


DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

KARIMNAGAR | THURSDAY | 28 JANUARY 2021

WEATHER

 Max: 31.7°C
Min: 19°C
RH: 45%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky.
Misty morning. Max/Min
temp. 32/18 °C

NATION | 4

**Tandav makers fail
to get SC relief**

WORLD | 5

**Trump likely to be
acquitted in trial**

SPORTS | 8

**Sindhu, Srikanth lose
opening matches**



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COVID-19 COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+12,159)	(+138)
1,07,01,427	1,53,862

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+147)	(+1)
TS: 2,93,737	1,593
(+111)	(+2)
AP: 8,78,828	7,152

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

 10,10,87,195
DEATHS
 21,74,702
COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
 219
worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Pushya Shuddha Purnima till 12.42 am (Friday)
Star: Pushyami till 3.48 am (Friday)
Variyam: 11.47 am to 1.23 pm
Durmuhuratam: 10.36 am to 11.21 am; 3.06 pm to 3.50 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
HJRI CALENDAR
Jamadi- ul- Akhir 14,1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.46 am
Zohar: 12.39 pm
Asar: 4.33 pm
Maghrib: 6.15 pm
Isha: 7.24 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.09 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.48 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 5.49 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 6.23 AM

COUNTER POINT



It's high time we allocate more funds in the budget for teargas shells, lathis, water cannons...

SHORT TAKES

SC stays HC order on sexual assault

New Delhi: The Supreme Court Wednesday stayed the Bombay High Court order which acquitted a man under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act saying "groping a minor's breast without 'skin to skin contact' cannot be termed as sexual assault. A bench of Chief Justice S.A. Bobde and Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian stayed the high court order after Attorney General K.K. Venugopal mentioned the matter. The top court also issued notice to Maharashtra government and permitted the AG to file an appeal against the January 19 verdict of the Nagpur bench of the Bombay HC.

Delhi HC quizzes Centre on EIA

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court on Wednesday said it cannot understand why the Centre was resisting its order to translate the draft Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) in all 22 languages in the Constitution. A special bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Prateek Jalan said the government would have to understand the objections in local languages to the draft and therefore, "what was the harm in translating it in all 22 languages". ASG Chetan Sharma said that it has already received 20 lakh responses till date to the draft EIA and therefore, there was no need to translate it.

Two farmers' unions pull out of agitation

Umbrella union of protesting farmers not to step back unless 3 farm bills are withdrawn

**SANJAY KAW | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 27**

A day after the national capital witnessed unprecedented violence during the Republic Day tractor rally, two farmer unions — the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) and the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) — on Wednesday quit the ongoing protests against the contentious agriculture laws at Delhi borders.

AIKSCC leader V.M. Singh said his organisation is withdrawing from the agitation with immediate effect because the format of the protest is "unacceptable" to it. "We are discontinuing our agitation but our fight for the rights of the farmers will continue," he said.

Speaking about the violence, Singh said he and his organisation had nothing to do with the protest led by Bhartiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait. Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) president Thakur Bhanu Pratap Singh said he too is withdrawing from the protest as he was pained to see the violence in Delhi.

"I am deeply pained by whatever happened in Delhi yesterday and am ending our protest."

Even after the two farmer unions withdrew from over two-month long protests, the Samyuktha Kisan Morcha, an umbrella organisation of the agitating groups, made it clear that they will not call off their agitation until the three laws are withdrawn and a legal guarantee is assured on the Minimum Support Price (MSP).

Union minister Prakash Javadekar said that the government had not shut the door on further discussions with farmer leaders on the new laws. The Centre has so far held 11 rounds of talks with the farmers.

19 held for R-Day attack, 25 FIRs filed

**BHASKAR HARI SHARMA | DC
NEW DELHI, JAN. 27**

A day after the national capital saw unprecedented violence during the farmers' Republic Day tractor rally, Delhi police commissioner S.N. Shrivastava said on Wednesday some farmers' leaders were also involved in the violence and that all those involved will not be spared.

A Special Investigation Team, including officials from Special Cell, Crime Branch and the district police, has been constituted to investigate the incident. The police has registered 25 First Information Reports (FIRs) for rioting, robbing, attempt to murder and other criminal offences across against several people, including some farmers' leaders, and 19 people were arrested while around 200 other were detained and 50 were questioned. The Delhi police has named 37 farmers' leaders, including Medha Patekar and Yogendra Yadav, in an FIR registered at the

Samaypur Badli police station in connection with the violence. According to the FIR, the protesters also robbed an official pistol with 10 rounds of ammunition along with two gas guns.

The farmers' leaders named in FIR include Rakesh Tikait, Medha Patekar, Yogendra Yadav, Darshan Pal, Kulwant Singh Sandhu, Satnam Singh Pannu, Joginder Singh Ugraha, Surjeet Singh Phool, Jagjeet Singh Dalewal, Balbir Singh Rajewal, Harinder Singh Lakhoval, Gurnam Singh Chanduni.

The police chief also said by January 25 evening, it became clear that the unions were not keeping their word as they brought forward the aggressive elements who occupied the stage at protest sites and delivered provocative speeches.

He said that after five rounds of talks with the farmers' union regarding the tractor parade on R-Day, there was mutual agreement on the parade routes from Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur borders.



Farmers listen to their leaders speech during their ongoing protest at Tikri border, a day after the farmers tractor rally, in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

Farmers blame antisocials for rally turning violent

Chandigarh, Jan. 27: Actor-turned-activist Deep Sidhu is in the eye of a storm for being among the protesters who put up a religious flag atop the Red Fort on Republic Day. Many farmers' bodies blamed him for inciting protesters to head towards the Red Fort during the farmers' tractor parade on Tuesday. They also accused 36-year-old Sidhu

of allegedly trying to defame the farmers' peaceful agitation against the agri reforms introduced by the Centre.

Sidhu, since he joined the farmers' agitation against the new farm legislation last year, has been considered by several farm bodies as an "agent" of the government.

However, Sidhu sought to defend the action at the

Red Fort, saying they did not remove the national flag and had put up the 'Nishan Sahib' flag as a symbolic protest. "Deep Sidhu is an agent of the government and he did it at the behest of the Centre to defame the farmers' agitation," said Bharti Kisan Union (Ekta Ugrahan) general secretary Sukhdev Singh Kokrikalan. —PTI

SHOW | TIME

■ **Home ministry allows swimming pools ahead of summer, exhibition halls to resume**

More people allowed into film theatres

**DC CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, JAN. 27**

With new Covid-19 cases falling to seven-month lows, the Union home ministry on Wednesday allowed cinema halls and theatres to operate with more people while swimming pools have been permitted for use, just in time for the summer. Exhibition halls were allowed to resume.

According to the fresh 'unlock' guidelines issued on Wednesday, effective from February 1, there shall be no restriction on inter-state and intra-state movement of people and goods including those for cross land-border trade.

Social, religious, sports, entertainment, educational, cultural, religious gatherings have been permitted up to a maximum of 50 per cent of the hall capacity, with a ceiling of 200 people in closed spaces and in keeping with the size of open spaces. The caps on these gatherings will be subject to standard operating procedure (SOP) of the state and Union Territory concerned, the home ministry said. "Cinema halls and theatres have already been permitted up to 50 per cent of seating capacity. Now they will be permitted to operate at higher seating capacity, for which a revised SOP will be issued by the ministry of information and broadcasting in consultation with MHA," the guidelines said. Cinema houses opened are running to house full shows, and managements have asked the government to allow them to all more viewers per show, both in view of public demand and to cover the losses sustained during the lockdown period. Tamil Nadu briefly allowed 100 per cent capacity in theatres.

