batting line-up by removing Cheteshwar Pujara.

On a deteriorating fifth day pitch, where spinners were expected to pose the bigger threat, James Anderson produced an outstanding spell of fast bowling in the morning. Old warhorse Anderson is one of the finest exponents of swing bowling. He dug deep into his repertoire and used the reverse swing to his advantage to strike twice in a span of four balls. India were left reeling at 92 for four.

The way Anderson breached the defence of both Shubman Gill and Ajinkya Rahane seemed like an action replay. The cartwheeling off-stump, on both occasions, made for a spectacular sight. Before India could recover from the double blow, Anderson sent Rishabh Pant packing with a soft dismissal. Joe Root, at short cover, pounced a simple catch off a leading edge. Anderson's



England's James Anderson celebrates taking the wicket of Ajinkya Rahane on Day Five of the first Test in Chennai on Tuesday. — *ECB*

SCORECARD

England 1st Innings: 578
India 1st Innings: 337
England 2nd Innings: 178
India 2nd Innings (overnight 39/1): Rohit Sharma b J. Leach 12, Shubman Gill b J. Anderson 50, Cheteshwar Pujara c Stokes b J. Leach 15, Virat Kohli b B. Stokes 72, Ajinkya Rahane b J. Anderson 0, Rishabh Pant c Root b J. Anderson 11, Washington Sundar c Buttler b D. Bess 0, R. Ashwin c Buttler b J. Leach 9, Shahbaz Nadeem c Burns b J. Leach 0, Ishant Sharma (not out) 5, Jasprit Bumrah c Buttler b J. Archer 4. Extras (b-8, lb-5, nb-1) 14. **Total (all out in 58.1 overs) 192.**
FOW: 1-25, 2-58, 3-92, 4-92, 5-110, 6-117, 7-171, 8-179, 9-179.
Bowling: Jofra Archer 91-4-23-1, Jack Leach 26-4-76-4, James Anderson 11-4-17-3, Dominic Bess 8-0-50-1, Ben Stokes 4-1-13-1.

astonishing spell read 5-3-6-3.

As Washington Sundar, caught behind off Dom Bess, followed suit for a five-ball duck, India were reduced to 117 for six inside the first session. Jofra Archer steamed in and unleashed a barrage of bouncers. R. Ashwin had to take blows on his head, fingers and body to see India through to lunch.

Kohli, who hasn't scored a Test century since November 2019, looked set to end the

drought. He smashed erring off-spinner Bess for three consecutive boundaries. Against Ben Stokes, Kohli punched through the covers elegantly and pulled with authority. However, a probing delivery from Stokes kept low and crashed into Kohli's off-stump.

England bowling coach Jon Lewis' prediction came true when Leach roared back from his first-innings thrashing to end with figures of 4 for 76.

Root all praise for 'GOAT' Anderson

AGE CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 9

England skipper Joe Root was all praise for his bowling unit who helped the visitors take a 1-0 lead against India in the four-match series. Pacer James Anderson took three wickets in an impressive spell on the final morning to trigger India's collapse.

Describing Anderson as "England's greatest of all time", Root said the swing bowler has set high standards. "He seems to get better all the time. His skill level keeps improving, his work-rate is as good as anyone's I have ever seen and his fitness levels are probably the best they have ever been."

India suffered their first defeat at Chepauk since 1999 and Root knows Virat Kohli & Co. would come back hard in the second Test, starting here on February 13. "It's certainly a good victory but in the scheme of the series we know it's just a start. India are a brilliant team, especially in these conditions and a proud nation as well. They will 'come back hard at us but to be sat here 1-0 up is really good. We have 'set a benchmark now and have something to work from and compare ourselves to. There is 'still areas we can improve and that excites me, to play as well as we have and still be able to get better," Root said.

NUMBERS GAME

● India's 227 runs defeat against England in the first Test was their first after eight successive wins at home.

● The last time India lost a Test in Chennai was in 1999. It was an epic encounter, which Pakistan won by 12 runs. Since then, India won five out of eight Tests here before this defeat to England.

● India had lost just one home Test in their last 35 games before this one, going back to the beginning of 2013. They had won 28 games during this period.

● James Anderson took 343 wickets after turning 30, which is the most for a fast bowler. He went past West Indian Courtney Walsh, who has 341. Among all bowlers, only three have more wickets after turning 30 — Sri Lanka's Ranga Herath (398) and Muttiah Muralitharan (388), and Australia's Shane Warne (386), while India's Anil Kumble has 343 as well.

