

SHORT TAKES

Woman, daughter held for gold theft

New Delhi: Three members of a family were arrested for allegedly stealing gold ornaments from a jewellery shop in south Delhi's Chhatrapur area, police said on Tuesday.

The accused — Mithlesh (55), her daughter Durgeshwari (21) and son Chirag (19), are residents of Madangir. They usually targeted old aged shopkeepers at jewellery shops, they said. A CCTV footage of the incident also surfaced online wherein the woman along with her daughter were seen stealing gold ornaments from the jewellery shop.

According to the complainant Shambhu Dayal, on December 25, 2020, two women came to his jewellery shop and asked him to show earrings. He showed them earrings and after sometime, they left the shop. Later on during checking, he found that one box of earrings was missing. On watching the

cctv footages, it was revealed that both women had stolen the jewellery box having gold of weight 50 Grams. Deputy commissioner of police (South) Atul Kumar Thakur said the CCTV footages of the shop and nearby spots were analysed and it was revealed that the two women came on a metallic red colour scooter with a male, who was waiting outside the shop. "On the basis of cctv footages, it was revealed that the scooter had crossed the border to Gurgaon and reached Sikanderpur to mislead police. But later, on checking details of the alleged scooter, the police team managed to reach Madangir from where the offending vehicle was traced," he said.

Wanted UP criminal arrested in city

New Delhi: The Delhi Police has arrested a wanted criminal of eastern Uttar Pradesh who allegedly killed a rival gang member in a shootout in the posh Gomti Nagar area of Lucknow last week, officials said on Tuesday. The accused has been identified as Kanhaiya Vishwakarma alias Girdhari, a resident of Varanasi district of UP, they said. One 9 mm pistol and a live cartridge were recovered from his possession, police said. On Monday, the special staff of Outer North district of the Delhi Police got a tip-off regarding a suspicious person having weapon in Rohini's Sector-11 area.

Thereafter, a team was formed and the accused was apprehended, a senior police officer said. Interrogation revealed that on January 6, he killed one Ajit Singh of the rival gang member in Lucknow. Ajit, 39, who was a notorious criminal of Mau district having 17 cases against him, and his associate Mohar Singh were travelling in an SUV when three motorcycle-borne assailants opened fire at them. After killing Ajit, he wanted to make Delhi as his hideout.

Juvenile among 3 nabbed for robbery

New Delhi: Two men were arrested and a juvenile was apprehended in connection with a robbery case last week where a 30-year-old woman got injured after she fell off a moving e-rickshaw during the incident, police said on Tuesday. The accused have been identified as Ajay (21) and Vaibhav (20), they said. On Monday around 5 pm, police got a tip-off and apprehended the accused persons from Ring Road Shalimar Bagh to Azadpur Flyover while they were roaming on a bike, a senior police officer said.

One country-made pistol loaded with one cartridge, one knife and one live cartridge was recovered from their possession. During interrogation, Ajay and Vaibhav disclosed that they along with the juvenile used to roam in the area on stolen bike for committing robbery or snatching of purse or mobile phones, the officer said. They disclosed their involvement in a robbery case of Shalimar Bagh area where a 30-year-old woman was injured after she fell off a moving e-rickshaw while resisting an attempt by them to snatch her bag at Azadpur Flyover on Friday around 3 pm. The snatched purse had ₹26,000 and some documents of the victim. Police recovered the purse with cash ₹5,000 and her documents. The accused were involved in several cases of robbery, snatching and auto-lifting, police added.



Air Force personnel during a rehearsal for upcoming Republic Day at Rajpath in New Delhi on Tuesday. — G.N. JHA

Delhi's minimum temp dips to 4.3°C
Mercury likely to drop further in coming days, says met dept

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 12

Delhi's minimum temperature dropped to 4.3 degrees Celsius on Tuesday, and is likely to dip further in the coming days, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. The Safdarjung Observatory, which provides representative data for the city, recorded a minimum of 4.3 degrees

Celsius, three notches below normal, an IMD official said.

Delhi had been registering above normal minimum temperatures till Monday, as a cloud cover persisted over the city under the influence of successive Western Disturbances.

Delhi's minimum had settled at 7 degrees on Monday, 7.8 degrees Celsius on Sunday, 10.8 degrees Celsius on

Saturday, 9.6 degrees Celsius on Friday and 14.4 degrees Celsius on Thursday, the highest in January in four years, according to IMD.

The cloud cover over the national capital has prevented a steep decline in the minimum temperature so far, the IMD official said.

Clouds trap some of the outgoing infrared radiation and radiate it back downward, warming the

ground.

However, the minimum temperature has started declining with the commencement of northwesterly winds from snow-capped mountains towards the plains starting Saturday, the official said.

The mercury is set to drop further. Moderate to dense fog is also predicted over the capital on Thursday and Friday, the IMD official said.

₹3 cr 'due' from Delhi govt for services at Covid centre: SDMC

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 12

The BJP ruled South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) on Tuesday claimed that an amount of about Rs three crore is due to the civic body from the Delhi government for "offering sanitation services" Sardar Patel Covid Care Centre at Radha Swami Satsang Complex in Chhatrapur last year.

South Delhi mayor, Anamika alleged that the Delhi government is not releasing funds to the civic bodies and now, Covid services are also getting affected due to its attitude.

Leader of the House in the SDMC Narender Chawla claimed that the Delhi government had "assured to bear the costs" when the emergency arrangement was being planned to fight Covid-19 last year.

"We had deployed about 200 SDMC employees at the Radha Soami Satsang Covid-19 Care Centre last year to fight the pandemic. We have already paid over ₹1.83 crore to the concessionaire from May till October and an amount of over ₹1.05 crore is yet to be paid till December. We are not in a financial situation to meet this, so we request the Delhi government to release the due amount of over ₹2.9 crore for the services rendered," said Mr Chawla.

HC notice to Centre, CBSE on PIL to dispense with Cl-10, 12 board exams

New Delhi, Jan. 12: The Delhi high court on Tuesday asked the Centre and Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) to treat as representation a PIL seeking dispensing with physical exams for class 10 and 12 board examinations in view of the prevailing Covid-19 pandemic.

A bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh said it was not going to entertain the petition, moved on behalf of the parents association of a private school here, and suggested that either a representation be moved before the Centre and CBSE or the matter be withdrawn, else it will dismiss the plea with costs.

Subsequently, the counsel for the parents association said the plea be treated as representation.

The court, thereafter, directed the Centre, repre-

■ 'Green corridor' formed for safe passage of vaccine

Delhi receives 2.64 lakh doses of Covid vaccine

New Delhi, Jan. 12: The first batch of Covishield vaccine containing 2.64 lakh doses reached Delhi's central storage facility at Rajiv Gandhi Super Specialty Hospital (RGSSH) on Tuesday amid high security, officials said.

An official at the hospital said 22 boxes, each containing 1,200 vials of the Oxford University COVID-19 vaccine, were delivered to the hospital Tuesday afternoon. Each vial of 5 milliliters has 10 doses, he said.

A SpiceJet flight carrying the vials landed at the Delhi airport around 10 am on Tuesday, four days ahead of the launch of a nationwide drive against the coronavirus. Thereafter, the Delhi Police formed a "green corridor" to safely transport the vaccine to the hospital, the Delhi government's largest Covid-19 facility. "The truck carrying the vaccine arrived at the hospital around 3:10 pm," a source said.

A special cold storage facility has been created at RGSSH to store the vials. Deputy commissioner of police (IGI Airport) Rajeev Ranjan said adequate security arrangements have been made at the storage site, and PCR vans will also cover them in their

ITBP's Covid-19 Centre admits foreigners, people from abroad

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 12

Sardar Patel Covid centre, the world's largest Covid-19 care facility run by the ITBP here in Chhatrapur, has started treating foreigners and people coming from abroad.

The decision has been taken as the centre is witnessing very low turnout of Covid-19 patients. Around 60 patients were admitted here with a staff

patrolling plans.

Deputy commissioner of police (Shahadra) Amit Sharma said: "We have deployed the personnel at the storage area of the Rajiv Gandhi Super Specialty Hospital."

Officials said three-layer security — CCTV cameras, Delhi Police and hospital's own security staff — is in place around the storage facility at RGSSH.

From RGSSH, the vaccine will be transported in a special vehicle under heavy security to the vaccination centres. The Delhi government has identified 89 sites in the national capital, including 40 govern-

ment and 49 private hospitals, for the first phase of the immunisation drive meant for about three lakh healthcare workers.

The All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Sadarjung Hospital, LNJP Hospital, GTB Hospital, Apollo Hospitals and Max Hospital will be among the vaccination centres here.

The vaccination roll-out is expected to be kicked off from the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan (LNJP) Hospital On January 16 with a simple ceremony in the presence of chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and health minister Satyendar Jain, sources said. — PTI



Workers carrying the first batch of Covid-19 vaccine which arrived at the Rajiv Gandhi Super Specialty Hospital in New Delhi on Tuesday. — G. N. Jha

Sisodia terminates manager of labour office over irregularities in registration of workers

New Delhi, Jan. 12: Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia conducted a surprise inspection at northwest Delhi labour office on Tuesday and terminated its manager on detection of irregularities in registration of construction workers.

After receiving complaints of irregularities in registration of construction workers, Sisodia, who is also the labour minister of Delhi government, conducted a surprise inspection and detected "grave irregularities" in a dozen cases, a statement said.



Manish Sisodia

"The deputy chief minister terminated the manager of the North-West Delhi Labour Office with immediate effect," it said. The complaints ranged from violation of proper

procedure to negligence on behalf of labour office staff who used photographs of women instead of men in the registration documents.

During the inspection, Sisodia also directed the labour officers to carry out all the work related to registration and welfare of the labourers as per the rules and within the stipulated time period.

The deputy chief minister said no negligence will be tolerated in implementing the comprehensive welfare plans for the labourers, by the Delhi government. — PTI

Debt-ridden man 'kills self' in Noida

Noida, Jan. 12: The body of a debt-ridden man, who allegedly shot himself, was found near the Gautam Buddha Nagar Collectorate on Tuesday morning, police said.

Locals spotted Nirdesh, who belonged to Kasganj district in western Uttar Pradesh, lying dead on the service lane of the collectorate in Surajpur police station area, according to officials.

Nirdesh was staying on rent in Surajpur, Greater Noida, a senior officer said.

Central Noida DCP Harish Chander said the incident appears to have taken place somewhere around midnight.

"The police were alerted this morning about the finding of a body on the service lane of the district collectorate. The police

reached the spot immediately," he said.

"Initial investigation has revealed that he was under debt. He had approached some people for loan and that (financial condition) led him to taking the extreme step," he added.

The DCP said preliminary investigation by the forensic team suggests it is a case of suicide.

The body has been taken into custody and sent for post-mortem, he said.

"The bullet was fired on the right side of temple and it emerged out from the left side of his head, leaving a mark. A pistol with a used bullet shell was recovered from the spot," Chander said.

The family of the deceased has been contacted and further proceedings are being carried out, he added. — PTI



Youth Congress activists protest against the new farm laws by playing the plate in New Delhi on Tuesday. — G.N. JHA

SHORT TAKES

Cigarette smuggling racket busted

Kozhikode: In a joint operation, sleuths from the CBI, Customs and department of revenue intelligence on Tuesday seized a huge volume of foreign brand cigarettes while it was being smuggled into the country from the Gulf and detained around 21 passengers at Karipur airport here, sources said. Officials have also detained a batch of officials from the customs and other departments on the suspicion that they had links with the cigarette smugglers, they said. Sources said the cigarettes' being smuggled can easily be detected in scanning but such checking and recovery were not carried out effectively. The less number of seizures from the side of officials generated a suspicion about their involvement and based on intelligence inputs, a joint operation was launched to bust the syndicate. — PTI

Drug test must for cops in Sikkim: CM

Gangtok: Sikkim chief minister Prem Singh Tamang on Tuesday said that all police personnel of the state will face mandatory drug test and those failing it will lose their jobs. Expressing concern that several police personnel in the Himalayan state have been found to be using narcotic drugs, Tamang directed DGP A Shankar Rao to start the drug test as soon as possible. "A mandatory drug test will be held for all police personnel of the state. Anyone found to be using drugs will be compulsorily retired from service," the chief minister said at a programme at Rangpo in East Sikkim district bordering West Bengal. The state government wants a strict and vigilant police force and this test will discourage them to use narcotics drugs in future, Mr Tamang said.— PTI

Guj: No sashtang pranam in temples

Ahmedabad: Nothing is same after the outbreak of coronavirus, not even the way of paying obeisance to God. "Sashtang pranam" or prostration before the deity is no longer allowed in Gujarat temples. Instead, devotees can only bring their palms together to offer a "namaste". Carrying "prasad" (offerings) inside the sanctum sanctorum is also not allowed in line with the standard operating protocol of the state government, authorities said. Temples and other places of worship reopened in the state in June. "Sashtang pranam is not allowed as per the government guidelines. No devotee is allowed to touch anything as per the SOP," said Vijaysinh Chavda, manager of the famous Somnath temple. — PTI

PATNAIK WAIVES CLASS 10 BOARD EXAM FEES

Bhubaneswar: Keeping in view adverse impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the livelihood of the people across Odisha, chief minister Naveen Patnaik on Tuesday announced that the state government will not charge any fee from students appearing in the matric examination. Mr Patnaik decided to waive the fees for the annual examination, conducted by the Board of Secondary Education, in the greater interest of the students. The matriculation exam is scheduled to begin in the state from May 3 this year. "The state government will bear ₹27 crore on this account and more than 6 lakh students will be benefited", the chief minister said in a statement. Every candidate appearing in the annual high school certificate examination was supposed to pay ₹420 for filling up the forms. Patnaik said the education sector is one the worst sufferer of the pandemic as the students could not attend classes for nine long months which has affected their studies. "No student will be denied opportunity to appear in the annual board examination for Class 10th due to financial constraints," Mr Patnaik said. The state government keeping in view the decline in report of new COVID-19 cases in Odisha, has reopened schools for the final year students of Class 10 and 12 from January 8.