Swimming pools have already been permitted for use of sports persons. Now these will be permitted for use of all, for which a revised SOP will be issued by ministry of youth affairs and sports in consultation. Gyms have

reopened several months back, as well as parks, and the reopening of swimming pools gives those keeping a fitness regimen another avenue to keep fit. For casual swimmers, this order comes just in time for the traditional opening of swimming pools ahead of the summer. Business to business (B2B) exhibition halls have already been permitted. Now all types of exhibition halls will be permitted, for which a revised SOP will be issued by the department of commerce. The main focus of the guidelines is to consolidate the substantial gains that have been achieved against the spread of Covid which is visible in the

steady decline in number of active and new cases in the country over the last four months, the MHA said. Containment zones, if required, shall be carefully demarcated by the district authorities at the micro level, taking into consideration guidelines prescribed by the MoHFW in this regard.

Within the demarcated containment zones, containment measures, as prescribed by MoHFW shall be scrupulously followed. Local district, police and municipal authorities shall be responsible to ensure that the prescribed containment measures are strictly followed and state and union territory gov-

ernments shall ensure the accountability of the officers concerned in this regard.

The MHA said state and UT governments shall take all measures to promote Covid appropriate behaviour and ensure wearing of face masks, hand hygiene and social distancing. The National Directives for Covid Management shall continue to be followed throughout India, so as to enforce Covid appropriate behaviour.

For further opening up of international air travel, Ministry of Civil Aviation (MOCA) may take a decision in consultation with MHA based on the assessment of the situation.

Pay panel for 7.5% hike, pegs retirement at 60

HRA reduced; max pay at ₹1.62 lakh; state sop on housing loan

**DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 27**

The Pay Revision Commission (PRC), headed by former bureaucrat C.R. Biswal, has suggested a fitment of 7.5 per cent on the basic pay. It also called for increasing the superannuation age of employees from 58 years to 60, which is a key promise made by Chief Minister K. Chandrababhan Rao during the last Assembly elections.

The committee recommended pegging the minimum pay at ₹19,000 and ₹1,62,700 at the top end of the ladder. The new scale was evolved by merging the dearness allowance with basic pay as on July 1, 2018.

Among other changes, the committee has reduced house rent allowance (HRA) from 30 per cent to 24 in Hyderabad and to 11 per cent in villages besides other slabs from 17 to 13 per cent. It recommended retaining additional HRA in lieu of rent-free accommodation at 8 per cent of basic pay, but the monthly monetary ceiling has been increased to ₹2,500 from ₹2,000. The PRC has sought continuation of the existing practice followed by the Centre of sanctioning DA twice a year. The commission proposed a conversion factor of 0.0910 for sanction of DA from 1.1.2019.

It recommended encouraging employees to go in for house loans from the government suitably sub-



Employees unions burn the suggestions and tear copies of the PRC report in front of the State Secretariat on Wednesday. — PTI

sidising interest rates. Pending such an arrangement, increase in the quantum of various loans and advances has been recommended.

The committee suggested that the Child Care Leave (CCL) be enhanced from 90 days to 120 days in case of normal children and from 90 days to two years in case of disabled children on par with Central norms. This leave is granted with 100 per cent of salary for the first 365 days and 80 per cent of the salary for the next 365 days.

■ **Page 2: Leave to be given for work-related illness**

Employees dub report 'miserly'

**DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 27**

There is widespread resentment against the pay revision proposals mooted by the C.R. Biswal Committee to the extent that employees dubbed the report as a 'pisanari' (miserly) report.

As soon as the Pay Revision Commission report went viral on social

media on Wednesday morning, employees and teachers' organisations staged protests and some even tried to lay siege to the temporary Secretariat complex at BRK Bhavan here.

In several districts, employees organised protest programmes.

■ **Page 2: TS tries to underplay report**

SC for 7th time junks TS pleas on Hafeezpet lands

**N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC
HYDERABAD, JAN. 27**

The state government once again lost its cases on the Hafeezpet lands in the Supreme Court on Wednesday.

The apex court dismissed the special leave petitions (SLPs) filed by the state government challenging the High Court directives in two different cases. One of the cases pertained to granting of building permission and the other to registration of properties in Survey No.s 78 and 80 of Hafeezpet.

On six earlier occasions, the apex court had dismissed the state government's contention of ownership of the Hafeezpet lands.

Deccan Chronicle had reported on Monday on

● **ON SIX** earlier occasions, the SC had dismissed the state government's contention of ownership of the Hafeezpet lands

the government's discriminatory approach against common people and in favour of the super rich in granting building permissions in the controversial Sy No. 78. (Hafeezpet Sy No. 78: HC initiates contempt case, January 25).

The Supreme Court division bench headed by Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul dismissed the SLP filed by the government challenging the High Court order directing the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation to sanction building permission to one A. Shalivahana

Reddy who had applied to construct a house in 300 sq yds. "We are not inclined to interfere with the impugned order," the Bench said while dismissing the SLP.

In another case, the government had approached the SC challenging the HC's interim order issued on October 1, 2019, directing the authorities concerned to delete Sy No. 78 to 80 from the prohibitory register. The HC made a clear observation that the copy of the gazette notification issued by TS on September 26, 2013, including Sy No.s 78 to 80 in the prohibitory register under Section 22A of the Registration Act was not furnished by the Special GP.

■ **Page 2: HC had asked TS to file counter**

SASIKALA OUT OF PRISON; TN CM INAUGURATES JAYA MEMORIAL

**B. VIJAYALAKSHMI and D. SEKAR | DC
with bureau inputs
CHENNAI, BENGALURU, JAN. 27**

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami inaugurated the phoenix-themed memorial for party supremo late J. Jayalalithaa amid a huge show of strength in Chennai while in Bengaluru expelled AIADMK leader V.K. Sasikala, a close associate of the former CM, was released after serving four years of imprisonment in a corruption case. Sources said she is likely to leave for Chennai in the first week of February.

Speaking to reporters, MLA T.T.V. Dhinakaran, Sasikala's nephew and founder of Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK), said "the release of Chinnama" (Sasikala) was the happiest moment for all of them.

"People in TN are eagerly waiting for her," he said. Sasikala is suffering from Covid and has to remain at the Victoria Hospital for another three days. A large number of Sasikala supporters lined up outside the hospital, raised slogans in her favour and distributed sweets in celebration.

Back in Chennai, the memorial, also housing a digital museum, spread across 50,422 square feet, built at a cost of ₹80 crore, is expected to boost the morale of party cadre with the Assembly polls round the corner.

Speaking after the event, Palaniswami said Jayalalithaa's military-like discipline made the party grow well.

SHORT TAKES

JNTUH ORDERS
FULL PAYMENT
OF SALARIESDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 27

After continued a struggle by the government teaching and non-teaching staff across the state, the Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University, Hyderabad (JNTUH) has instructed managements and principals of affiliated colleges to ensure that full salaries are paid to the staff punctually.

The university gave strict instructions upon receipt of complaints to the Chancellor, TSCHE, department of higher education as well as the university, of non-payment of salaries or part payment of salaries to staff and faculty of various affiliated colleges. The university said that failing this, they will view the offence seriously and take action.

BJP JAMBAGH
CORPORATOR
ELECT BOOKEDDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 27

The Abids police of Hyderabad on Wednesday booked Rakesh Jaiswal, who was elected from the Jambagh division in the recent GHMC elections on a BJP ticket, for allegedly giving false statements with regard to the number of children.