— S. PERVEZ QAISAR

Kohli vows to bounce back

AGE CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 9

The heat is on Virat Kohli. The Indian skipper has now lost four consecutive Test matches, but he is confident of bouncing back. The second Test begins at the same venue in just three days.

Excerpts from post-match press conference:

On India's batting performance: I think the Test probably shifted in their favour when we batted in the first innings because we were looking to bat long and we were not able to do that and I don't think there was enough application shown by us as a batting unit. It (showing application) is something that we take a lot of pride in. We don't think about batting milestones. We think

about partnerships and putting the team into good positions.

On England coming with better preparation: They said the same thing when Australia won the first Test in 2017 as well. It's important we don't jump the gun and we don't come to conclusions too early. As a side, our focus is the next Test and bouncing back into the series. What is being perceived is something that doesn't bother us at all. You could say they are well prepared but to say they are better prepared than us in our own conditions is not an accurate assessment.

On the decision to pick Shahbaz Nadeem ahead of Kuldeep Yadav: When you are playing two off spinners, Kuldeep



more or less becomes a similar kind of spinner taking the ball away (from the left hander) so you need variety in the bowling attack. We were quite clear on what combination we wanted to play and there are no regrets. Moving forward we will think of combinations which brings us variety as a bowling attack and not one dimensional.

Jaffer resigns as U'khand coach due to interference in selection

New Delhi, Feb. 9: Former India opener Wasim Jaffer has resigned as Uttarakhand's head coach due to "interference in team selection", days before they were to compete in the Vijay Hazare Trophy, beginning on February 20.

Cricket Association of Uttarakhand (CAU) has accepted his resignation. "I feel really sad for the players as I genuinely think that they have lots of potential and can learn so much from me but are denied this

opportunity because of so much interference and bias of selectors and secretary in the selection matters for non-deserving players," Jaffer wrote in an e-mail to the association.

Cricket Association of Uttarakhand's secretary Mahim Verma rejected Jaffer's claims and said he had asked for since being appointed as the state team's coach.

"We gave him whatever he asked for, had a pre season camp for a month, let him choose

his outstation players, trainer and bowling coach but his interference in selection matters was getting too much," Verma said.

POWAR IS NEW MUMBAI COACH

Former India off-spinner Ramesh Powar has been appointed as Mumbai team's coach for the Vijay Hazare Trophy.

Powar got the charge after Amit Pagnis quit from his post following the team's dismal show in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy. — *PTI*

AUSTRALIAN | OPEN

Barty bagels, Rafael roars

Melbourne, Feb. 9: Rafael Nadal's injured back didn't slow his bid for a record 21st Grand Slam title on Tuesday, as women's world number one Ashleigh Barty romped to a 6-0, 6-0 'double bagel' at the Australian Open.

On a day when women's champion Sofia Kenin also reached round two, but two-time winner Victoria Azarenka lost after breathing problems, Nadal and Barty were the headline acts at the coronavirus-delayed Slam.

Spanish great Nadal, who pulled out of last week's ATP Cup with back problems, beat Serbia's Laslo Djere 6-3, 6-4, 6-1 in one hour and 52 minutes on a sun-kissed Rod Laver Arena.

"It's been a tough 15 days for me," said the 2009 champion, whose back stiffness first flared during an exhibition match last month.

"I needed to survive today and that's what I did. I'm happy to be through and I think I did a good job today. Straight sets is what I needed."

After world number one Novak Djokovic eased through late on Monday, Russia's Daniil Medvedev extended his winning streak to 15 matches with

an emphatic 6-2, 6-2, 6-4 victory over Canada's Vasek Pospisil.

Russian seventh seed Andrey Rublev also continued his winning start to the year with a straight-sets victory over German Yannick Hanfmann 6-3, 6-3, 6-4.

And Greek fifth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas made short work of French veteran Gilles Simon, winning 6-1, 6-2, 6-1 in 92 minutes.

ASHLEIGH'S PARTY ON

Barty also outclassed Montenegro's Danka Kovinic, losing only 10 points as she raced into round two in just 44 minutes.

With the win Barty, last year's semi-finalist who sat out most of the 2020 season, ramped up hopes of a first Australian women's winner in 43 years.