'93 blast culprits enjoying 5-star hospitality: India

Targets China at UNSC, says double standards on terror must end

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 12

In a veiled barb at China, external affairs minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar on Tuesday evening told the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) that the "practice of placing blocks and holds on listing requests without 'any rhyme or reason' must end" as "this only erodes our collective credibility", even as he called for an eight-point action plan to combat terrorism. It may be recalled that China — which had blocked action against Pakistan-based terrorist Masood Azhar on several occasions — relented in May 2019, only after the Pulwama attack in February that year and dropped its objections that finally led him to be banned by the UN.

Slamming Pakistan without naming it, the EAM also demanded that the international community hold accountable those nations that support terrorism, adding that "the crime syndicate responsible for the 1993 Mumbai bomb blasts (was) not just given state protection but (is) enjoying 5-star hospitality", a clear reference to criminal and terrorist Dawood Ibrahim and his D-Gang which has found refuge in Pakistan for the past few decades.

Participating in a UNSC open debate on "International cooperation on combating terrorism...", Mr Jaishankar said that "terrorism continues to be the gravest threat to mankind" and that "it not only grievously impacts human life but attacks the very foundation of human-



S. Jaishankar

ity", adding that "India has always been at the forefront of global counter-terrorism efforts". He said all have to show the political will to tackle the menace, adding that there should be "no ifs and buts" and that there is no such thing as a "good or bad terrorist". He also called for an end to double standards on fighting terrorism, adding that there should be "no justification of terrorism or glorification of terrorists". In another veiled dig at

China, the EAM said those who "cover-up" for such double standards "are just as culpable". Observers point out that while Pakistan has been actively sponsoring cross-border terrorism against India for decades, Islamabad has been enjoying diplomatic support at the UN from its all-weather friend Beijing which is a permanent member of the UNSC.

As part of his eight-point action plan, Mr Jaishankar said, "We must reform the working methods of the Committees dealing with Sanctions and Counter-Terrorism. Transparency, accountability and effectiveness are the need of the day. The practice of placing blocks and holds on listing requests without 'any rhyme or reason' must end. This only erodes our collective credibility."

Nepal's minister to visit India Jan. 14-16

Kathmandu, Jan. 12: Nepal's foreign minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali will travel to India on Thursday on a three-day visit during which he will attend the Sixth Meeting of Nepal-India Joint Commission and discuss the entire gamut of relations, including Covid-19 cooperation and boundary, with his Indian counterpart S. Jaishankar.

Mr Gyawali is the senior most political leader from Nepal to visit India after Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli triggered a border row last year by publishing a new political map that showed the three Indian territories — Limpiyadhura, Kalapani and Lipulekh — as part of Nepal.

The Joint Commission Meeting "will discuss the whole gamut of Nepal-India bilateral relations, including trade, transit, energy, boundary, Covid-19 cooperation, infrastructure, connectivity, investment, agriculture, tourism, culture, among others," the ministry of foreign affairs said in a statement here.

During his visit from January 14 to 16, foreign minister Gyawali will also meet with the high-level dignitaries of India, the ministry said.

The Nepali delegation



Pradeep Kumar Gyawali

will consist of the ambassador of Nepal to India, the foreign secretary, health secretary and other senior officials.

After Nepal released the map last year, India reacted sharply, calling it a "unilateral act" and cautioning Kathmandu that such "artificial enlargement" of territorial claims will not be acceptable to it.

India said that Nepal's action violated an understanding reached between the two countries to resolve the boundary issues through talks.

The bilateral exchanges that had stalled due to the bitter boundary dispute were reset in the later part of 2020 with a series of high-level visits, as New Delhi emphasised that it sees itself as the Himalayan nation's "foremost friend" and development partner. — PTI

Body of Army officer fished out of lake in Jodhpur

Jodhpur, Jan. 12: A six-day-long search operation for an Army officer came to an end on Tuesday when his body was finally found by divers from a lake here in the afternoon.

Assistant commissioner Neeraj Sharma said the body of Captain Ankit Gupta was recovered from the Kalyana lake at about 3 pm and was immediately taken to the military hospital.

Captain Gupta of the 10 Para (Special Forces) unit of the Army had jumped into the lake from a helicopter with some fellow personnel during an exercise on Thursday afternoon.

While the others resurfaced immediately after jumping into the water, Captain Gupta failed to show up. The six-day-long search operation was one of the longest such operations, in which a special camera team, the Navy's Marcos unit, the NDRF, the SDRF, a civil defence team, local divers as well as divers and experts from the Army and the police tirelessly embarked upon a mission to search the drowned officer day and night. — PTI

Army Chief: Pak, China form potent threat, ready to meet any eventuality

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 12

Army Chief General M.M. Naravane asserted on Tuesday that the Indian army is "alert and ever-ready to meet any challenge" from China and there has been no deployment in Chinese deployment in friction areas in Eastern Ladakh.

"We are prepared to hold our ground as long it takes to achieve our national goals and objectives," said the Army Chief.

"It is not only the Eastern Ladakh, but we have maintained a high state of alertness all along the northern borders as of now, keeping the threat perception in mind. We have gone in for a winter posture and deployment," he said.

Gen. Naravane said that not much should be read in Chinese withdrawing troops from depth areas in the Tibetan plateau that were there for training.

"There has been no decrease in strength either on the Chinese side or our side as far as the friction points are concerned," he said.

The Army Chief said that all logistics aspects have been taken care of, whether it is clothing, ration or habitat and "as a

'I am stressed too... It can result in good work'

New Delhi, Jan. 12: "I am stressed too. Stress is not a bad thing," Army Chief Gen. M.M. Naravane said in a lighter vein, dismissing a recently reported survey that claimed that more than half of Indian Army personnel seem to be under severe stress.

The Chief of Army Staff said that the report was based on an inadequate sample size of 400.

He said that several steps were being taken to reduce stress among the personnel, and noted that the number of suicides in the force has been coming down. "Based on a sample of 400, we can not say there is stress or no stress."

result of all this, our operational preparedness is of a very high order and the morale of the troops is high."

"We keep saying that we are prepared to meet all challenges. But last year we had to walk the talk and actually rise up to the occasion and show that we are indeed prepared to meet all these challenges," he said.

However, Gen. Naravane said that he was hopeful that India and China will be able to reach an agree-



Gen. M.M. Naravane

"There could be stress. I am stressed too. Stress is not a bad thing. It can result in good work," Gen. Naravane said while replying to a query at a press conference.

The report published by leading military think-tank United Service Institution of India (USI)

ment to resolve the eastern Ladakh standoff.

"We are now awaiting the date of 9th round of Corps Commanders talks. I am sure that through dialogue and discussion, we will be able to reach an amicable solution based on the principle of mutual and equal security," said the Army Chief.

On whether status quo has been changed in Eastern Ladakh, the Army Chief replied: "As far as the situation in eastern Ladakh is concerned,

foundly disturbed."

"Now last year, for reasons which are not clear to us, the Chinese really brought an enormous military force to one part of the border. And then at the line of actual control, obviously we moved up when we saw them coming and that has sort of created, friction points along the line of actual control," Mr Jaishankar said.

On ties with the United States, he was quoted as saying, "When I look at many of the challenges we face, the US is going to be much more open looking for partners and I'm confident about where we are going with the relationship."

said that more than half of Indian Army personnel seemed to be under severe stress and the force has been losing more personnel every year in suicides, fratricides and untoward incidents than in any enemy action.

The report was removed from the website of the USI last week. "I too read the report. I would like to say that the sample size for the report was only 400. I think it was not an adequate sample size. If you want a 99 percent accuracy with 1 percent margin of error, then the size of the samples should have been 19,000 for such a study," Gen. Naravane said. — PTI

the situation is same as prevailing last year. There has been no change in the status quo."

The Army Chief said that Pakistan and China together form a "potent" threat, and the "threat of collusion" cannot be wished away. He said that there is increased cooperation between China and Pakistan in both military and non-military fields and "two-front threat is really something we have to be prepared to deal with."

Dispatch for Covid vaccine drive a historic moment: SII

Pune, Jan. 12: Serum Institute of India (SII) CEO Adar Poonawalla on Tuesday said 1.11 crore doses of Covishield vaccine are currently being rolled out in India and there are plans to provide 5 to 6 crore more doses by February even as he described the dispatch of the vaccines for the January 16 national inoculation drive a "proud and historic" moment.

Early Tuesday, the first consignment of the vaccines rolled out of the SII facility in Pune for transport to various locations in the country.

Speaking to the select mediapersons at the SII facility, Mr Poonawalla said the real challenge lies in taking the vaccine to the "common man, to the vulnerable groups of people and to healthcare workers".

Mr Poonawalla said the SII has offered the vaccine to the Government of India (GoI) at a special price of ₹200. "This is one of the most affordable vaccines in the world and we are offering it to the GoI at a special price just to support the Prime

Minister's vision and to support the 'aam aadmi' of our country," he added.

He also said that once the SII get the requisite permission, the vaccine will be made available in the private market at the cost ₹1,000.

Mr Poonawalla further said the SII is not only providing the vaccine in India, "but it is also committed to provide it to other countries who are looking at India at this point".

Covishield is developed by Oxford University and British-Swedish company AstraZeneca and manufactured by the SII.

A "puja" was performed before the three temperature controlled trucks rolled out of Serum Institute gates and moved towards the Pune airport, from where the vaccines were flown across India. — PTI

Amid tension in alliance, Khattar, Chautala meets Shah

No threat to Haryana govt: CM, dy CM

New Delhi, Jan. 12: Facing heat over the ongoing six-week-long farmers' agitation, Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar and deputy chief minister Dushyant Chautala on Tuesday said there is no threat to the BJP-JJP coalition government and it will complete its full five year term.

After an hour-long meeting with Union home minister Amit Shah, both Mr Khattar and Mr Chautala said they have discussed about the prevailing law and order situation in the state.

"There is no threat to

the Haryana government and it will last its full five year term," Mr Chautala told PTI.

Mr Khattar also said, "There is no point in speculating about the future of this government, it will complete its term."

The chief minister said Haryana is the epicentre of farmers' agitation so they discussed with the home minister about the law and order situation in the state. "We also discussed about holding celebrations for January 26 without any trouble," he said.

Mr Khattar said after the Supreme Court

stayed the implementation of the farm laws, they were hopeful that farmers will end their agitation.

"It's a national festival and everyone understands its importance and the value attached to it," he said.

Mr Chautala said the Supreme Court has set up a committee and he hoped that things will be resolved soon.

Both Haryana leaders met Mr Shah hours after the apex court stayed the implementation of controversial three farm laws till further orders and decided to set up a committee to resolve the

impasse over them between the Centre and farmers' unions protesting at Delhi borders.

State presidents of BJP, JJP and state Cabinet ministers were also present in the meeting with the home minister.

Before meeting Mr Shah, Dushyant met MLAs of his party JJP here at a farm house, in which a section of MLAs said it would cost the ruling alliance heavily if the laws were not repealed.

Mr Khattar had to cancel a public meeting in Karnal on Sunday after the site was ransacked by the protesting farmers. — PTI

Mumbai's famous Mucchad Paanwala shop co-owner held

Mumbai, Jan. 12: The Narcotics Control Bureau on Tuesday arrested Ramkumar Tiwari, one of the owners of the famous "Mucchad Paanwala" shop in Mumbai, in connection with a drugs case, an NCB official said.

The paan shop, located at Kemps Corner in south Mumbai, is famous as it is frequented by celebrities.

Mr Tiwari was apprehended by a team of the NCB after questioning, the official said.

His name cropped up during investigation into a drugs case in which three persons, including a British national, were arrested with 200 kg of drugs from Khar and Bandra areas here on Saturday, he said.

Following the questioning, he was placed under

DRUGS CASE

THE PAAN shop, located at Kemps Corner in south Mumbai, is famous as it is frequented by celebrities. Ramkumar Tiwari was remanded in 14-day judicial custody as the NCB didn't press for his custody.

The drugs included ganja, imported contraband like "OG Kush" (a strain of cannabis indica), and curated marijuana, some of which had been sourced from the US, the official said.

Mr Tiwari was summoned by the NCB for questioning on Monday and his statement was recorded, he said.