The case was booked under Section 199 (false statement made in declaration which is by law receivable as evidence) of the IPC, said the police. "He was booked on the basis of giving a false statement before the authority and used the false statement/declaration as evidence i.e. he suppressed that he has got three children whereas he stated he has got two children," added the police.

TS RECORDS 147
NEW COVID-19
CASES, 1 DEATH

Hyderabad: The state recorded 147 new cases and one death from Covid-19 on Tuesday, taking the caseload to 2,93,737 and the toll to 1,593, the state health department said on Wednesday. Only 16,486 samples were tested. The GHMC limits saw 32 cases while some districts had four to five cases and a few recorded no cases.

STORMY END TO
BHUMA FAMILY'S
26-YEAR REIGNDC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, JAN. 27

In a major setback to the Bhuma family, for the first time in 26 years, they have lost control of Nandyal Vijaya Milk Dairy. A chairman has been elected from outside their stronghold, and this has led to tension on Wednesday. Police registered cases of kidnap against former MLA Bhuma Bramhananda Reddy and outgoing chairman Bhuma Narayana Reddy as a candidate fielded from their camp turned hostile. This has paved the way for the election of YSR Congress Party candidate S.V. Jagan Mohan Reddy as Chairman of Kurnool District Milk Producers' Mutually Aided Cooperative Union Ltd. Nandyal CI Mohan Reddy said that based on a complaint of kidnap lodged by one Mallikarjuna, one of the contestants for directors' post, a case has been registered against them.

JNTUH ORDERS
FULL PAYMENT
OF SALARIESDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 27

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Teachers and other state government employees stage a protest in front of the state Secretariat building against the PRC, in Hyderabad on Wednesday. — GANDHI

Leave to be given for
work-related illness

Minimum monthly pension/family pension to be fixed at ₹9,700

From Page 1

The leave will be extended to single-male parents who may include unmarried or widower or divorced employees.

Special Disability Leave is substituted by a new leave called "Work Related Illness and Injury Leave (WRILL)" and special disability leave for accidental injury and hospital leave are merged in WRILL.

It has recommended streamlining cashless treatment under EHS by collecting one per cent basic pay from employees and one per cent of basic pension from pensioners and creating a 'separate reserve' as in the case of Arogya Bhadratha.

The expenditure shall be met from the above reserve initially and the same shall be recouped from government reimbursement, after scrutiny of bills as per the existing rules.

The minimum monthly pension/family pension shall be fixed at ₹9,700, which is 50 per cent of the minimum pay in the revised master pay scale. Full pension is recommended to state govern-

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE is recommended to be increased to the level of minimum service pension, increased family pension with no dearness relief after 1.7.2018.

ment employees retiring after 20 years of service.

However, the existing provision of service weightage of five years with regard to government employees retiring in less than 20 years of service will continue. If a government servant dies while in service, the enhanced family pension shall be payable for a maximum period of either 10 years from the day next to the date of death of the employee/pensioner or till the time employee/pensioner would have attained the age of 65 years had the individual been alive, whichever is earlier.

The mentally retarded/physically challenged son/daughter of an employee are recommended to be paid family pension for their life-time even after their marriage. To provide

relief to pensioners, who retired a long time ago, an additional quantum of pension at 15 per cent of basic pension has been recommended from the age of 75 years onwards and proposed up to 100 per cent of basic pension to the pensioners aged 100 years or above.

The maximum amount of gratuity payable at the time of retirement recommended to be increased from ₹12 lakh to ₹16 lakh. Relief amount on the death of service pensioner/family pensioner is recommended to increase from ₹20,000 to ₹30,000.

Financial assistance is recommended to be increased to the level of minimum service pension, increased family pension with no dearness relief after 1.7.2018. Restoration of the commuted portion of pension after 15 years to be continued, till such time as the commutation table is revised by the Union Government.

The PRC recommended increasing the employer's share to 14 per cent of basic pay+DA in place of 10 per cent on the lines of the Centre. Invalidation pension/family pension to

be extended to the employees of state government covered under the Contributory Pension Scheme (CPS) and their family members. Death Relief (obsequies charges) is extended to retired CPS employees also on par with the pensioners/family pensioners under the old pension scheme.

The existing human resources of all departments in tune with the contemporary requirements including contract/outsourcing personnel was reviewed. It is recommended to sanction annual increase of ₹1,000 to contract/outsourcing personnel.

The terms of reference mandate the PRC to make recommendations on the revision of pay and allowances of employees of state government, local bodies, aided institutions, non-teaching staff of universities and pensioners taking into account the overall financial position of the state government.

The committee stated that if the state government implements the suggestions and recommendations, the additional burden on it would be around ₹2,250 crore.

EMPLOYEES'
UNION LEADERS
MEET CHIEF SECYDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 27

Representatives of employees' unions TNGO, TGO and Secretariat employees associations met Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar over the fitment and other recommendations made by the Pay Revision Commission headed by retired IAS officer C.R. Biswal soon after it was 'released'. They said the fitment recommendation of 7.5 per cent of the basic pay was condemnable. Later, speaking to the media, union leaders M. Rajender and Mamata criticised the recommendations and pointed out that employees were expecting 43 per cent fitment and not a miserable 7.5 per cent.

They said it was grossly unfair to reduce the house rent allowance and minimum pay to ₹19,000 from ₹24,000. They said that the maximum pay limit should be extended up to ₹2,19,000. The Commission has pegged at ₹1,62,700.

The union leaders stated that within three or four days they would meet the Chief Minister and achieve a better PRC fitment. They appealed to the employees not to worry about the fitment suggested by the PRC.

Somesh Kumar released a statement saying that a three-member committee had met employees' union representatives and heard their views. He said all related issues would be brought to the Chief Minister notice.

HC ASKED STATE
GOVERNMENT TO
FILE COUNTER

From Page 1

The High Court asked the government to file a counter and posted the case for further hearing on October 17, 2019. The government instead of pursuing the case in the High Court preferred an SLP in the apex court for reasons best known to it. "The impugned order being in the nature of an interim order, and that too passed on 01.10.2019, we are not inclined to interfere under Article 136 of the Constitution of India," the SC said.

SCHOOL TEACHERS
FORUM RIDICULES
PRC REPORT

Khammam: School Teachers Federation state president Devarakonda Saidulu ridiculed the recommendations of Pay Revision Commission (PRC) report and he termed it as pay deduction report. He said Chief Minister

K. Chandrashekar Rao had deceived the employees.

He said no serious effort had been put into the report. "The HRA has been reduced. The report followed an unscientific approach," Saidulu said.

The AP government is paying 27 per cent interim relief while the PRC recommended 7.5 per cent hike, he said. Besides, the salary increment is recommended to be implemented from 2021 instead of 2018. The committee spent ₹9 crore and took 30 months to give unrealistic report, Saidulu said.



photograph of Late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi with Adivasi Gussadi dance troupe on the occasion of Republic Day in 1981. Kanaka Raju who is conferred Padma Shri is sitting second next to Indira Gandhi in the photo. —DC

Rare 'memory' of
Gussadi artists with
late PM GandhiPILLALAMARRI
SRINIVAS | DC
ADILABAD, JAN. 27

Many top political leaders and presidents of India used to respect Adivasi culture and their unique lifestyle. They even mingled with people of various tribes on special occasions to understand their unique culture and take their opinion on empowerment of tribes in India.

Former prime minister of India late Indira Gandhi was one such person. Adivasi Gussadis have a rare photograph with her, said Kanaka Raju, who has been selected for Padma Shri. The photograph with Indira Gandhi was taken in Delhi when Kanaka Raju led a team to give a dance performance on the occasion of Republic Day in 1981.