Women's champion Kenin was less convincing and she audibly vented her frustrations during her 7-5, 6-4 win against Australian Maddison Inglis, who is ranked outside the top 100.

Two-time major-winner Garbine Muguruza, who was stunned by Kenin in last year's final, had little trouble beating Russia's Margarita Gasparyan 6-4, 6-0. — *AFP*

SELECTED RESULTS

Men's singles first round: Andrey Rublev (RUS x7) bt Yannick Hanfmann (GER) 6-3, 6-3, 6-4; Lorenzo Sonego (ITA x31) bt Sam Querrey (USA) 7-5, 6-4, 6-4; Radu Albot (MDA) bt Roberto Bautista (ESP x12) 6-7 (1/7), 6-0, 6-4, 7-6 (7/5); Alexei Popyrin (AUS) bt David Goffin (BEL x13) 3-6, 6-4, 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (8/6), 6-3; Daniil Medvedev (RUS x4) bt Vasek Pospisil (CAN) 6-2, 6-2, 6-4; Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x5) bt Gilles Simon (FRA) 6-1, 6-2, 6-3; Karen Khachanov (RUS x19) bt Aleksandar Vukic (AUS) 6-3, 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/2), 6-4; Ricardas Berankis (LTU) bt Sumit Nagal (IND) 6-2, 7-5, 6-3; Rafael Nadal (ESP x2) bt Laslo Djere (SRB) 6-3, 6-4, 6-1; Matteo Berrettini (ITA x9) bt Kevin Anderson (RSA) 7-6 (11/9), 7-5, 6-3; Fabio Fognini (ITA x16) bt Pierre-Hugues Herbert (FRA) 6-4, 6-2, 6-3.

Women's singles first round: Ashleigh Barty (AUS x1) bt Danka Kovinic (MNE) 6-0, 6-0; Olga Danilovic (SRB) bt Petra Martic (CRO x16) 7-5, 3-6, 6-4; Belinda Bencic (SUI x11) bt Lauren Davis (USA) 6-3, 4-6, 6-1; Elise Mertens (BEL x18) bt Leylah Fernandez (CAN) 6-1, 6-3; Karolina Pliskova (CZE x25) bt Jelena Ostapenko (LAT) 7-5, 6-2; Sofia Kenin (USA x4) bt Maddison Inglis (AUS) 7-5, 6-4; Jessica Pegula (USA) bt Victoria Azarenka (BLR x12) 7-5, 6-4; Samantha Stosur (AUS) bt Destanee Aiava (AUS) 6-4, 6-4; Coco Gauff (USA) bt Jill Teichmann (SUI) 6-3, 6-2; Elina Svitolina (UKR x5) bt Marie Bouzkova (CZE) 6-3, 7-6 (7/5); Garbine Muguruza (ESP x14) bt Margarita Gasparyan (RUS) 6-4, 6-0; Ann Li (USA) bt Shuai Zhang (CHN x31) 6-2, 6-0.



Ashleigh Barty of Australia celebrates after defeating Danka Kovinic of Montenegro 6-0, 6-0 in their Australian Open first round match in Melbourne on Tuesday. — *AP*

MARADONA DEATH: NURSES, PSYCHOLOGIST INVESTIGATED

Buenos Aires, Feb. 9: A psychologist and two nurses who helped care for football legend Diego Maradona before his death have been added to a widening involuntary manslaughter probe, a judicial source told local media on Monday.

Maradona died of a heart attack outside Buenos Aires on November 25, weeks after undergoing brain surgery on a blood clot.

His psychiatrist Agustina Cosachov and heart surgeon Leopoldo Luque are already under investigation, as they were treating Maradona before his death.

The three people newly under investigation must appear before prosecutors this week, the judicial source told local media. Investigators are trying

to determine if any of the five people who had Maradona in their care were in any way negligent.

Maradona was suffering from liver, kidney and cardiovascular disorders, but there were no signs of alcohol or narcotics consumption, according to his autopsy.

Luque, the surgeon, in November responded to the launch of an investigation for involuntary manslaughter by saying he did "everything he could, up to the impossible" for an "unmanageable" patient. A first autopsy conducted the day Maradona died found he had suffered from liquid on the lungs with acute heart failure brought on by a disease of the heart muscles that makes it harder to pump blood. — *AFP*