Following the questioning, he was placed under

arrest on Tuesday, the official said, adding that further probe into the case is on.

The NCB on Saturday arrested three persons, including a British national, for allegedly supplying imported varieties of ganja in the metropolises.

One of those arrested is a suspect in the drugs case being probed after the death of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput in June last year.

Mr Tiwari was produced before a magistrate's court later in the day and remanded in 14-day judicial custody as the NCB didn't press for his custody, a lawyer said.

His bail plea is likely to be heard on Wednesday. — PTI

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority	
Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida, (U.P.) Website: www.noidaauthorityonline.com	
E-TENDER NOTICE	
E-Tender are invited from firms / contractors registered with UPLC Lucknow for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on NOIDA Authority's official Website: www.noidaauthorityonline.com and https://etender.up.nic.in . Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/amendments & corrigendum etc.	
A1	50/CGM/SM(WC-10)/ET/2020-21, Name of work: M/o & D/o Village (Maintenance of Pond Near Baratghar in Village-Gulawali), Noida. Cost: Rs. 26.48 Lacs
2	12/GM/SM(WC-4)/ET/2020-21, Name of work: M/o Village (Shed Work in Crematorium and P/L Interlocking Tiles on Patri from Village Entry Gate to Chandgiram Yadav House in Village Behloipur), Noida. Cost: Rs. 26.33 Lacs
Which can be uploaded by date 20.01.2021 upto 5.00 pm. Pre-qualification shall be opened/ downloaded on date 21.01.2021 at 11.00 am.	
Chief General Manager Noida	
CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA	

SHORT TAKES

EC DISCUSSES
SECURITY FOR
STATE POLLSAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 12

The Election Commission of India on Tuesday held a meeting with the Union home secretary Ajay Bhalla to discuss requirement and availability of the Central Armed Paramilitary Forces (CAPF) during the upcoming Assembly polls in several states. Other related issues, including law and order situation, transfer posting of officials were also discussed.

Assembly elections in Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and the Union Territory of Puducherry will be held this year. The term for Tamil Nadu Assembly ends on May 24; Kerala June 1; West Bengal May 30; Puducherry June 8; and Assam May 31.

The ECI had in December issued an advisory to states saying in order to ensure free and fair election, states should ensure that the officers directly connected with conduct of elections in an election going state/UT are not posted in their home districts or places where they have served for a considerably long period.

Besides, officials against whom the ECI had recommended disciplinary action in the past and which is pending or has resulted in a penalty or the officers who have been charged for any lapse in any election or election related work in the past, may not be assigned any election related duty.

CULLING OF
BIRDS ORDERED
IN LATUR DISTBHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, JAN. 12

In a sign of bird flu spreading rapidly in Maharashtra, birds from one more district — Latur — have also found positive for the avian influenza. The Latur district authorities have ordered culling of birds in the villages of Kendrewadi and Sukni as precautionary measures.

Earlier, birds from five districts in Maharashtra — Mumbai, Thane, Ratnagiri, Parbhani and Beed were found to be infected by the bird flu. In Latur, at least 225 birds have died in Kendrewadi till Monday, while 12 hens have died in Sukni and four in Wanjarwadi of Udgir taluka. After Parbhani and Beed, Latur is the third district in Maharashtra to report cases of bird flu.

Latur district collector Pruthviraj B.P. has ordered culling of birds in 1 km radius from where birds infected with avian influenza were found in Kendrewadi and Sukni. There are nearly 15,000 birds in the 1 km radius of the place where the infected birds were found in Kendrewadi. “Samples of dead birds from Kendrawadi and Sukni were sent for testing and their results came out positive for the infection, while reports for Wanjarwadi are awaited. We have completed fitness tests of our work force and will leave for Kendrewadi for the culling operation,” an official from the animal husbandry department said.

Panel members back laws, how
can farmers expect justice: Cong

New Delhi, Jan. 12: The four members of a committee formed by the Supreme Court on Tuesday to resolve the deadlock over farmers' agitation against three farm laws — two experts and two farmer leaders — have been known as pro-reforms in the agriculture space, while Congress party and agitating unions flagged their direct support for the contentious Acts as well in the recent past.

While staying the implementation of the three new farm laws, enacted in September last year, till further orders, the apex court announced the panel.

Addressing a press conference, Congress' chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said the party welcomes the Supreme Court's concern over the farm laws, but the party has issues with the composition of the committee formed by it.

He sought to know whether any government lawyer disclosed the credentials of the committee members before the court.

He also said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi should talk to the farmers on January 15, when the next round of discussion between the agitators and the government is slated.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi raised questions over the formation of the committee. “Can justice be expected from people who have given their written support to the anti-agriculture laws. This struggle will continue till anti-farmer-worker laws are repealed. Jai Jawaan Jai Kisaan, he tweeted.

“All the members of the committee constituted by the Supreme Court have already supported the agricultural bill,” Congress party's Madhya Pradesh unit tweeted while tagging newspaper articles written by Mr Gulati and Mr Joshi and also news reports quoting Mr Ghanwat and Mr Mann speaking against the repeal of the laws.

Mr Ghanwat said on Tuesday the new farm laws partially implement what his outfit has been demanding for decades. His attempt will be to improve them, he said, while coming out in support of reforms including permission for contract farming.

Bhupinder Singh Mann, president of Bhartiya Kisan Union; Anil Ghanwat, president of Shetkari Sanghatana, Maharashtra; Pramod Kumar Joshi, director for South Asia, International Food Policy Research Institute, and agriculture economist Ashok Gulati have been named in the panel announced by the apex court.



Wrestling competition organised during farmers protest against the new farm laws at the Tikri border in New Delhi on Tuesday.

“We do not know who has given these names to the Chief Justice of India. Why was their background and stand not checked. All these four persons are in favour of these laws and are standing with Prime Minister Modi. How can we expect justice from such a committee,” Mr Surjewala told said.

He also alleged that one of the committee members was also a petitioner and asked how can the petitioner be made a member of the SC-appointed committee.

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram said the concern expressed by the Supreme Court over the farmers' protests is “justified and welcome in the situation created by a stubborn government”.

“The decision to form a committee to help find a solution is well-intentioned. However, the composition of the four member committee is puzzling and sends contradictory signals,” he said on Twitter.

“We are not lauding the Centre's three acts that are described as giving freedom to farmers. It was the Shetkari Sanghatana headed by late Sharad Joshi which had pressed for these changes first,” Mr Ghanwat, whose organisation has been accused of backing the Centre on the issue despite representing farmers, said.

“Now the current government has tried to implement them to some extent. My role in the committee will be to protect the interest of farmers and improve these laws,” he said.

Sharad Joshi, an economist who had worked with the World Bank, founded the Shetkari Sanghatana in the late 1970s. —PTI

Agri experts welcome SC
decision; term it sensible

New Delhi, Jan. 12: Eminent agriculture economists on Tuesday welcomed the Supreme Court's decision to stay the implementation of the new farm laws till further orders and set up a four-member committee to resolve the impasse over them between the Centre and farmers' unions protesting at Delhi borders.

Former Union minister and eminent economist Y.K. Alagh said he thinks it (the SC's decision) is very sensible. “Because they (the SC judges) have said that you (the Centre) must do adequate preparation because the new farm laws were passed in a big hurry,” Alagh said.

He pointed out that the bench headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde and Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian said the Centre can develop a framework for the new farm laws only after the Covid-19 year is over.

“Because you can't talk about trade and transport when there are lockdowns,” Alagh said. Echoing similar views, eminent economist and former Planning Commission member Abhijit Sen said, “I think it is good. If (the SC) has stayed it (the Centre's new farm laws).”

Mahendra Dev S., professor of economics at the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR) also said, “That's a good suggestion (the staying of new farm laws by the

SC).” Noting that the protesting farmers are demanding the repeal of the new farm laws and the government is only ready to amend the new farm laws, he said the panel can suggest what are the alternatives. —PTI

■ EMINENT ECONOMIST and former Planning Commission member Abhijit Sen said, “I think it is good. If (the SC) has stayed it (the Centre's new farm laws).”

“The bull is a symbol of farmers and part of their lives,” the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee president said.

Mr Gandhi would lend his moral support to farmers protesting against the new farm laws across the country by witnessing the sport at Avaniapuram in Madurai district, he told reporters.

“The bull is a symbol of farmers and part of their lives,” the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee president said. Mr Gandhi's visit is to “honour the farmers and the valorous Tamil culture on the day of harvest festival and he will not engage in election campaign on that day,” he said. Assembly elections are due during April-May in the state.

“The general public should gather in large numbers for the event.” Billing Mr Gandhi's event as “Rahulin Tamil Vanakkam”, he said it was also intended to dislodge the “inept” AIADMK regime, “subservient” to the Centre. —PTI

Alagh also argued that private trade can be regulated in private markets in other parts of the country that produce pulses, oil seeds and horticulture crops. —PTI

Rahul to visit TN for ‘Jallikattu’, lend support to farmers' stir

Chennai, Jan. 12: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi would visit Tamil Nadu on January 14, the Pongal day and witness a bull taming event, “Jallikattu”, the party's state president K.S. Alagiri said on Tuesday.

Mr Gandhi would lend his moral support to farmers protesting against the new farm laws across the country by witnessing the sport at Avaniapuram in Madurai district, he told reporters.

“The bull is a symbol of farmers and part of their lives,” the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee president said. Mr Gandhi's visit is to “honour the farmers and the valorous Tamil culture on the day of harvest festival and he will not engage in election campaign on that day,” he said. Assembly elections are due during April-May in the state.

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Yasin, 9 others
to be charged in
kidnapping case

Jammu, Jan. 12: A special Tada court has framed charges against Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) chief Mohammad Yasin Malik and nine others in a 31-year-old kidnapping case involving Rubaiya Sayeed, the daughter of then union home minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed.

Malik is presently lodged in Tihar jail, Delhi, after he was arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in April 2019 in connection with a terror funding case, a month after his group was banned by the central government.

In March last year, the special Tada court had framed charges against the JKLF chief and six others in another case related to the gunning down of four IAF personnel on the outskirts of Srinagar in January 1990.

Special Tada judge Sunit Gupta on Monday ordered framing of charges against Malik and nine others — Ali Mohd Mir, Mohd Zaman Mir, Iqbal Ahmad Gandroo, Javed Ahmad Mir, Mohd Rafiq Pahlou, Manzoor Ahmed Sofi, Wajahat Bashir, Mehraj-ud-Din Sheikh and Showkat Ahmad Bakshi.

The 10 are among two dozen accused named by the CBI in its chargesheet filed before the Tada court. Among the others, Mohammad Rafiq Dar and Mushtaq Ahmad Lone — both top commanders of JKLF — are dead and 12 others are absconding.

The absconders include Halima, Javed Iqbal Mir, Mohammad Yaqub Pandit, Riyaz Ahmad Bhat, Khurshheed Ahmad Dar, Basharat Rehman Noori, Tariq Ashraf, Shafat Ahmad Shangleo, Manzoor Ahmad, Gulam Mohammad Taploo, Abdul Majeed Bhat and Nissar Ahmad Bhat.

Rubaiya Sayeed was kidnapped by JKLF members on December 8, 1989, from Srinagar to ensure the release of their associates lodged in different jails.

From the confessional statements of the accused



Yasin Malik

■ RUBAIYA SAYEED was kidnapped by JKLF members on December 8, 1989, from Srinagar to ensure the release of their associates lodged in different jails

persons recorded, either under Section 164 CrPC or under Section 15 of Tada Act, supported with the statements of the abductee Rubaiya Sayeed and other prosecution witnesses, it has been prima facie proved that the accused persons have hatched a criminal conspiracy to kidnap the abductee with sole objective to get their persons released from the custody after having negotiation with the government of J&K as well as Government of India and the accused persons had also succeeded in their nefarious designs and got their persons released from the custody.

I am of the considered view that sufficient grounds are existing for drawing prima facie presumption that the accused persons namely Malik, Ali Mohd Mir, Iqbal Ahmad Gandroo, Manzoor Ahmed Sofi, Mehraj-ud-Din Sheikh and Rafiq Ahmad Pahlou have committed offences under Sections 364/368 /120-B IPC, 3/4 TADA Act & 27 IA Act, whereas, the accused persons namely Mohd Zaman Mir, Javed Ahmed Mir, Wajahat Bashir and Showkat Ahmed Bakshi have committed offences under Sections 120-B read with Sections 368 IPC and Section 3/4 of TADA Act, the Special Judge said.

Hence, the court said, the charges are required to be framed against each of the accused persons, separately, for the delineated offences. —PTI

Man travels 2K km to offer b'day
gift to girl, lands in police station

Lakhimpur Kheri (UP), Jan. 12: A 21-year-old man was slapped with a case and had to spend a night at a police station after he landed with birthday gifts at the home of a minor girl whom he had befriended online, police said Tuesday.

Salman travelled 2,000 km — taking a flight from Bengaluru to Lucknow and then a bus to Lakhimpur Kheri — to be able to reach her home in time for her birthday, but her family refused to recognise him.