Kanaka Raju has been

conferred Padma Shri for bringing the unique Gussadi dance alive by training many Adivasi youths in this dance form over the last 50 years. Gussadi dance troupes have performed before Indira Gandhi, Gnanai Jail Singh, and A. P. J. Abdul Kalam in the past.

Telangana tribal welfare department officials invited Kanaka Raju to Hyderabad for a felicitation by commissioner Christiana Z. Chongthu on being selected for the Padma Shri award.

In this regard, Kanaka Raju also met tribal welfare minister Satyawathi Rathod, excise minister V. Srinivas Goud and Language and Culture Department director Mamidi Hari Krishna in Hyderabad. They too appreciated the Gussadi dance exponent on getting awarded the Padma Shri.

Politicians look at
survey agencies to
know voters pulseDC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, JAN. 27

So far, political parties were taking the help of 'survey agencies' to know the pulse of the voters when assembly, Lok Sabha and other major elections took place. Now, such surveys are sponsored by parties even for local body polls.

Leaders of major political parties here have enlisted the service of such agencies to know the mind of voters for the Adilabad rural mandal ZPTC. Questions are also asked in these surveys about the people's response to the welfare schemes initiated by the YSRC government led by Jagan. Local inhabitants, not used to such an exercise, were surprised when teams of surveyors visited interior villages and asked them about their party preferences and how they felt about the performance of the state government.

Winning the Adilabad rural ZPTC seat is a matter of prestige to both TRS and BJP. The result will have its impact on the Adilabad assembly constituency politics. A senior Adivasi leader said teams of youths are visiting the villages for

sample surveys and this was for the first time such surveys were done in these areas. Adilabad Rural ZPTC seat fell vacant with the demise of Are Rajanna following a Covid-19 hit. Both Adilabad MLA Joga Ramanna and BJP district president Payal Shankar are keen on winning the seat for their party candidates.

Payal Shankar's son Sharath will be the BJP candidate while Are Rajanna's son Naresh Kumar will be the TRS nominee. Payal Shankar is trying for his son's victory by ensuring the backing of Adilabad MP Soyam Bapurao, a tribal leader. Joga Ramanna is trying his best to split the Adivasi vote bank by luring some Adivasi leaders to the TRS camp.

It is learnt that huge sums have begun being pumped in for the campaign much before the EC issued the poll notification. Proof is in the way youths in interior areas are flush with cash these days and finding themselves in an inebriated condition day and night. They meet in groups in villages and organise parties with heavy inputs of liquor and meat.

Activists: Order
fraught with riskDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 27

The decision of the government to allow gram sarpanches to decide on culling of wild boar could result in uncontrolled and unchecked killing of the animals, and could prove to be counter-productive, it has been warned.

"The long overdue order is good from the farmers' perspective. But, as a conservationist, I see a flaw. How will the understaffed forest department keep track of how many boars are shot? By who? And where," Shafat Ali Khan told *Deccan Chronicle*. Pointing to the perils of unchecked hunting of wild boar, as the orders allow sarpanches to hire anyone with a licensed gun that can fire bullets capable of killing a boar, he said it should be remembered that "40 per cent of leopards' prey base is sub adult wild

piglets. Nearly 50 per cent of leopards in the state are, nowadays, outside the forests, in human landscape. Excessive culling will rob their prey base triggering further man-animal conflict." He said, "a balanced, scientific culling is a tool of conservation. Overdoing it, I foresee, could be counter-productive."

According to Pervaram Santhaji, a licensed shooter empanelled by the forest department for culling of wild boar, the government should have not allowed the freedom to call anyone with a licensed gun. "Not everyone with a gun is a good shoot. What if they shoot someone accidentally, or some other wild animal? Who will be responsible for the fallout? Anyone called in for the culling must at least be certified as a good target shot by the Telangana Rifle Association or the state police," he said.

WILD | MENACE

Villagers unsure over funds for culling operation

Sarpanches happy with wild boar GOs

BALU PULIPAKA | DC
HYDERABAD, JAN. 27

The newly minted honorary wildlife wardens, all the village sarpanches, are reported to be a happy lot with the government order that give them the power to order the killing of wild boar that attack and damage crops in their villages.

But there is also a sense of disappointment that the order, issued on Tuesday, has no information as to where the money to hire shooters, and the subsequent cost of burying the culled wild boar, will come

from. The sarpanches say that the government should have included instructions to the district collectors, or to the panchayat department or to the forest range officers to release the funds for a culling operation in a village. Or there should have been instructions saying one of the three will make the payments to the shooters.

"There is no clarity on this issue. Now that everyone knows that a sarpanch can take a decision on getting rid of wild boars that are attacking crops, they will all ask us to take

action. And they will expect that we take quick decisions," Saritha Tirupati Reddy, sarpanch of Manigila village in Peddamandadi mandal of Wanaparthy district, said.

"The cost of getting a shooter who is approved by the forest department to the village, the expenditure incurred by him for the shooting etc., will work out to anywhere up to ₹10,000 a day. This will put us in a spot as we expect multiple demands from farmers for culling boar that attack their fields," she told Deccan Chronicle. This is

the season when most farmers plant groundnut, a crop that the boars can destroy in a single night over a few acres, she added.

In Kumaram Bheem Asifabad district, Pale Sudhakar, sarpanch of Agarguda in Penchikalpet mandal, said the order was the most useful one so far in the farmers' battle against wild boar. He recalled how he had led a protest last September with 200 villagers demanding that the forest department do something about the wild boar depredations.

"The forest officers keep telling us that our village in the forest, and that we are in the land that belongs to wild animals. Sometimes they tell us even the air belongs to the forest and are very dismissive of our problems," he said.

"Whenever there is wild boar damage to crops, they say they will give ₹1,200 per acre as compensation. It costs ₹50,000 to ₹60,000 per acre of cotton, which the boars raid to eat the cotton bolls when they are raw. What use is ₹1,200 to us against what we actually spend," he asked.

OTHER STORIES

FORMER MP
PA GOES MISSING
IN NSP CANALDC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, JAN. 27

Nunna Ravi, personal assistant to former Union minister Renuka Chowdhary went missing in the Nagarjunasagar canal near Munner in Khammam on Wednesday. Ravi, 39, went to the canal for a swim with his friends, as they do everyday to swim against the current. When Ravi went missing in the waters, his friends called the police. It is suspected that Ravi might have been suffered a cardiac stroke while swimming. The police has deployed divers to try and find Ravi.

CANCER TESTING
CAMP ON JAN. 30
IN NIZAMABADDC CORRESPONDENT
NIZAMABAD, JAN. 27

Cancer screening camp to be conducted on January 30 in Nizamabad. District collector C. Narayana Reddy will launch the camp at Indur cancer hospital at Madhavanagar. Government of Telangana, Indur cancer hospital and Grace cancer foundation to jointly conduct the camp. People aged above 21 years can visit the camp for cancer screening, the organisers said.

ANTI-TRS WAVE
BLOWING IN TS,
SAYS VIVEKDC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, JAN. 27

The executive committee meeting of BJP Warangal Urban district was held here on Wednesday under the leadership of district president Padma Rao.

Speaking during the meeting, former MP G. Vivek Venkataswamy said the winds are blowing against Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao in Telangana.

The Telangana government has neglected the central government schemes. People are being deceived with only words and no visible work. The administration has taken a turn as if it was ruled by Tughlaq.

"The struggles of people in Telangana have gone in favour for the Kalvakuntla Company. KCR, TRS party is going to bow down soon to give way for the BJP flag in Telangana state. The people have already hit out at the TRS in Dubbaka and GHMC. The BJP is now in the first place in Warangal city. KCR has been deceiving people with lies since a long time," he said.

Vivek stated that the people now believe that only the BJP can bring down the KCR rule. He gave a call to all Dalits to unite to make a Dalit as Chief Minister.

He said opposition parties are spreading false propaganda on agricultural law for political gain.

He alleged that the Mission Bhagiratha project was taken up just for commissions. "The definition of KCR has been redefined to Kalvakuntla Commission Rao.

A CBI inquiry will be conducted against Kalvakuntla & Co. soon. Mid-term elections would come in 2022 and the TRS will be unseated for sure," he said.

● "The struggles of people in Telangana have gone in favour for the Kalvakuntla Company. KCR, TRS party is going to bow down soon to give way for the BJP flag in Telangana state. The people have already hit out at the TRS in Dubbaka and GHMC. BJP is now in the first place in Warangal city.

MLA EFFIGY BURNT FOR REMARKS AGAINST
RAM MANDIR DONATIONS COLLECTION DRIVEDC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, JAN. 27

Parkal MLA Challa Dharma Reddy kicked up in a controversy after making comments against the collection drive of donations for Ram Mandir to be constructed at Ayodhya. While addressing a meeting, he asked why people should donate for the temple in Ayodhya when there is Bhadrachalam shrine in Telangana. "We have Lord Rama in Bhadrachalam. Why do we need your Lord Rama in

Ayodhya? Will god originate just because you construct a temple there?" he asked stating that the BJP is politicising the issue.

"We are not against the idea of constructing the temple. God is for all, not just for you. We will teach you a fitting lesson in the upcoming elections," he warned.

Irked by the comments BJP leaders held protests at Parkal and Warangal. They burnt an effigy of the MLA and demanded he retracts his comments.

Govt employees slam
Biswal panel report

Staff alleges that PRC report might be influenced by govt

DC CORRESPONDENT
NIZAMABAD, JAN. 27

Stage government employees, teachers and pensioners burnt the proposal papers of the Pay Revision Commission here on Wednesday against the proposed fitment of 7.5 per cent and cut in house rent allowance. Under the aegis of the steering committee of all associations, taken out a rally in the town and burnt the proposal copies at dharna chowk. They raised slogans at the state government.

Speaking on the occasion, steering committee leaders said that the TRS government is not friendly with the employees, who are tools to the government machinery. In united Andhra Pradesh, employees, pensioners had never got the 7.5 fitment, they said. Government delayed PRC for 33 months and proposals are shocking, they said. They criticized that PRC might be influenced by the government and it did not work impartially.

Steering committee leaders said that they boycott the proposals of PRC. Steering committee members Srikanth, Ramesh, Devi Singh, Sudhakar, Rammoohan Rao, Y. Vijay Kumar, Shanthan, Satyanand, Ramesh, Vijay Kumar, A.S. Dharmender and Ajfal Beig were present.



Government employees, teachers and pensioners take out a protest rally against PRC and burn PRC proposal papers in Nizamabad on Wednesday.

— BY ARRANGEMENT

It's pay deduction report
not PRC, say teachersDC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, JAN. 27

School Teachers Federation state president Devarakonda Saidulu ridiculed the recommendations of pay revision report and he termed it as pay deduction report rather than pay revision. He said that the Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Rao, who used to claim

'employee friendly government, deceived the employees.

He said that the government did make the report as name sake and there is no serious effort in it. "The house rent allowances were recommended reduction to 24, 17, 13 and 11 against the existing HRA of 30, 20, 14.5 and 12 per cent.

The report followed unscientific approach

in fixing HRA", he said.

The Andhra Pradesh government has been implementing 27 per cent interim relief and PRC report recommended 7.5 per cent.

The salary increment is recommended to implement from 2021 instead of 2018.

The committee that spent Rs 9 crore and took 30 months to give unrealistic report.

KCR deceived govt staff with
Biswal committee report: BJPDC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, JAN. 27

BJP state general secretary and party candidate for Warangal, Nalgonda, Khammam graduates' constituency MLC elections Gujjula Premender Reddy criticised the report given by the Biswal Committee on fitment to be given to employees.

Responding to the Biswal committee report on Wednesday, he said the Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao has deceived the employees by delaying the announcement of fitment for three years in the name of the Biswal committee and made a disappointing report.



Gujula Premender Reddy

"Should a committee be set up for just 7.5 per cent and ten per cent fitment? Is three years of time needed for this report? Did the Biswal Committee work at all? Was it allowed to work independently? Did the CM KCR write the PRC sitting in his farm

house?" he posed.

He further alleged that the committee was put under pressure to mention what CM KCR dictates. Giving 7.5 per cent fitment and reducing HRA by 6 per cent is atrocious, he said.

"There is no benefit to the employees through the report. 7.5 PRC is given and CPS is reduced by 10 per cent. The salary of an employee with 30 per cent CPS will not be increased by this PRC. Instead, 2.5 per cent of the salary will be reduced. This is what the Chief Minister has to offer to the employees who have been waiting for 31 months," he said

demanding the state to give 43 per cent fitment as demanded by the employees.

Premender Reddy stated that the workload on employees has increased. Vacancies should be filled without wasting time on committees and reports. Such a terrible, minimal fitment was not given even in the united Andhra Pradesh state.

He noted that employees were never given less than 25% fitment. "It is customary to give an IR as soon as the PRC is filed. But this government did not even give IR. Reducing HRA is foolish when house rents are skyrocketing," Reddy said.



Minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao along with Mahbubabad collector V.P. Gautham at the Palle Prapruthi Vanam in Thorrur on Wednesday.

— BY ARRANGEMENT

Thorrur to be role model
municipality: ErrabelliDC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, JAN. 27

Thorrur municipality will be developed as a model for the entire State, Minister for Panchayat Raj Errabelli Dayakar Rao said here on Wednesday.

The minister, who inaugurated Palle Prapruthi Vanam and Yathi Raja Rao Memorial Park, besides taking part in several other developmental programmes at Thorrur in Mahbubabad district, stated that funds were no constraint to ensure facilities in Thorrur town. He said that M u n i c i p a l Administration and Urban Development

(MA&UD) Minister K T Rama Rao had promised to allocate more funds for the development of Thorrur Municipality.

"After March, efforts are on to allocate ₹50 lakh for each ward in the municipality to ensure the development of the town" Errabelli said. Even though the State's economy was in doldrums due to the impact of coronavirus lockdown, the government continued its welfare programmes," the minister said.

Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Rao assured irrigation facility with the construction of Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP), he said. KCR

also ensured drinking water to all the households in the State by taking up Mission Bhagiratha programme with an estimated cost of ₹45,000 crore, the Errabelli said.

On the occasion, the minister released bottled drinking water of Mission Bhagiratha. District Collector V.P. Gautham, Additional Collector Abhilash Abhinav, former Girijan Cooperative Corporation D Mohan Gandhi Naik, Municipal C h a i r m a n Ramachandraiah, Commissioner Gunde Babu, MPP Anjaiah and ZPTC Srinivas were among others present.

Delay in compassionate
appointments in TelanganaA. RAVINDRA SESHU
KHAMMAM, JAN. 27

The snail's pace at which the compassionate appointments are done by the government is giving heartburns to families waiting for such jobs.