He had brought with him chocolates, a teddy bear and other such items. The girl's family reprimanded him and called the police and he had to spend the Sunday night at the police station.

“The girl's family members refused to file a first information report (FIR) against the youth. He was produced before the sub-divisional magistrate's court Monday,” Kotwali Police Station in-charge Sunil Kumar Singh told PTI Tuesday.

“The youth was released on Monday on personal bond,” Singh added. Salman hails from Uttar Pradesh's Deoria district and works as a mechanic in Bengaluru. —PTI

Spurious liquor kills
12 in MP villagesRABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, JAN. 12

At least 12 people, including 3 members of a family, have died and 10 others hospitalised after consuming spurious liquor in 2 villages in Morena district under Chambal region of Madhya Pradesh, police said on Tuesday.

The victims hailed from villages of Manpur Prithwi and Pahawali.

“Eleven people have died so far. We are waiting for autopsy reports to ascertain the cause of their deaths”, Chambal region inspector general of police Manoj Sharma said.

Another person succumbed in the district hospital in Morena on Tuesday evening, taking the toll to 12. According to the police, the victims started reporting at various government hospitals in Morena district on the intervening night of Monday and Tuesday.

Some of them were shifted to a government hospital in Gwalior when their condition worsened. The locals later staged a blockade on National Highway-552 by laying the bodies on the road demanding compensation of ₹20 lakh each to the next of kin of the deceased.

■ THE LOCALS staged a blockade on NH-552 by laying the bodies on the road demanding compensation

Morena district collector Anurag Verma rushed to the spot along with police force to bring the situation under control.

Police registered a case against seven people under relevant sections of Indian Penal Code and Excise Act in connection with the incident.

However, no one has been arrested so far, police said. “The accused will be arrested soon”, the police officer said.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan placed local district excise officer Javed Khan under suspension in connection with the incident.

The station house officer of the local police station and another policeman were suspended for dereliction of duty. “A team of officers has been sent to the area to probe the incident. Action will be taken against those responsible for the tragedy”, state home minister Narottam Mishra said.

This was the second such incident in the state in the past 3 months. On October 11 last year, 11 people died in Ujjain after consuming spurious liquor.

Covid-19 vaccines' first
batch sent to states, UTs

■ Continued from Page 1 India, they will be available to people.

As the first shipment of the vaccines rolled out, SII CEO Adar Poonawala said it was a historic and emotional moment for his team and he hoped the vaccine reached everyone this year. The Covishield vaccines were first brought to four Central Government Medical Stores Depots — in Chennai, Karnal, Kolkata and Mumbai — and then sent to different regional medical stores in the states. Mr Bhushan said some big states have multiple stores — UP has nine, MP and Gujarat have four each, Kerala has three,

Khalistani infiltrartion...

■ Continued from Page 1 This averment is supported by the learned attorney general also,” it said.

During the hearing, senior advocate P.S. Narasimha, appearing for intervenor, Indian Kisan Union supporting the new farm laws, alleged that some banned organisations have been fuelling the protests of farmers. These kinds of protests

while J&K, Karnataka and Rajasthan have two each.

India, meanwhile, on Tuesday reported 12,584 fresh Covid-19 cases and 167 more deaths in the past 24 hours, which was the lowest in the last seven months. The health secretary said the Covid-19 situation was still worrisome worldwide, even though daily cases are declining in India. He added that the effectiveness of the vaccines can be observed only after 14 days, and till then people must observe Covid-appropriate behaviour and follow protocols like wearing masks and maintaining social distancing.

can be “dangerous” he said, adding that groups like “Sikhs for Justice” are involved in these agitations. The bench told Mr Venugopal that somebody has made an allegation here on record that there are some banned organisations which are helping the protest. “Will you confirm this or deny?” the bench asked the AG. —PTI

SC puts farm laws on hold, forms panel

■ Continued from Page 1 government have not yielded any result so far, the court said, “We are of the view that the constitution of a committee of experts in the field of agriculture to negotiate between the farmers' bodies and the Government of India may create a congenial atmosphere and improve the trust and confidence of the farmers... We are also of the view that a stay of implementation of all the three farm laws for the present may assuage the hurt feelings of the farmers and encourage them to come to the negotiating table with confidence and good faith.”

Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde, taking note of the agitating farmers' lukewarm response to the court's suggestion on Monday to set-up a

committee to examine the contentious laws, said on Tuesday that they are not forming the committee to “appease” everyone. He said that the committee will be a part of the “judicial proceedings” and its report will be for the purposes of the court. He was heading a bench also comprising Justice A.S. Bopanna and Justice V. Ramasubramanian.

Making it clear that the suspension of the operation of three farm laws would not be for an indefinite period, the court said that the setting up of the committee will not be an “empty” exercise, making it clear that all those involved in the dispute, including government and the agitating farmers, will have to appear before it.

The court noted that senior lawyers Dushyant Dave, Colin Gonsalves,

H.S. Phoolka and Prashant Bhushan representing different bodies of agitating farmers were not present in today's hearing. And in an unequivocal message to the agitating farmers that they can't veto the suggestion coming from the top court on setting up a committee to examine the laws, Chief Justice of India Bobde said, “There is no power which can prevent us from forming a committee. We want to solve the problem. We want to understand the ground situation. This is not politics. You have to cooperate.”

“The representatives of all the farmers' bodies, whether they are holding a protest or not and whether they support or oppose the laws, shall participate in the deliberations of the committee

and put forth their view points”, the court said, making it obligatory for agitating farmers to appear before the expert committee.

The four-member committee that will scrutinise the three laws include Bhupinder Singh Mann, national president of the Bhartiya Kisan Union and the All India Kisan Coordination Committee; Dr Parmod Kumar Joshi, agricultural economist and director for South Asia, International Food Policy Research Institute; Ashok Gulati, agricultural economist and former chairman of the commission for agricultural costs and prices, and Anil Ghanwat, president, Shetkari Sanghatana. Mr Gulati and Mr Ghanwat have openly expressed their support for the three farm laws.

Panel members pro-govt, won't appear before it: Unions

■ Continued from Page 1 said the aim of forming a committee is basically to cool down the agitation.

In a statement issued late evening, Samkyukt Kisan Morcha, a joint forum of around 40 unions, also said the court was being “misguided” by various forces even

in formation of a committee.

“The Supreme Court has formed a committee in its own wisdom and farmer unions have nothing much to say on this. Farmer unions reiterate the fact that they will not participate in any such committee process,” it said in the

statement.

“These (committee members) are people who are known for their support to the 3 Acts and have actively advocated for the same. It is not out of place to remind that the farmer unions have rejected a committee proposal from the government too.

“Their dialogue is basically with an elected government about its policy directions and Concomitant laws,” the morcha said.

The farmer leaders, however, said they would attend the January 15 meeting with the government. —PTI

THE ASIAN AGE

13 JANUARY 2021

Not court's call to have panel review farm laws

The order of the Supreme Court on Tuesday staying the implementation of the three recently passed laws to regulate farming in India and the formation of a four-member committee to study them is perplexing, to say the least. The court issued the order while hearing petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the laws.

While the court is very well within its rights to stay the operation of a law suspecting it to be ultra vires on the Constitution, it defies logic when it appoints a committee to study an aspect of the law other than legal. It must be reiterated that the highest court of the land has not been called upon to adjudicate on the impact of a government action borne out of a government policy; it has been asked strictly to subject that action to judicial review and see if it meets the constitutional and legal requirements.

The court's move is worrisome on many counts even when one does not count the selective activism it demonstrates. One, by appointing a committee on a government action, and saying it will issue an order based on the report of that committee, the court is seeking to have a say on government policy. It was only recently that another bench of the same court, in its judgment on petitions against the Central Vista project, made it clear that the court does not have the wherewithal to sit in judgment on a government policy and that the Parliament is the right forum to debate it. Now, the court has, instead of performing its job as the interpreter of the Constitution, chosen to be a mediator and influencer on government policy. This is a dangerous proposition, as it goes against the spirit of the Constitution, which is clear on the separation of powers.

The same logic applies to the farmers, too. They have no compulsion to go by the court even if it finds the laws are beneficial to them. They can continue with their agitation and the Chief Justice of India, who heads the bench, has repeatedly clarified that the farmers have every right to hold peaceful protests. On the other hand, the court can hardly order scrapping of the laws even if it finds them to be detrimental to the interests of farmers. That people who are sympathetic to the farmers' cause have already come out arguing that all the members in the panel have supported the three laws in varying degrees poses another question mark on its legitimacy.

The farmer's grouse is simple — the government is trying to withdraw from supporting the farming sector and is handing it over to the private corporates. They see a policy in it and oppose it. The government can either convince them that they are indeed in their interest or convince itself that they are not so, and repeal them. Either way, it should be a political decision. The farmers know it well, and hence they insist that they were not raising a legal question. The apex court must see their logic, instead of ordering them to cooperate with the committee it has appointed.

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Test of character

A battered and bruised Team India would not surrender. In a display of courage perhaps unequalled in 74 years of Test matches against Australians who are considered the cricket world's toughest opponents, Team India drew the third Test in Sydney and go to Brisbane with the scores 1-1. A series-winning chance is intact though the squad has sustained a huge number of injuries, besides losing its skipper to paternal leave who coincidentally was blessed with a daughter on the famous day his team did their "Dunkirk Act" at SCG under able replacement Ajinkya Rahane.

Courage can too readily be equated with sporting achievement but in this case bravery was the foremost quality that saw Ravichandran Ashwin, barely able to get up from bed with a sore back and Hanuma Vihari, who had strained a hamstring, fight a lengthy rearguard action right up to the draw of stumps. Such resolute resistance in the face of "slogging" (as derived from sledgehammer blows aimed at mental disintegration of batsmen) brought out the worst in the Australians, especially in captain Tim Paine, who was the white knight riding in to rescue his country's cricket from an "Ugly Aussie" image.

A draw is also a result in Test cricket and a hard fought one often exemplifies an indomitable spirit unwilling to accept defeat. Such a position would not have been possible if not for Rishabh Pant playing like the fearless modern white ball cricketer and a stoic Cheteshwar Pujara joining him in attack mode as if his younger colleague had inspired him. A glimpse of victory may have faded when Pant threw it away because he does not quite possess the temperament of specialist batsmen who treasure a milestone century.

The Aussies aimed at breaking the resistance with a new ball at red hot pace directed at the bodies of Ashwin and Vihari who have bruises to show as valorous badges. To rally from the depths of despair of 36 all out to win the second Test and then draw the third is an epic achievement and BCCI's tweet in salute was apt — "Bruised. Broken. But never short of character".

THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani



Educational activism of a different kind is needed



Devi Kar

I have been an "examination warrior" of sorts for years. But in a different sense to the title of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's book of the same name. Mr Modi has written a useful book to help students "slay" exams. There is a contradiction here, though, because while he urges students to treat exams like festivals (I rather liked this approach), he also advises students to be "warriors" implying that examinations are something to be conquered. My fight has been with the school examination system which requires students in their last year of school to write papers for hours at a stretch and their entry into college depends to a degree on the results of this single examination. Educators have observed to their satisfaction that many examination reforms were necessitated by the current Covid-19 pandemic. However, the same pandemic has given birth to a horrific practice, which must be nipped in the bud. This is the testing of pre-primary children for admission into school.

Even in pre-Covid times I used to be horrified to hear that little children were interviewed and assessed by the school authorities for admission into the nursery classes. Most of these children were already attending playschools, some of which would "prepare" these tiny mites, all of 18 months of age, for "The Interview in The Big School". Mock interviews would be held so that the tots would get used to interacting with unfamiliar persons. Parents too would be given practice in

responding "intelligently" to expected questions. It is believed that parents too are subtly assessed by schools to see whether they matched their preferred "client profile". On questioning parents, I learned that some of them were even advised to dress in a particular manner. No wonder that some parents were so formally dressed that they looked as if they were attending a convocation ceremony. The fathers were suited and booted and were sporting ties, the mothers were in elegant attire while the toddlers were fitted out in their best partywear. All this for a virtual interaction from the comfort of their homes.

It is unkind to put parents through this kind of ordeal. They are already tense because even having dutifully rehearsed for the "test" with their little toddlers, there was no guarantee that the little things would perform at the right time "on command". At this age children should indulge in free play, they should learn from the environment, dance, sing and run around. Why should they be subjected to virtual lessons, be made to sit in front of the screen and learn the letters of the alphabet and names of colours and fruits? Even if children of this age get accustomed to learning from "the screen ma'am", this sort of regimentation is quite premature. When I asked some of the parents why they subject themselves and their children to this kind of "torture", one parent gave a telling reply. He said that they were so eager to admit their children into certain favoured schools that they were afraid of

objecting to the admission procedure and risk their application being rejected.

It was bad enough in the past, but in this pandemic year it was disturbing to be told that children who had not even turned two were being made to attend virtual lessons. Some parents went for customised activity packages which I learnt were delivered at intervals so that the curriculum could be tackled in a methodical way. Other parents said that they were lucky to find a Montessori teacher in the neighbourhood who came to their housing complex and taught a group of toddlers on a regular basis. This arrangement gave their children the much-needed opportunity to socialise with other children of the same age.