The state government had identified 178 families for giving jobs on compassionate grounds since 2018. About 82 persons were given postings so far and the remaining 96 persons are waiting for appointment letters. The decisions are being implemented as per the availability of posts and the educational qualifications of the applicants

In Zilla Parishad, 67 applications on compassionate

grounds are pending while 17 persons were given the postings. Applications of three persons were rejected due to various reasons like crossing of age-limit while 47 candidates are waiting for postings.

There are various reasons for the delay. Lack of availability of posts is one reason. There are several vacancies for office subordinate posts. But, the persons who were identified for jobs under compassionate grounds might be eligible for a higher-grade junior assistant posts and do not opt for a junior-level posting. In the collectorate limit, about 105 applications have been received for the compassionate appointments. About 75 persons got

jobs and another 35 applications are pending. Those who applied for jobs are waiting to get suitable jobs based on their qualifications. About six persons who were eligible for junior assistant posts joined in the office subordinate (OS) posts by considering their family conditions. But, N Sridhar, who is awaiting an appointment, said he had a post-graduate qualification and he cannot join the office subordinate post.

Additional collector Madhusudan said the compassionate appointments are given immediately after vacancies emerged. The availability of more office subordinate posts than the junior assistant posts is the main reason for the delay.

GOVT TO START PROVIDING RATION
THROUGH IRIS, OTP FROM FEB. 1DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, JAN. 27

District civil supplies officer N. Rajender said that the government stopped the delivering ration through biometric systems from February 1.

The ration card holders can get the provisions through Iris or OTP system from their concerned fair price shops. The government took the system in the backdrop of Covid-19 and the virus may spread by using a biometric system by thousands of ration card holders.

"It is a temporary one and the old system will be revived after the situation comes under control", he said. He said that an awareness program on the new system to the fair price dealers as well as

● Government took the system in the backdrop of Covid as virus may spread by using a biometric system.

beneficiaries, is going on in the district.

In the OTP system, the card holder will get a one time password while taking a ration and he can be given a ration after telling the OTP number.

For it, almost all the ration card holders linked Aadhar numbers to their phone numbers. He said that the persons that do not link Aadhar to their phones should be done to get provisions.

The provisions will be distributed through the Iris system to the card holders. (eom)

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public in General are hereby notified that my client Mogli @ Bandi Padma W/o Bandi Srinivas. R/o H.No.10-3-157, Vidyanagar, Karimnagar town purchased open plot measuring 338 sq.yds. bearing plot No.95 in Sy.No.143 situated at Rekurtty, Karimnagar town, bounded by: East: Land of others, West: 30' ft. wide Road, North: Plot No.93 & 94 & South: 40' ft. wide Road, from Duppalli Mallikarjun Rao, D.Gopi Krishna, D.Vamsi Krishna & Guduru Archana through their AGPA holder Kuna Yelliah through Regd. sale deed No.4403/2017 dated 23-11-2017. Originally Duppalli Uma Rani and Guduru Archana purchased the same from Srigiri Sridhar through AGPA holder Srigiri Satyanarayana vide sale deed No.8216/2001 dated 31-12-2001. Earlier, Srigiri Sridhar executed AGPA No.6839/2001 dated 23-11-2001 in favour of Srigiri Satyanarayana. After death of Duppalli Uma Rani, her legal heirs and Guduru Archana sold the same to Kuna Yelliah through AGPA No.4283/2017 and subsequently, it is sold to the loan applicant. The originals of Link document No. 6839/2001 and 8216/2001 are misplaced and could not be traced out. My client is intending to avail loan facility from LIC Housing Finance Ltd., Karimnagar by offering the above property as security.

Therefore general public are informed that if anybody has got any objection over the property or loan transaction may submit their objections within a period of (15) days to the under signed by enclosing the documentary proof their claim. After completion of said period my client will obtain loan from LIC HFL.

Sd/- K.Gopal Reddy, Advocate
Karimnagar Cell: 9849059459
Date: 27-01-2021

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The detailed NIT and Bid documents can be viewed and /or downloaded from NMDC website:<http://www.nmdc.co.in> Central Public Procurement portal <http://www.eprocure.gov.in/epublish/app> & MSTC portal <http://www.mstccommerce.co.in> /eprocure/nmdc from 28.01.2021 to 10.02.2021.

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IN BRIEF

No SC relief in 'Tandav' case

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Wednesday declined to interfere with the spate of FIRs filed against the producer, director, and actors of *Tandav* web series on Amazon Prime and asked them to approach the High Courts of the states where FIRs have been lodged for their quashing. Observing that the freedom of speech is not absolute but subject to restrictions, the bench comprising Justice Ashok Bhushan, Justice R. Subhash Reddy and Justice M.R. Shah while dismissing the plea for the quashing of the FIRs said, "You want the FIRs to be quashed. But why can't you approach the High Courts?" While declining the plea for the quashing of the FIRs, the court, however, issued notice "limited to transfer and clubbing of the FIRs with first FIR." Having issued notice on the transfer and clubbing of the FIRs, the court made it clear that it will not come in the way of actor and makers of the webseries from approaching the concerned courts for anticipatory bail.

'COVAXIN WORKS AGAINST UK VARIANT TOO'

New Delhi, Jan. 27: Covaxin developed by Bharat Biotech with ICMR has equivalent immunogenicity against the UK-variant and circulating strains of SARS-COV-2 in India, ICMR said on Wednesday.

Its assurance has come at a time when scepticism is on the rise over the efficacy of both Covaxin as well as Serum Institute of India's Covishield, as they haven't completed their third phase trials.

A general feeling has emerged among people that the nation-wide inoculation is being done as a trial on them and as a result, there is a reluctance even within the medical fraternity over getting vaccinated.

Meanwhile, as India entered the 309th day since a nationwide lockdown to help curb the Coronavirus pandemic was implemented, there have been 1,06,89,527 confirmed cases, including 1,53,724 deaths.

JAWAN KILLED, 3 HURT IN IED BLAST IN J&K

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, JAN. 27

An Army jawan was killed and three others were wounded in an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blast in Jammu and Kashmir's southern Kulgam district on Wednesday morning.

The soldiers belonging to the Army's 24 Rashtriya Rifles were part of a road opening and area dominance party targeted by suspected separatist militants in Kulgam's Subhanpora area.

Meanwhile, a Srinagar resident shot and wounded by suspected militants last month died in a city hospital early Wednesday.

The police sources say the IED had been planted by militants in the premises of a roadside school at Subhanpora and was detonated when the soldiers reached the place for routine area dominance and road opening exercise.

TERRITORY | DISPUTE

Farmers cancel Budget Day march

BJP blames Rahul Gandhi, Communists for instigating farmer unions for violent protests on R-Day

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI, JAN. 27

As cracks began to appear in their ongoing agitation against the agri laws, farmer unions on Wednesday cancelled their planned march to Parliament on February 1 when the Budget would be presented.

The decision by farmer unions came a day after massive violence during their tractor parade in the national capital that left nearly 400 police personnel injured.

The farmer leaders, however, alleged that there was a conspiracy behind Tuesday's incidents and demanded a probe.

They said their agitation against the farm laws will continue and public meetings and hunger strikes will be held across the country on January 30.

"The tractor parade was hit by a government conspiracy. Deep Sidhu is an RSS man. Police let him go after he hoisted a religious flag at Red Fort," farmer leader Darshan Pal, who has been accused by police of making inflammatory speeches, alleged at a press conference.

"We have cancelled our plan for a march to Parliament on budget day on February 1. But our agitation will continue and there will be public meetings and hunger strike across the country on January 30," Pal said.

Another farmer leader Balbir Singh Rajewal claimed that over two lakh tractors and lakhs of people participated in Tuesday's parade and "99.9 percent of the protesters were peaceful".