On deeper questioning, it became evident that this whole exercise of attempting to "educate" toddlers was largely to prepare them for entry into the primary department of one of the reputed schools.

In this context I have some questions to ask the authorities and teachers of the schools that assess such small children before admitting them. The first and most important question is: "Can you really identify the brighter children on the basis of naming a few colours, fruits and vegetables?" Children develop at their own individual pace and at this age you cannot make out anything about their

I am calling out all schools that test pre-primary children for admission into their nursery or kindergarten classes. You are adopting a practice that goes against the principles of pre-primary education, besides adding stress to the already stressful lives of parents.

potential. Over the decades that I have been in school education, I have seen enough to know that there are late bloomers, there are moody children and quiet ones who have eventually turned out to be outstanding students. Conversely, I have seen little children mastering formal schoolwork at the basic stages but falling behind when there was need for more complex work involving problem-solving or independent thinking. My next question is: "Will you reject a child who refuses to answer your questions or suddenly tires of the whole thing and starts bawling?" I remember the case of one little girl who stubbornly refused to tell the head teacher her name. On the way home, when her mother asked why she hadn't opened her mouth, she said: "My name was written on the card that you pinned to my dress, why was she asking me?"

Some children are precocious, but precociousness is not equivalent to giftedness. In fact, it is accepted that IQ tests are not reliable in the case of very young children as the intelligence quotient of a child takes some years to stabilise. As for assessing parents, I suppose schools, like clubs, may feel entitled to have their own criteria for parents.

But this article is more about unfairness to children. I am calling out all schools that test pre-primary children for admission into their nursery or kindergarten classes. You are adopting a practice that goes against the principles of pre-primary education, besides adding stress to the already stressful lives of parents. Finally, you are guilty of giving some of these little children their first taste of failure. Activists need to urge the schools to stop this insensitive practice at once.

The writer is a veteran school educator based in Kolkata

LETTERS

BUDGET JITTERS

This refers to the editorial, "Will FM offer India the mega-stimulus it needs?" At a time that the government has gone belly up, the common man's only prayer is that his disposable income remains the same. He dearly hopes that the government does not rob Peter to pay Paul, again. It is a foregone conclusion that the forthcoming Budget shall lay special focus on poll-bound states, at the expense of the most urgent priorities.

Deepak Singhal
Noida

ONE MORE BURDEN

IN ORDER to partially meet the heavy expenditure incurred during the tackling of the Covid-19 pandemic, the government is reportedly mulling the imposition of a Covid cess in the forthcoming Union Budget. Needless to say that the entire burden will fall on the fragile shoulders of the salaried class, retired people and the pensioners. Even though it may be touted as a "temporary" measure, it is unlikely to be withdrawn. Precedents can be cited of the Bangladesh refugee surcharge (later converted into nutrition levy), education surcharge on IT, CDS (occasionally), profession tax (at state level), and so on, all borne by the hapless middle class.

Arun Malankar
Mumbai

BAD MANNERS

ACE BATSMAN Steve Smith did not distinguish himself by removing Rishabh Pant's batting guard marks during the third Test in Sydney. Despite Smith's petty act, Pant played the Australian attack, scoring a breezy 97. Several former players and Indian fans have played the former Aussie skipper's poor gamesmanship. One may recall that Smith was banned for 12 months for his part in the ball-tampering scandal against South Africa in Cape Town in 2018 and stripped of the captaincy.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Jawed Naqvi



Trump bid for a 'coup' in DC follows a long US tradition!

It's still a week to go before Donald Trump demits control of the nuclear codes, and US whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg is seeing mischief afoot in the Gulf. With Iran as a potential target of the defeated President's sublimated rage, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has shared the larger concern with the US military, but there's little news about what the Pentagon's response was. Ms Pelosi discussed with the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff the "available precautions for preventing an unstable President from initiating military hostilities or accessing the launch codes and ordering a nuclear strike".

The world is waiting out the fraught days before Joe Biden can put the doomsday trigger out of reach of the "unstable" Mr Trump. True to form, Mr Trump plans to fly away to Scotland a day before Mr Biden's January 20 inauguration. The white supremacist hero is adulated by the global right, and there's no dearth of those who see in him their role model.

It's quite likely that other than dodging inevitable criminal cases he will be slapped with and the barrage of legal probes expected to be

ordered into his dodgy tenure, Mr Trump hopes to use the overseas stay to keep the racist pot boiling. His American fans and other right-wing groups will hang on to every word he utters to pliable or conniving TV anchors.

The delusional right-wing assault on Capitol Hill by men and women smitten to death by Mr Trump's fantasy world may seem ordinary by America's own standards. As the wag said: "Given travel restrictions in view of the pandemic, the US had to stage this year's coup in Washington DC." Another gleefully had a rejoinder. "The coup failed because there were no US embassies in America."

It was America that applauded Boris Yeltsin in a similar but more successful endeavour at murdering democracy. It was only 30 years ago that Mr Yeltsin was guided by US intelligence to bombard the Russian Parliament in a fatal assault on his rivals, the Communist deputies in the Duma. Mr Yeltsin deployed tanks and heavy weapons to blow up his own Parliament. US intelligence helped him break into the Russian military communications channels, according to Seymour Hersh's 1994

revelations of the US-aided coup.

As soon as deputies staged their resistance to Mr Yeltsin's pro-market reforms on August 18, 1991, and moved to impeach him, America's NSA, according to Hersh, was able to decrypt conversations between the two leaders, Vladimir Kryuchkov, KGB chairman, and Dmitri Yazov, defence minister, taking place over a supposedly secure landline. President George H.W. Bush, himself a former CIA chief, ordered the information to be given to Mr Yeltsin. However, according to Hersh, fearing Russian reaction if word of American interference leaked out, Mr Bush broke the law by not telling Congress. In a parallel move, he also set into motion the dismantling of the secular, pro-Moscow Arab structures, inflicting the first military defeat on Saddam Hussein.

Why should it surprise that Mike Pompeo, author of Mr Trump's anti-Iran military buildup, also has his roots in US intelligence? He became secretary of state after a stint as head of the CIA. Consider it a curious irony in the end that Donald Trump, who seemed to loathe US agencies and had nothing nice to say

about the CIA or any other outfit, became so dependent on the machinations of the Deep State. How would that change for Mr Biden?

Daniel Ellsberg described in *The Guardian* recently the increased danger of a US military assault on Iran under Mr Trump's supervision. If that comes about, it would also have the fingerprints of Benjamin Netanyahu and Mike Pompeo.

"President Trump's incitement of criminal mob violence and occupation of the Capitol makes clear there is no limit on the abuse of power he may commit in the next two weeks. Outrageous as his incendiary (action) was on Wednesday, I fear he may incite something far more dangerous in the next few days: his long-desired war with Iran," Ellsberg wrote.

Ellsberg reports the dispatch a fortnight ago of B-52s nonstop round-trip from North Dakota to the Iranian coast. He says it was the fourth such flight in seven weeks, one at year's end — along with his buildup of US forces in the area. It is a "warning not only to Iran but to us".

According to Ellsberg, by mid-November, as the B-52 flights began, Mr Trump had to be dissuaded at the

highest levels from directing an unprovoked attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. But an attack "provoked" by Iran (or by militias in Iraq aligned with Iran) was not ruled out.

US military and intelligence agencies have frequently provided presidents with false information that offered pretexts to attack America's perceived adversaries, says the author of the Pentagon Papers. It is not unusual for US militaries to suggest covert actions that could provoke the adversaries to some response that justifies US "retaliation".

Ellsberg refers to the assassination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, Iran's top nuclear scientist, in November, and the killing exactly a year ago of Gen. Soleimani. Iran didn't rise to the bait.

Mr Trump is running out of time to generate a ruse to block resumption of the Iran nuclear deal by the incoming Biden administration. "US military and covert planning staffs are up to the task of attempting to meet that challenge, on schedule." Powerful interests rather than the constellations may want the teacup not to reach the lip.

By arrangement with Dawn

SHORT TAKES

MINE BLAST:
EFFORTS ON TO
FREE 22 CHINESE

Beijing, Jan. 12: Rescuers are seeking to free 22 Chinese workers trapped underground for more than two days following an explosion at a partially built gold mine in the country's east, state media reported on Tuesday.

Some 300 rescuers were seeking to clear obstructions to reach the workers, whose condition remains unknown, the reports said. The mine in the eastern province of Shandong was under construction at the time of the explosion. The cause of the blast has not been announced.

Mine managers did not report the explosion to authorities in the city of Yantai until Monday evening.

China's mining industry focused on coal used to be the world's deadliest, suffering more than 5,000 fatalities a year from explosions, floods and gas leaks.

2 CAPITOL COPS
SUSPENDED
AFTER ATTACK

Washington, Jan. 12: Democratic Representative Tim Ryan of Ohio says two US Capitol Police officers have been suspended as a result of their actions during last week's attack on the Capitol.

Ryan told reporters on Monday that one of the officers took a selfie with someone and the second officer put on a "Make America Great Again" hat. He says of the latter that the "interim chief determined that to be qualifying for immediate suspension". Thousands of pro-Donald Trump insurrectionists stormed the Capitol, forcing lawmakers to flee and hide. Five people died, including a Capitol Police officer.

The congressman says Capitol Police are looking at everybody involved that could have potentially facilitated the incursion "at a big level or small level in any way". Capitol Police did not immediately reply to a request for more details.

1ST EXECUTION
OF U.S. FEMALE
IN 67 YEARS

Mission (US), Jan. 12: The US government on Tuesday prepared to carry out its first execution of a female inmate in nearly seven decades — a Kansas woman who killed an expectant mother in Missouri, cut the baby from her womb and passed off the newborn as her own.

Lisa Montgomery faces execution at the Federal Correctional Complex in Terre Haute, Indiana, just eight days before President-elect Joe Biden, an opponent of the federal death penalty, takes office.

Montgomery drove about 170 miles (273.59 kilometres) from her Melvern, Kansas, farmhouse to the northwest Missouri town of Skidmore under the guise of adopting a rat terrier puppy from Bobbie Jo Stinnett, a 23-year-old dog breeder. She strangled Stinnett with a rope before performing a crude cesarean and fleeing with the baby. She was arrested the next day after showing off the premature infant, Victoria Jo, who is now 16 years old and hasn't spoken publicly.

HOLOCAUST
SURVIVOR
TUCARMAN DIES

Bucharest, Jan. 12: Iancu Tucarmán, one of the last remaining Holocaust survivors in Romania, was buried after dying from Covid-19 last week. He was 98.

Dozens gathered at Tucarmán's funeral in Bucharest on Monday to pay respects and mark a horrific legacy of World War II. The funeral was held in line with anti-virus measures. Tucarmán died on January 8 after battling the Coronavirus. Romania has been hit hard in the outbreak, recording more than 16,000 deaths in the country of 19 million people.

Tucarmán was 18 years old in June 1941 when German and pro-Nazi Romanian troops rounded up thousands of other Jews in the northwest city of Iasi during the events that became known as the "Iasi Pogrom". Iasi Jews were crammed into trains and driven around Romania until most of them suffocated inside or died of dehydration. About 13,000 people died. Upon capture in Iasi, Tucarmán was first brought to the police station along with around 5,000 Jews, nearly half of whom were shot or beaten to death.

US Acting Homeland Security chief quits

Wolf resigns over the storming of the US Capitol by outgoing President Donald Trump's supporters

‘Armed protests’ planned at all capitols, Washington: FBI

Washington, Jan. 12: Chad Wolf, the acting secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, has resigned over the storming of the US Capitol by outgoing President Donald Trump's supporters. His resignation comes amidst Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) warning of a nationwide "armed protests" being planned in the run-up to President-elect Joe Biden's January 20 inauguration.

Wolf — whose department oversees numerous federal law enforcement bodies and also is in charge of security for Biden's inauguration ceremony — said last week that he was staying in his position until the end of Trump's administration on January 20.

"I am saddened to take this step, as it was my intention to serve the department until the end of this administration," Wolf wrote in an email to the staff of the Department of Homeland Security on Monday. "Unfortunately, this action is warranted by recent events, including the ongoing and merit-less court rulings regarding the validity of my authority as Acting Secretary.

These events and concerns increasingly serve to divert attention and resources away from the important work of the department in this critical time of a transition of power," he said. His resignation comes into effect from Monday midnight.

Peter Gaynor, Administrator of Federal Emergency

Management Agency, replaces Wolf as DHS acting secretary for the remaining duration of the Trump administration. He is the third Cabinet member of the Trump administration to resign after the January 6 incident that resulted in the death of five people, including a police officer. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos and the Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao resigned last week.

Congressman Bennie Thompson, Chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security, in a statement said for months Wolf has been serving illegally in his position. "So the

timing of his resignation from the Department today is questionable. He has chosen to resign during a time of national crisis and when domestic terrorists may be planning additional attacks on our government. Unlike others, he is apparently not leaving the Trump administration on principle," he said.

"If it is true he is resigning because of recent Federal court decisions, then it is an admission that his policy decisions are indeed invalid. Under this scenario, Ken Cuccinelli must also resign," Thompson said.

Wolf joins a growing exodus of officials in the final

days of the Trump administration. US Deputy National Security Advisor Matt Pottinger, first lady Melania Trump's chief of staff Stephanie Grisham, White House Deputy Press Secretary Sarah Matthews, White House social secretary Rickie Niceta, US special envoy for Northern Ireland Mick Mulvaney, acting chairman of the White House Council of Economic Advisors Tyler Goodspeed and deputy assistant secretary for intelligence and security at the Commerce Department John Costello are among the officials who have resigned over the Capitol violence.

PTI

one other bulletin — they go out to law enforcement nationwide on the topic — before the riots last week.

On December 29, it warned of the potential for armed demonstrators targeting legislatures, the second official said. Army General Daniel Hokanson, chief of the National Guard Bureau, told reporters Monday that the Guard is also looking at any issues across the country. The riots followed weeks of online calls for violence in Washington in the waning days of Donald Trump's presidency.

AP

Washington, Jan. 12: US President-elect Joe Biden on Monday named two Indian Americans —

Reema Shah and Neha Gupta — to the Office of the White House Counsel.

Shah, who had served on the debate preparation team for Biden on the Biden-Harris Campaign, has been named as Deputy Associate Counsel while Gupta, currently an attorney in the Office of the General Counsel for the Biden-Harris Transition, has been named as Associate Counsel in the Office of the White House Counsel. Shah was an associate at Latham & Watkins and a Bristow Fellow in the Office of the Solicitor General at the Department of Justice. She served as a law clerk to Justice Elena Kagan on the US Supreme Court and Judge Sri Srinivasan on the US Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit.

Originally from New Jersey, Shah is a graduate of Harvard College, Cambridge University and Yale Law School. On the other hand, Gupta served as a Deputy City Attorney in the San Francisco City Attorney's Office, where she was general counsel to several city agencies, litigated constitutional and statutory challenges to city laws and administra-

INDIAN-AMERICANS IN BIDEN ADMIN

1. Neera Tanden, Director of the Office of Management and Budget
2. Dr Vivek Murthy, Surgeon General
3. Vanita Gupta, Associate Attorney General
4. Ali Zaidi, Deputy National Climate Advisor
5. Gautam Raghavan, Deputy Director of the Office of Presidential Personnel
6. Bharat Ramamurti, Deputy Director for the National Economic Council for Financial Reform and Consumer Protection
7. Vinay Reddy, Director of Speechwriting
8. Rohini Kosoglu,

Domestic Policy Advisor to the Vice President
9. Shanthi Kalathil, Coordinator for Democracy and Human Rights
10. Mala Adiga, Policy Director to Dr Jill Biden
11. Tarun Chhabra, Senior Director for Technology and National Security
12. Sumona Guha, Senior Director for South Asia
13. Aisha Shah, Partnerships Manager, Office of Digital Strategy
14. Sabrina Singh, Deputy Press Secretary, Office of the Vice President
15. Vedant Patel, Assistant Press Secretary

tive decisions, and participated in the office's affirmative public protection advocacy. Previously, Gupta clerked for Judge Michael Daly Hawkins of the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit and Judge Richard Seeborg of the US District Court for the Northern District of California. A New York native born to Indian immigrants, Gupta is a graduate of Harvard College and Stanford Law School. Biden also named Samiyyah Ali as Deputy Associate Counsel, Funmi Olorunnipa

Badejo as Associate Counsel, Tona Boyd as Special Counsel, Megan Ceronisky as Associate Counsel, Martine Cicconi as Associate Counsel, Sean Crotty as Associate Counsel and Ashley Deeks as Associate Counsel and Deputy Legal Advisor to the National Security Council. These individuals will, under the direction of White House Counsel Dana Remus, help restore faith in the rule of law and the accountability of government institutions, the transition said.

PTI

China expands lockdowns, local conference delayed

Beijing, Jan. 12: Lockdowns have been expanded and a major political conference postponed in a province next to Beijing that is the scene of China's most serious recent Covid-19 outbreak.

Residents of the city of Gu'an just south of Beijing have been ordered to stay home for seven days starting from Tuesday. Similar measures have been ordered around the country, particularly in the central city of Wuhan where 11 million people were placed under lockdown for 76 days last winter as the pandemic was just beginning.

Hebei has also delayed the meetings of the provincial People's Congress and its advisory body that are usually held in February. It wasn't clear when the meetings would be held. China last year postponed the holding of the National People's Congress and its advisory body in Beijing from March until May, shortening the sessions and limiting media access in a sign of the seriousness with which the ruling Communist Party was treating the outbreak.

Hebei's provincial health commission on Tuesday reported 40 new confirmed cases, all but one in the provincial capital of Shijiazhuang just south of Beijing where transport links have been cut and residents told to stay home. Local authorities say several dozen of the more than 300 confirmed cases reported this year in the city appear to be linked to wedding gatherings. One new case was reported in Beijing, where more than a dozen communities and villages have been put under lockdown.

AP

WHO experts to visit Wuhan: China

Beijing, Jan. 12: World Health Organisation experts will visit the city of Wuhan, where the Coronavirus was first detected in late 2019, at the start of their investigation into the origins of the pandemic, China said on Tuesday.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said the experts will arrive in Wuhan on Thursday. Other details of their schedule haven't been announced and the central government's National Health Commission offered no

further information. The visit has been expected for months. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus expressed frustration last week that arrangements were taking so long to finalise. After China announced the visit Monday, Tedros said the scientists, who come from several nations, will focus on how the Coronavirus first jumped to people.

"Studies will begin in Wuhan to identify the potential source of infection of the early cases," Tedros said.

AP

EMERGENCY
IMPOSED IN
MALAYSIA

Kuala Lumpur, Jan. 12: Malaysia's king on Tuesday approved a Coronavirus emergency that will suspend parliament at least until August and halt any bids to seek a general election in a political reprieve for embattled Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin.

Muhyiddin assured citizens in a televised speech that the emergency was "not a military coup and curfew will not be enforced."

He said his civilian government will remain in charge during the emergency, that will last until August 1 or earlier depending on the situation.

AP

EU REGULATOR
GETS OXFORD VAX
NOD REQUEST

London, Jan. 12: The European Medicines Agency said AstraZeneca and Oxford University have submitted an application for their Covid-19 vaccine to be licensed across the European Union.

In a statement on Tuesday, the EU regulator said it has received a request for the vaccine to be green-lighted under an expedited process and that it could be approved by January 29 during an EMA meeting, "provided that the data submitted on the quality, safety and efficacy of the vaccine are sufficiently robust and complete". The drugs agency for EU has already okayed two other vaccines.

AP

Divers recover plane 'black box'

Jakarta, Jan. 12: Indonesian navy divers searching the ocean floor on Tuesday recovered the flight data recorder from a Sriwijaya Air jet that crashed into the Java Sea with 62 people on board.

The device is expected to help investigators determine what caused the Boeing 737-500 plane to nose-dive into the ocean in heavy rain shortly after taking off from Jakarta on Saturday. TV stations showed divers on an inflatable vessel with a large white container containing the device heading to a Jakarta port.

Military chief Air Chief Marshal Hadi Tjahjanto said the plane's other "black box," the cockpit

voice recorder, was likely to be found soon because its beacon was being emitted in the same area. The devices were buried in seabed mud under tons of sharp objects in the plane's wreckage, navy Chief Adm. Yudo Margono said.

He said at least 160 divers were deployed Tuesday in the search. More than 3,600 rescue personnel, 13 helicopters, 54 large ships and 20 small boats are searching the area just north of Jakarta where Flight 182 crashed and have found parts of the plane and human remains in the water at a depth of 23 metres (75 feet).

So far, the searchers have sent 74 body bags containing human remains to

police identification experts who on Monday said they had identified their first victim, 29-year-old flight attendant Okky Bisma. His wife, Aldha Refa, who is also a flight attendant for Sriwijaya Air, shared her grief in a series of posts on social media. "My husband is a loving, devoted and super kind man," she wrote on Instagram.

"Heaven is your place, dear ... be peaceful there." Anguished family members have been providing samples for DNA tests and police say results are expected in 4-8 days. National Police spokesman Rusdi Hartono said about 53 samples for DNA testing have been collected but more are still needed, especially from parents and children of victims.

Indonesia's National Transportation Safety Committee said the US National Transportation Safety Board will join in investigating the crash. The NTSC chairman, Soerjanto Tjahjono, ruled out a possible midair breakup after seeing the condition of the wreckage found by searchers. He said the jet was intact until it struck the water, concentrating the debris field, rather than spreading it out over a large area as would be seen with a midair event. The disaster has reignited concerns about safety in Indonesia's aviation industry.

AP

AP

HUNTING | EXCURSION

The meat of the bird houbara bustard is considered by Arabs to be an aphrodisiac

Imran permits Dubai royals to hunt protected bird

Islamabad, Jan. 12: The Pakistan government has issued at least seven special permits to Dubai Ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum and six other members of the ruling family to hunt the internationally protected bird houbara bustard during the 2020-21 hunting season. Prime Minister Imran Khan, who has earlier opposed such permits for Arab royals, this time personally approved the special pass, reported the Dawn newspaper.

The foreign ministry's

deputy chief of protocol issued the documents after approval by the prime minister, the daily reported quoting sources. The permits were delivered to the UAE Embassy in Islamabad. Apart from Dubai Ruler Rashid Al-Maktoum, the others given permits are the crown prince, deputy ruler and finance and industries minister, deputy police chief, an army official, two other members of the royal family and a businessman.

Khan, when in Opposition, had campaigned against

such hunting excursions by the rich Arab families, who annually visit Pakistan to hunt the endangered bird. A Saudi prince, Fahd bin Sultan bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, is said to have gunned down 1,977 birds on reserved and protected areas over 21 days in January 2014, while other members of his party killed another 123 birds.

The killing resulted in a lot of criticism but the practice has been going on. The bird's meat is considered by Arabs to be an aphrodisiac.

PTI

COURT SENTENCES THREE FOR VANDALISING GURDWARA NANKANA SAHIB

Lahore, Jan. 12: Pakistan's Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) on Tuesday awarded up to two years imprisonment to three accused involved in vandalising Gurdwara Nankana Sahib in the country's Punjab province. Gurdwara Nankana Sahib, also known as Gurdwara Janam Asthan, is a site near Lahore where the first Guru of Sikhs, Guru Nanak, was born. In January 2020, a violent mob had attacked

the Gurdwara and pelted stones in the name of religion and threatened to destroy the minorities worship place (Gurdwara Janamasthan) to build "Ghulam-e-Mustafa" shrine there. However, police had controlled the situation.

"On Tuesday a Lahore's ATC handed down two years jail term to prime accused Imran Chishti and imposed a fine of 10,000 Pakistani Rupees. Two other accused — Muhammad Salman and Muhammad Ahmed — were convicted for six months. However, four other accused were acquitted for want of evidence," a court official said.

AP

All the suspects were present in the court when the sentence was announced. Strict security measures were taken to handle any protest by the religious elements in the wake of their conviction. Imran Chishti, a government employee working in the Fisheries Department, and other suspects were arrested under terrorism and blasphemy charges following the attack on the Gurdwara last year.

They faced charges under sections 295A, 290, 291, 341, 506, 148 and 149 of Pakistan Penal Code and 7-ATA (anti-terrorism act). According to the FIR, Chishti had incited the Muslim mob in the name of religion.

PTI

quick
BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49517.11	0.50
Nifty 50	14563.50	0.54
S&P 500*	3,803.94	0.11
Dollar (₹)	73.25	0.27
Pound Sterling (₹)	86.01	-0.05
Euro (₹)	81.51	-0.05
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,946.297	0.60
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	56.43	1.38
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.931	0.12
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.168	0.034

* As of 8:30 PM IST

5% more income
tax returns filed
this year

I-T returns filed this year have risen by about 5 per cent to nearly 6 crore as more businesses and entities filed annual income statements. Over 5.95 crore income-tax returns for the fiscal year 2019-20 were filed by Jan. 10, the Income Tax Department said. The ITR filing deadline for individuals ended on Jan. 10 while for companies it is till Feb. 15. The department in a tweet said 5.95 crore ITRs for AY 2020-21 were filed.

Karnataka Bank
Q3 profit rises
10% to ₹135 cr



Private sector lender Karnataka Bank reported a 10 per cent increase in net profit at Rs 135.38 crore for the December quarter on account of a decline in bad loans. The Mangalore-headquartered bank had reported a net profit of Rs 123.14 crore in the year-ago period. Total income declined to Rs 1,868.62 crore from Rs 1,993.68 crore. The gross NPAs eased to 3.16 per cent of assets from 4.99 per cent.

NMDC adopts
most advanced
SAP ERP system

NMDC announced implementation of SAP Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) solution. This solution will help India's largest ore miner to integrate and consolidate all the business process end-to-end and improvement operational efficiency. Flagg off the go-live event, Sumit Deb, CMD, said NMDC is the first CPSE to implement ERP solutions on the most advanced platform SAP-S/4 HANA, on a large scale, with over 2,000 users.