Meanwhile, blaming the Congress, in particular its leader Rahul Gandhi and the Communists for instigating farmers unions for violent protests witnessed on the Republic Day in the national capital and "defaming the tricolor" at the Red Fort, the BJP on Wednesday said the Congress used the same tactics to instigate people

against the amended Citizenship Act, asked them to come on roads against it and fanned riots and mayhem.

Claiming that the Narendra Modi government made "sincere efforts" by reaching out to farmer unions over the farm laws, held several rounds of meetings, even suggesting clause by clause discussion but farmer unions remained adamant on repealing the laws as "there was politics behind their demand."

Asserting that all those who instigated the violence will be brought to book and the nation will never forgive those who defamed the tricolor, Union minister and senior BJP leader Prakash Javadekar said the Congress and the Congress ruled Punjab had been instigating farmer unions since day one against the laws and when there were statements and videos of some of them claiming "final match on the Republic Day" why did the Punjab government did not act against "habitual criminals" who were leaving the state to reach Delhi borders. He said no other state witnessed such protests by farmers as in Punjab.

Reading some of the tweets of Congress affiliated handles, Mr Javadekar said Congress members were supporting the violence by claiming that it was peaceful protest when police personnel were beaten up, mob was damaging barricades, flouting the agreed routes of their 'tractor parade,' damaging vehicles and defamed the tricolor at the Red Fort.

"Congress has been losing electorally, politically, it is dejected, desperate and so are the Communists, who now only want that somehow they instigate people, create a situation where there is mayhem, there are riots, so that police is forced to act, lives are lost, public property is damaged so that they can do politics," he said.



Farmers ride on tractors during their ongoing protest against the Centre's new farm laws at the Ghazipur border in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

Lone INLD MLA Abhay Singh Chautala resigns

Chandigarh, Jan. 27: Indian National Lok Dal leader Abhay Singh Chautala, who was his party's lone representative in the 90-member Haryana Assembly, Wednesday resigned as an MLA over the three new Central farm laws.

"I decided I cannot sit in the Assembly with those who bring resolutions favouring these laws," Chautala said, referring to the BJP-led government's earlier move of bringing in a resolution backing the Centre's three contentious farm laws.

Abhay, who is the younger son of INLD president and former Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala, drove to the state assembly complex with his supporters in his green tractor to submit his resignation.

"Abhay Chautala, who represents the Ellenabad constituency, came to me personally and tendered

his resignation and I have accepted it with immediate effect," Speaker Gian Chand Gupta said, adding his resignation letter was correct in all technical aspects.

Abhay has said in his resignation letter that he was resigning as farmers' demands have not been met by the government, the Speaker told reporters here.

In his resignation paper, Abhay has referred to two letters he had sent to the Speaker earlier this month, telling him that if the Centre failed to accept farmers' demand to repeal the new farm laws then his letters be treated as his resignation from the state assembly, Gupta said.

The Speaker had not accepted Abhay's previous letters as his resignation on the grounds that "conditional letters" cannot be considered as such.

In the letter to Gupta,

Abhay, the 57-year-old general secretary of the INLD, had slammed the Centre for imposing the black laws" on farmers in an undemocratic way and said the farming community in the entire country is opposing these legislations.

After Abhay's resignation, the 90-member Haryana Assembly now has 40 MLAs of the BJP, 10 of ally JJP, 31 members of the main opposition Congress and one MLA of Haryana Lokhit Party.

Seven members are Independents, out of whom five including Power Minister Ranjit Singh Chautala support the ruling combine.

Abhay's move to resign is likely to come as a boost for workers of the party, which has been out of power for over 15 years in Haryana and has suffered a series of electoral setbacks in recent times.

— PTI

Farmer who died had returned from Oz to celebrate his wedding

Rampur (UP), Jan. 27: He had returned from Australia to his hometown in Uttar Pradesh's Rampur to celebrate his recent wedding. And there was a gathering indeed at his home at Dibdiba village in Bilaspur on Wednesday. But no celebration.

Navreet Singh's family and friends were mourning his death a day earlier. The 27-year-old farmer got crushed underneath the tractor he was driving after it toppled on the road when he tried to break through a police barricade at central Delhi's ITO during a farmers' tractor parade, police have said.

A police officer said on Wednesday the body reached Rampur Tuesday night and post-mortem was conducted.

Navreet had come to his native place from Australia to throw a wedding party after he tied the knot abroad some time back, his family members said.

Persuaded by his uncles, Singh visited the national capital on Republic Day to participate in the farmers' protests against the Centre's agriculture laws and drove a blue tractor at high speed, according to footage circulating on social media.

As the tractor rammed into the yellow police barricade, it flipped and Navreet came under the toppled vehicle leading to his death, the Delhi Police had said Tuesday. "We came together to participate in the parade but never knew it would happen," a neighbour said.

A rumour spread like wildfire that Navreet fell to a police bullet, but the Delhi Police denied it saying the CCTV footage did

not record any gunshot sound. Scores of locals reached the bereaved family's home on Wednesday to pay homage as the body was kept at Dibdiba village for pre-cremation rites.

Security has been beefed up in Rampur district with senior police officials getting on ground to review law and order.

"ADG Bareilly Zone Avinash Chandra along with Rampur SP Shogun Gautam visited Bilaspur area of the district to review the law and order situation. Necessary instructions were given to personnel on the ground," the police official added.

Navreet's grieving family members, who described him as a "shaheed (martyr)", said he had gone to Australia for higher education and got married there recently. He came home to celebrate his wedding, they said.

After the Tuesday incident, protesting farmers draped the body in the Tricolour and kept it at the ITO crossing, not allowing the police to send it for post-mortem.

They kept insisting on taking back the body to the village at the earliest and also lashed out at the mediapersons covering the incident. Speaking about the incident, a senior Delhi Police officer said some farmers were driving their tractors rashly in an attempt to hit security personnel. "We saw the tractor hitting the barricades. Our personnel went to rescue him, but a group of agitating farmers stopped them," he said.

The farmers, however, denied the police version and claimed that the Navreet died after being shot by the police. — PTI

Skin-to-skin contact: SC stays HC order acquitting accused

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, JAN. 27

The Supreme Court on Wednesday stayed a judgment of the Bombay High Court holding that groping a child's breast without removing her top is no sexual assault under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.

Permitting Attorney General K.K. Venugopal to file an appropriate petition challenging January 19, 2021, High Court judgment, Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde heading a three-judge bench comprising Justice A.S. Bopanna and Justice V. Rama-

subramanian stayed the acquittal of accused Satish and issued notice to him and the Maharashtra government.

"In view of what is stat-

ed, we permit the learned Attorney General to file an appropriate petition against the said judgment", the court said ordering that "In the meantime, we stay the acquittal of the accused ... in respect of the offence under section 8 of the POCSO Act."

The notice to accused Satish and state of Maharashtra is returnable in two weeks.

At the outset of the hearing on Wednesday, Attorney General Venugopal in a mentioning described the January 19 judgment as a "disturbing conclusion" and asserted that it "sets a dangerous precedent".

The Attorney General said that the Centre will file a petition challenging the High Court verdict on Thursday.

The High Court ruling came in an incident dat-

ing back to December 2016, the victim girl's mother complained that the accused took her daughter to his house on the pretext of giving her a guava, pressed her breasts and tried to remove her salwar. The mother immediately lodged an FIR against accused Satish, who was held guilty in February 2020 and sentenced to three years of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of ₹500 by a trial court under sections 354 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty), 363 (kidnapping) and 342 (wrongful confinement) of the IPC, and Section 8 (punishment for sexual assault) of the POCSO Act.