BMW 220i Gran
Coupe M Sport
at ₹40.90 lakh

BMW, India's second biggest luxury car maker, expanded its 2 Series Gran Coupe range in India by launching the 220i M Sport variant at an introductory price of Rs 40.90 lakh at pan India showroom. The new petrol-powered version of the sedan joins the two diesel variants, the 220d Sport Line and the 220d M Sport, that were launched in October last year. The sedan is locally produced at BMW factory near Chennai.

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■ Only 40-57% of claim amounts reimbursed
Insurers go stingy
with Covid claims

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, JAN. 12

Though the number of Covid-19 claims settled by non-life insurance companies has risen sequentially during the December quarter, the claim amount settled by them against the amounts claimed, has not increased in the same proportion. This indicates that policyholders are now paying a significant portion of the claim amount from their pockets owing to disagreements between hospitals and insurers on charges.

Sample this, during October to December 27, the total number of claims reported were 4.23 lakh, of these 83 per cent, or 3.51 lakh, claims were settled. However, in value terms, claims worth Rs 6,235.8 crore were reported, of which only 57 per cent, or Rs 3,578.50 crore were settled.

Similarly, during July to September 2020, there were 2.94 lakh Covid-19 related claims reported to insurers. Of these, 62 per cent, or 1.82 lakh, claims were settled. However, in terms of value, the reported claim amount was Rs Rs 4,629.30 crore, of which insurers settled claims worth Rs 1,842.3 crore, or a mere 40 per cent of the reported claim amount.

A senior official of an insurance company said, "The pendency appears big (claims pending) because the Covid treatment is long drawn. Patients after discharge continue to remain in



Cadila aims to supply 150 mn doses

CHRIS KAY
JAN. 12

Cadila Healthcare Ltd, a drugmaker working to develop an indigenous coronavirus vaccine, said it expects to supply between 100 million to 150 million doses of its candidate this year.

The Ahmedabad-based firm's ZyCoV-D vaccine was approved to com-

mence with final stage human trials in December, and it is recruiting 30,000 volunteers for its phase 3 tests, according to a presentation filed with the stock exchanges on Tuesday. Cadila's plasmid DNA candidate doesn't use an infectious agent, like other vaccines, and instead introduces the DNA sequence encoding the antigen. —Bloomberg

quarantine and use medicines for nearly two months after discharge and they submit the final bills only after that."

On policyholders bearing a part of the cost of treatment, the official said, "We have come across a few hospitals where the cost of the PPE kits worn by the medical staff is not equally distrib-

uted between all the patients in a ward but only to the insured patients in the ward. There are several items which are not payable by us and have been communicated to the hospitals."

Take the case of N. Akhter, a 76-year old female who suffered from breathlessness due to Covid-19 infection. Her

Philippines may
tap meat, fish
freezers for vaccine

ANDREO CALONZO
JAN. 12

The Philippines is preparing cold storage for Covid-19 vaccines, with government telling industry groups with facilities for storing meat and fish to be ready to help in keeping and distributing the shots.

The Philippine cold chain industry expects revenues to hit 20 billion pesos (\$416 million) by end-2023.

Local cold-chain logistics operators can help distribute the vaccines throughout the archipelago, as low-temperature storage facilities are mostly in cities, said Anthony Dizon, president of the Cold Chain Association of the Philippines. The group is waiting for the government's final decision on which shots to buy, he added. —Bloomberg

one-day bill in the intensive care unit of a top South Mumbai hospital was around Rs 33,000. Out of which, the insurer, however, did not pay Rs 5,318 charged for disposable gown, PPE kits, shoe cover and face mask and Rs 600 charged for resident doctor visits. So, the patient has to pay nearly Rs 6,000 per day from her pocket.

TATA CHEMICALS
IN TALKS FOR
ARCHEAN'S
IND. SALT UNIT

BAIJU KALESH &
P R SANJAI
JAN. 12

Tata Chemicals Ltd is in advanced talks to acquire the industrial salt unit of Chennai-based Archeon Group that could value the business at Rs 450 crore (\$61 million) at a minimum, according to people familiar with the matter.

The board of Tata Chemicals is set to discuss the potential offer as soon as this month, said the people, who asked not to be identified as the information is private.

A representative for Archeon declined to comment, while a representative for Tata Chemicals didn't provide any immediate comment.

The Archeon unit, with a production capacity of 3 million tonnes, makes industrial salt used as an intermediary in the manufacturing of products from detergents, textile dyes to plastics and glass.

A potential deal could offer a reprieve to Archeon, which has been struggling to service its debt obligations for the past two years. The company, founded in 1982, has businesses spanning from industrial salt, fertilisers to mining. In 2018, India Resurgence Fund, a JV between Bain Capital and Piramal Enterprises invested \$156 million in Archeon's marine chemical business. —Bloomberg

Amazon tells
Sebi to suspend
Future-RIL deal



SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JAN. 12

After receiving a validation for Singapore tribunal's interim award from Delhi High Court, Amazon has once again asked markets regulator Sebi to suspend the Future-Reliance deal. It has also asked the Sebi to instruct stock exchanges not to issue any approval letter to Future Retail.

In the letter dated January 5, Amazon informed the regulator about the constitution of the arbitral tribunal by Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) in the arbitration proceedings initiated by Amazon against inter alia FRL, Kishore Biyani and Rakesh Biyani. A three-member tribunal consisting of Singaporean barrister Michael Hwang Albert van den Berg and Jan Paulsson have been formed at the SIAC.

"We wish to highlight that in view of the constitution of the Arbitral Tribunal, the interim award passed by the Emergency Arbitrator stands automatically

extended for the duration of the Arbitration Proceedings unless it is reconsidered/ modified/ vacated by the Arbitral Tribunal," Amazon said in the letter seen by Financial Chronicle.

Hence, Future Retail continues to be expressly enjoined and restrained by the interim award from taking in any steps in furtherance...In October, Amazon had received an interim order from SIAC barring Future Retail from taking any step to dispose of or encumber its assets or issuing any securities to secure any funding from a restricted party.

Amazon wants the Sebi to take action by suspending review of the impugned transaction (Future's transaction with Reliance), and not granting any no-objection in relation to the same. It also wants the regulator to direct Indian stock exchanges not to issue any no-objection/ approval letter to FRL.

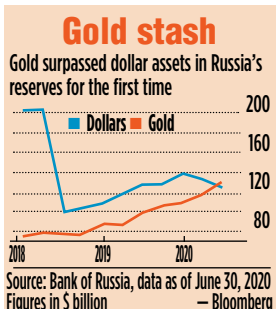
Amazon has been writing letters to regulators and stock exchanges from October 3 on this matter.

Russia for first time holds
more gold than US dollars

NATASHA DOFF &
ANYA ANDRIANOVA
JAN. 12

A multi-year drive to reduce exposure to US assets has pushed the share of gold in Russia's \$583 billion international reserves above dollars for the first time on record.

Gold made up 23 per cent of the central bank's stockpile as of the end of June 2020, the latest date for which data on the breakdown is available, according to a report published late on Monday. The share of dollar assets dropped to 22 per cent,



down from more than 40 per cent in 2018.

The shift is part of a broader strategy outlined by President Vladimir Putin to "de-dollarise" the

Russian economy and lower its vulnerability to US sanctions amid deteriorating relations with Washington. Gold is now the second-biggest component of the central bank's reserves after the euro, which makes up about a third of total assets. About 12 per cent of the stash is in yuan.

The increase in Russia's gold reserves was aided by a 26 per cent surge in prices between June 2019 and June 2020. Russia spent more than \$40 billion building a war chest of gold over the past five years. —Bloomberg

MORGAN STANLEY NAMES NEW COUNTRY HEAD

BAIJU KALESH
JAN. 12

Morgan Stanley made several senior appointments from country head to chiefs of investment banking in India after the US bank cemented multi-billion dollar deals in the Asian country in the past year. Sanjay Shah will be the bank's country head for India, effective immediately, according to a



memo. Kamal Yadav and Sachin

Wagle will become co-heads of the country's investment banking, while Samarth Jagnani is the new chief for global capital markets in India, the memo shows.

The appointments also came after Aisha de Sequiera, Morgan Stanley's co-chief executive officer and head of investment banking in India, died late last year. —Bloomberg

Toyota withdraws
lockout, starts second shift at Bidadi

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, JAN. 12

Toyota Kirloskar Motor on Tuesday withdrew the second lockout and enhanced its operations by resuming a second shift in both its factories in Bidadi, near Bengaluru.

The announcement came two months after the company declared the first lockout on November 9 in the facility following TKML Workers' Union members resorting to a sit-in at the factory premises to protest against the suspension of a union member. Subsequently, the automaker declared a second lockout on November 23.

The Japanese car maker's Bidadi facility has two production plants with a total installed capacity of 3.10 lakh units per annum.

The 432-acre facility in Bidadi, about 30 km from Bengaluru, employs about 3,000 permanent staff.

"In view of a recent meeting held between Karnataka deputy chief minister Ashwathnarayan with the TKM management and having observed a gradual improvement in safety situation, both inside and outside the company premises, TKM Management have decided to withdraw the lockout," the company said in a statement.

Woman vanishes with \$13 mn
from South Korean casino



YOUKYUNG LEE
JAN. 12

South Korean police are on the hunt for a female casino executive who disappeared after her employer discovered 14.6 billion won (\$13 million) in cash missing from the resort's coffers.

Hong Kong-based Landing International Development Ltd, which operates Jeju Shinhwa World, disclosed in a statement on its website that it was unable to reach the employee who was in charge of the casino funds.

The employee in charge of the funds was a Malaysian national who did not return to work after going on vacation at the end of December, Yonhap News Agency reported. The missing

funds—all in cash—would be too heavy and bulky at about 280 kilograms for one person to carry out of the casino, let alone transport off the island. Police secured surveillance camera footage from the casino but the video around the time the funds may have disappeared was erased, according to Yonhap.

Jeju Provincial Police Agency confirmed that the probe is underway at its anti-corruption team, but declined to elaborate. Jeju, an island off the southern coast of South Korea, is a popular tourist destination dotted with foreigners-only casinos.

Landing's shares in Hong Kong plunged 7.6 per cent to a record low on Monday before rebounding 6.4 per cent on Tuesday. —Bloomberg

BROKERS SEEK
REBATE ON STT &
CTT, TAX RELIEF
ON DIVIDEND

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JAN. 12

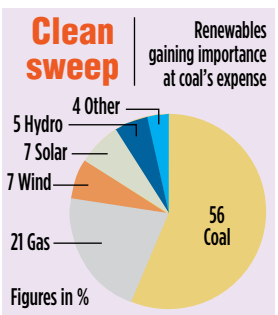
Practical problems faced by the stock market intermediaries are among several budget proposals presented to the finance minister by the Association of National Exchanges Members of India (Anmi) on behalf of around 900 stock brokers.

These include reduction in classification of income from stock market operations, reintroduction of rebate under erstwhile Section 88E for securities transaction tax (STT) and commodities transaction tax (CTT) paid, exemption of dividend of Rs 10,000 per company to the recipient, rationalisation of GST rate, credit for tax deducted at source for the purpose of Sec. 199 and placing limitation act under the Sebi Act and

"The concept of speculative income should be done away with and there should be limited categories of classification of incomes viz, business income, long-term capital gain and short-term capital gain," Anmi said.

It will ease income classification from the point of view of the taxpayer. For example, intraday cash market trading is classified as speculative income but intraday derivative trade is classified as business income.

Due to revenue considerations the association has not suggested complete abolition of STT/CTT on all non-delivery trades but sought reintroduction of rebates as a mitigating factor to align the Indian market more with every other global market, it said.



wind and solar generation, with the current 300-megawatt record holder starting in California last month.

Massive batteries are becoming a staple of power grids as a larger share of generation capacity tilts to

intermittent sources such as solar and wind. Battery operators can purchase that clean energy during excess periods and re-sell it when the sun isn't shining or wind isn't blowing.

Other companies also have big plans for energy storage, with France's Neoen SA submitting a scoping study for a 500-megawatt battery in New South Wales to regulators in December, after in November saying it would partner with Tesla Inc to install a 300-megawatt facility in Victoria. Even larger systems than Origin's have been announced for California, China and Australia. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Kohli loses 2nd spot to Smith

Dubai: India skipper Virat Kohli was on Tuesday pushed to the third spot by Australian batsman Steve Smith in the ICC Test rankings for batsmen but middle-order batsman Cheteshwar Pujara gained two places to be number eight.

Kohli has 870 points in the latest chart, issued on Tuesday. Smith (900 points) is placed second behind New Zealand captain Kane Williamson (919). The Australian had scores of 131 and 81 in the Sydney Test. Williamson's epic 238 in the second Test against Pakistan in Christchurch has helped him reach the best ever-rating points by a New Zealand player and consolidate his position at the top of the list.

Pujara, whose half-centuries (50, 77) in the third Test helped India draw the match, is placed eighth, just behind his stand-in skipper Ajinkya Rahane, who lost one place. — PTI

Vivek shines in Bengal win

Kolkata: Opener Vivek Singh hammered a 64-ball 100 (13 fours, 3 sixes) to star in Bengal's 16-run win against Jharkhand in a Elite Group B match the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20 tournament here on Tuesday.

The home team notched up their second straight win, following a victory over Odisha on the opening day (January 10). Opting to bat first, Bengal rode on Singh's stroke-filled century to make 161/6 in 20 overs. In another match in the group, Hyderabad pulled off a six-run win over Odisha. — PTI

BRIEF SCORES

- Bengal 161/6 (Vivek Singh 100 n.o.; Monu Kumar 3/30) bt Jharkhand 145/9 (Virat Singh 47).
- Hyderabad 153/8 (Tilak Varma 44, Tanmay Agarwal 34, Suryakant Pradhan 3/34) bt Odisha 147/4 (Govinda Poddar 50, Subhansu Senapati 42 n.o., C.V. Milind 2/24).

Ankita in Oz Open Qualifiers final

Melbourne: India's top-ranked woman player Ankita Raina moved to the final round of the Australian Open Qualifiers with a gutsy three-set win over world number 118 Katarina Zavatska but it was curtains for Ramkumar Ramanathan in the men's singles.

In the women's singles qualifiers being held in Dubai, the 180th ranked Ankita overcame a second-set lapse to win 6-2, 2-6, 6-3 in the second round against the Ukrainian.

Ankita will next take on 20-year-old Serbian Olga Danilovic, ranked 183. It will be the first meeting between the two players. It is Ankita's sixth attempt to crack the singles main draw of a Grand Slam and she is now just one win away from creating history. — PTI

F1 season to begin in Bahrain

London: The start of the Formula One season has been delayed a week and will start in Bahrain after the Australian Grand Prix was postponed from March to November because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Australian race in Melbourne, initially set to open the season on March 21, has been rescheduled to November. 21 with F1 organisers citing the ongoing situation regarding Covid-19.

The Chinese Grand Prix has also been postponed but no new date has been set for the race. The season will start with the Bahrain Grand Prix on March 28 at Sakhr. — AP

Live on TV

BADMINTON	
Thailand Open: Round of 32 from 7.30 am on Star Sports 2 HD, 3	
CRICKET	
Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20 Tournament: Delhi vs Andhra Pradesh from 11.55 am; Kerala vs Mumbai from 6.55 pm on Star Sports 1, HD	
FOOTBALL	
Indian Super League: Odisha FC vs Chennaiyin from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3	
English Premier League: Manchester City vs Brighton from 11.30 pm on Star Sports Select 1; Aston Villa vs Tottenham Hotspur from 1.45 am (Thursday) on Star Sports Select 2, HD	

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BAD START!

Sindhu, Praneeth lose on return to action in Thailand

Bangkok, Jan. 12: World champion P.V. Sindhu suffered a shock defeat on her return to international badminton, losing in three games to Denmark's Mia Blichfeldt in the opening round of YONEX Thailand Open Super 1000 event here on Tuesday.

Months after the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the international calendar, Sindhu, seeded sixth, returned to action with a 21-16, 24-26, 13-21 defeat to world no 18 Blichfeldt in a 74-minute battle.

In the men's singles, world No. 13 B. Sai Praneeth too suffered a straight game loss to Thailand's Kantaphon Wangcharoen on his return to competition.

Frontrunner to represent India at the Olympics, Praneeth went down 16-21, 10-21 to the world No. 15 Wangcharoen for only his second loss to the Thailand player.

Earlier in the day, the Indian mixed doubles pair of Ashwini Ponnappa and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy claimed a 21-11, 27-29, 21-16 win over the Indonesian pair of Hafiz Faizal and Gloria Widjaja.

However, the women's doubles pair of Ashwini and N. Sikki Reddy couldn't cross the opening hurdle, going down 16-21, 7-21 to fourth seeded Korean pair of Kim So Yeong and Kong Hee Young.

Sindhu made a good start, opening up a 6-3 lead and never allowing her opponent to grab the advantage to take the opening game.

In the second game, the Indian once again moved ahead to an 11-8 advantage but the Danish girl came back strongly and turned the tables at 15-14. After a neck-and-neck battle, it was Blichfeldt, who showed better nerves to make a roaring comeback.

In the decider, Blichfeldt carried on the momentum and opened up a sizable 11-6 lead at the break. She kept exerting pressure on the Indian, moving to a 14-8 advantage.

Sindhu eventually handed a seven match-point advantage to Blichfeldt after finding the net and then hit wide as the Danish shuttler celebrated. No coaches, managers or other personnel are allowed to attend the matches of the Indian players. — PTI



Srikanth miffed at poor treatment

Bangkok, Jan. 12: Former world number one shuttler Kidambi Srikanth got a bloodied nose after undergoing multiple Covid-19 tests and miffed at the poor treatment of health officials at Thailand Open, the Indian on Tuesday called it "unacceptable".

"We take care of ourselves for the match not to come and shed blood for THIS. However, I gave 4 tests after I have arrived and I can't say any of them have been pleasant. Unacceptable," an upset Srikanth wrote on his twitter handle.

The 27-year-old, who is scheduled to open his campaign on Wednesday against fellow Indian Verma, shared photographs of his nose bleeding after he was tested for the fourth time.

The Badminton World Federation said Srikanth is being attended to by a doctor and it is awaiting a medical explanation.

"A doctor from the Covid-19 testing team is attending to Srikanth Kidambi. BWF is still awaiting a medical explanation from Badminton Association of Thailand and the Department of Disease Control as to the reasoning for the occurrence," a BWF official said.

The Indian players are being tested for the fourth time following the positive Covid-19 result of star player Saina Nehwal.

Parupalli Kashyap, too, was forced to withdraw "due to close proximity" with wife and fellow shuttler Saina, while H.S. Prannoy's participation in balance after his sample came out negative following a positive result in a bizarre turn of events. — PTI



Kidambi Srikanth shared images after his Covid Tests in Thailand which left him injured.

Two are corona positive at Australian Open qualifying

Melbourne, Jan. 12: Two players have been withdrawn from Australian Open qualifying tournament in Doha, Qatar and put into hotel quarantine after returning positive tests for Covid-19.

American Denis Kudla, seeded No. 4 in the qualifying event, which is being held outside of Australia for the first time, was withdrawn following a 6-4, 6-3 first-round win over Elliot Benchetrit of Morocco on Monday.

Francisco Cerundolo of Argentina beat Guillermo Garcia-Lopez of Spain 6-2, 6-4 before he was withdrawn.

Tennis Australia confirmed in a statement there'd been two positive tests at the tournament and both men had been transferred to a government-run medi-hotel, where strict quarantine procedures were in place.

The withdrawals mean Australian wildcard entry

Dane Sweeny and Mario Vilella Martinez of Spain get walkovers into the third round of qualifying.

The Grand Slam is usually held in the last two weeks of January to coincide with the end of the holidays in the southern summer. An exhibition event featuring Serena Williams, Naomi Osaka, Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal will be played as an once-off curtain raiser in Adelaide on January 29. — AP

Monday.

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Tennis Australia confirmed in a statement there'd been two positive tests at the tournament and both men had been transferred to a government-run medi-hotel, where strict quarantine procedures were in place.

The withdrawals mean Australian wildcard entry

Bumrah, Ashwin add to long injury list

New Delhi, Jan. 12: On Monday, whenever the TV cameras panned towards the Indian dressing room, Ravichandran Ashwin could be seen either standing at the SCG balcony or leaning against the railing. But not for once was he sitting.

For the viewers, it might come across as a case of a senior player being tense as the pair of Rishabh Pant and Cheteshwar Pujara took the Australian attack head on but a tweet from Ashwin's wife Priithi revealed what it was all about.

Ashwin was in severe back pain and couldn't even sleep the prior night because of it. As India prepare for fourth and final Brisbane Test with

the series tied 1-1, the team resembles a mini-hospital and coach Ravi Shastri and skipper Ajinkya Rahane would be at their wits' end to put together a fit eleven after Jasprit Bumrah and Mayank Agarwal joined the list of injured cricketers.

The Injury List which affected Australia Tour:

Ishant Sharma: The senior pacer suffered a left side strain after playing only one match in the IPL in September and after that was ruled out of the Australia series.

Bhuvneshwar Kumar: The white-ball specialist and reserve pacer of the Test team injured his

right hamstring during an IPL game and had to undergo an rehabilitation programme which led to him missing the Australia series in full.

Mohammed Shami: He sustained a fractured forearm while trying to fend a short ball from Pat Cummins in the Adelaide Test and was then ruled out of the Test series.

Umesh Yadav: The pacer hobbled out of the field during Australia's second innings with a calf muscle injury and there is a chance he might be back for the England series next month.

K.L. Rahul: He sustained a wrist injury while batting at the Melbourne Cricket Ground nets and was sent back to India to recuperate before the England series.

Ravindra Jadeja: India's premier all-rounder received a knock on his left thumb from a short delivery bowled by Mitchell Starc in Sydney and scans revealed dislocation as well as thumb fracture.

Hanuma Vihari: The hero of the Sydney Test, after his epic 161-ball vigil, has a serious hamstring injury (grade 2) and will be out of the fourth Test in Brisbane.

R. Ashwin: He is suffering from back spasms and found it difficult to even sleep or tie his boot laces. With medication and physiotherapy sessions, India will expect their senior-most bowler on the park in Brisbane.

Jasprit Bumrah: He suffered an abdominal strain during the late evening on the third day while chasing a ball to the boundary. He will sit out of the next Test in Brisbane. — PTI

RACISM | ROW

Warner says sorry to Indian players

Sydney, Jan. 12: Australian batting star David Warner on Tuesday condemned the racist slurs hurled at Indian players, particularly pacer Mohammed Siraj, during the third Test here and said such behaviour by the spectators was not acceptable.

Siraj, on his maiden tour of Australia, and senior pacer Jasprit Bumrah were abused for two consecutive days by the crowd.

Play was, in fact, halted on the fourth day for a few minutes after the Indian team complained to the umpires, which led to the expulsion of six spectators from the stands and an unreserved apology from Cricket Australia.

"I'd also like to say sorry to @mohammedsirajofficial and the Indian team as racism, and abuse is not in any way acceptable or tolerated anywhere at any time, and I would expect better from our home crowd," Warner said in an instagram post.

The Australian players had supported their Indian counterparts after the incidents with skipper Tim Paine even joining the Indian team huddle after Siraj's complaints on the fourth day of the drawn match.

India skipper Ajinkya Rahane said the abuse was hurtful.

About the match, Warner said it was great to be back after an injury kept him out of the first two games.

"It was great to be back out on the park again this week. Was not the ideal result for us but this is what Test cricket is all about. 5 days of tough cricket and well done to our guys for working as hard as we could..."

"...congrats to India in the way they fought hard for the draw, and that's why we love this game, it's not easy. Move onto Brisbane now for the decider and what a place the Gabba is to play at," he said. — PTI

Paine defends Smith over pitch scuffing

Sydney, Jan. 12: Australian skipper Tim Paine on Tuesday defended star batsman Steve Smith, who was accused of scuffing the guard mark of Rishabh Pant during the drawn third Test here, asserting that the Indian team would have kicked up a bit of stink (at) that time," he said.

"But that is something I have seen Steve doing many a times in Test matches and Shield games that I have played with him, when he is in the field, he likes to sort of walk up to where he bats and visualise how is he going to play," Paine elaborated.

Paine said given how this has been perceived, especially by cricket fans online, there would be reconsideration.

"...There is no way in the world, he was trying to change Rishabh Pant's guard or anything like that. That is just one of Smithy's thing that he does, now that it has come up like it is, again it is something he might need to look at because of the perception of it." — PTI

explained.

Paine said had Smith changed the guard marks, the Indian team would have taken up the issue.

"He (Smith) was certainly not changing guard and imagine if he was, then the Indian players would have kicked up a bit of stink (at) that time," he said.

"But that is something I have seen Steve doing many a times in Test matches and Shield games that I have played with him, when he is in the field, he likes to sort of walk up to where he bats and visualise how is he going to play," Paine elaborated.

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Australia captain Tim Paine (left) talks with teammate Steve Smith during the third Test against India at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Sunday. — AP

TEAM INDIA DENIED BASIC FACILITIES IN BRISBANE

New Delhi, Jan. 12: The Indian cricket team, who landed in Brisbane for the fourth and final Test against Australia, were in for a shock on Tuesday as they were lodged at a hotel which "lacked basic facilities", prompting an intervention from the BCCI top brass.

It is learnt that BCCI president Sourav Ganguly, secretary Jay Shah and CEO Hemang Amin have all got in touch with their Cricket Australia counterparts after complaints reached them and have been assured that the the Indian contingent will be made to feel comfortable from here on. The series is tied 1-1 currently.

"There was no room service or house keeping facilities. The gym is very basic and not of international standards and the swimming pool can't be accessed. This wasn't what they were promised when they checked in," a senior BCCI source said.

Asked if the players were being allowed to mingle, the Board source said: "Yes, they have been provided with a team room and are allowed to meet each other inside the hotel."

When asked whether the team had protested with the hotel authorities, the source said: "When the manager enquired about how these things are not being taken care of, all they said was, 'the rule applies to both Indian and Australian teams. There is no one team that has been subjected to hard quarantine rules.'

 — PTI