On his appeal, the Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court held that "admittedly, it is not the case of the prosecution that the appellant removed her top and pressed her breast. As such, there is no direct physical contact i.e. skin to skin with sexual intent without penetration," it said.

Holding that the crime falls under Section 354 of the Indian Penal Code and convicted him to a year's rigorous imprisonment instead of three years of rigorous imprisonment.

Meanwhile, the Youth Bar Association of India has also filed a petition in the top court challenging the High Court verdict. The petition asserts that the observations and reasoning in the verdict would "lead to a dangerously situation."

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights too has demanded the review of the High Court order.

9 HELD UNDER NEW ANTI-CONVERSION LAW IN INDORE

Indore, Jan. 27: Madhya Pradesh police have arrested the parents of a woman and seven other people under the state's new law which penalises religious conversions through fraudulent means, an official said on Wednesday.

Before the arrest of the accused, some Bajrang Dal workers on Tuesday created ruckus at a centre of the Christian community here, while alleging that many persons there were being forced for religious conversion.

Earlier this month, the state government promulgated the Freedom of Religion-2020 ordinance, which provides for 10 years in jail in some cases.

The state police last week also arrested a married man in Barwani and a mechanic in Bhopal in separate cases under the new law.

In the latest case, a 25-year-old woman in her police complaint alleged that her parents, on the pretext of taking her to her grandmother's place, took her to a Christian community's centre in Indore for a prayer meeting. Bhanwarkuan police station in-charge Santosh Kumar Dudhi said. — PTI

RSS ideology poses danger, says Rahul

GILVESTER ASSRAY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, JAN. 27

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi alleging that his 'incompetence' coupled with the RSS ideology of 'hatred', was causing immense damage to the country.

Gandhi was addressing Congress-led UDP's pre-election preparation meeting in Malappuram district of Kerala. "Of course the Prime Minister is incompetent. But the greatest danger is the hatred that RSS is spreading in the country" he said while accusing Modi of ruining the economy through demonetisation and flawed implementation of the GST.

At the two meetings that he addressed in Malappuram, Gandhi did not say anything on the farmers agitation or the violence that was witnessed in Delhi on Tuesday.

"You would remember the Prime Minister said he has a 56 inches chest. I am wondering what happened to 56 inches chest when Chinese troops entered kilometers inside our territory? I have

been watching for the last six months, the man with 56 inch chest has not said the word "China". The word seems to have struck inside his throat and it is not coming out. And there is a reason for this situation. The reason is that he has weakened the country and the Chinese know that he would not be able to counter them," he added.

Gandhi said the Prime Minister insisted on doing things for five or six of his corporate friends. "You look at every single sector, it is handed over to his close corporate friends. The mobile phone sector, ports, airports, power and now agriculture all are being given away one by one to them," he alleged.

Rahul is on a two-day visit to Kerala during which he will tour his constituency Wayanad and address meetings of Congress workers. On Wednesday, he also inaugurated the Congress-led Front's preparatory meetings for the Assembly polls scheduled to be held in April. Rahul, however, spared the LDF of scathing attack. He said the Congress workers in Kerala were aware of the wrongdoings of the LDF government.

India to despatch 5 lakh doses of Covishield to Sri Lanka

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JAN. 27

Continuing its neighbourhood diplomacy of gifting Covid-19 vaccines, India will on Thursday despatch five lakh doses of the Indian-manufactured Covishield (Oxford-AstraZeneca) vaccine to southern maritime neighbour Sri Lanka.

India had delivered the vaccine recently to neighbours Bhutan, the Maldives, Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar. New Delhi was awaiting regulatory clear-

ances from Colombo which have now come through. The vaccines have been manufactured by the Serum Institute of India (SII).

The delivery of the Covid-19 vaccines to Sri Lanka is being seen as a fulfillment of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment made to Sri Lankan PM Mahinda Rajapaksa during the Virtual Bilateral Summit held last September for all possible support to Sri Lanka for minimising the health and economic impact of the pandemic. The Sri

Lankan Government has meanwhile finalised the priority list of vulnerable groups including healthcare workers and armed personnel, who will be first to receive the vaccine. Sri Lanka approved emergency use of the vaccine on January 23.

India has so far delivered one lakh doses of the Covishield vaccine to the Maldives, 1.5 lakh to Bhutan, 20 lakh doses to Bangladesh and 10 lakh doses to Nepal, and 15 lakh doses to Myanmar.

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, JAN. 27

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has demanded that the Marathi speaking villages at the border region with Karnataka be declared as a Union Territory. He has also threatened to make Belgaum a part of Maharashtra.

Thackeray accused the Karnataka government of deliberately changing the name of Belgaum despite the matter is in court and making the city deputy capital of the state.

"Looking at the atrocities of Marathi-speaking people in disputed border areas, our government will urge the Supreme Court to declare the disputed area



DESPITE THE matter being in court, the Karnataka government deliberately changed the name of Belgaum city. They made Belgaum the second capital where they also held an Assembly session. Maharashtra is following the rule of law but the Karnataka government does not. We should all come together to put an end to their arrogance. We will strive hard to bring the border region in Maharashtra for sure," he said after a meeting with the High

Power Committee constituted for the border dispute with Karnataka.

For decades, Belgaum has been the subject of a bitter dispute between the two neighbouring states.

Uddhav Thackeray had earlier claimed that the Karnataka government is "committing atrocities" on Marathi-speaking people living in Belgaum, Karwar, Nipani and also accused the central government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi 'siding' with neighbouring Karnataka, which has a BJP government in power.

Meanwhile, Maharashtra deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar said, "This matter is in the Supreme Court and this is our last option. When we have one option left then we have to prepare

for it very well, and we have to win it. If this is not done now, then I don't think it will happen anytime."

Earlier too, Thackeray in his recent tweet had backed incorporating Marathi-speaking areas in Karnataka into Maharashtra. "Bringing Karnataka-occupied Marathi-speaking areas into Maharashtra will be a true tribute to those who accepted martyrdom in the boundary battle. We are united and committed towards it," he had said in his tweet.

Thackeray said a time-bound action plan is needed to win the legal battle and ensure the Marathi-speaking leadership and people in those areas of Karnataka remained united.

SHORT TAKES

RIVER OF LAVA FROM VOLCANO IN INDONESIA

Yogyakarta (Indonesia), Jan. 27: Indonesia's most active volcano erupted Wednesday with a river of lava and searing gas clouds flowing 1,500 metres (4,900 feet) down its slopes. It was the Mount Merapi's longest lava flow since authorities raised the volatile volcano's danger level in November, said Hanik Humaida, the head of Yogyakarta's Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation Centre.

The alert level was being maintained for now at the second-highest level, she said, and people should stay out of the existing 5-kilometre (3-mile) danger zone around the crater as the local administrations in Central Java and Yogyakarta provinces closely monitor the situation. The 2,968-metre (9,737-foot) volcano is on the densely populated island of Java and near the ancient city of Yogyakarta.

TREAT SAILORS FAIRLY, CHINA TELLS INDONESIA

Beijing, Jan. 27: China's government called on Indonesia on Wednesday to treat a group of detained Chinese sailors fairly but gave no indication what their oil tanker was doing when it was found at sea transferring fuel from an Iranian ship.

The Iranian-flagged MT Horse and Panamanian-flagged MT Freya were seized Sunday and are suspected of illegally transferring fuel at sea, shutting off their identification systems and other offences. Indonesian authorities said 36 Iranian and 25 Chinese crew members were detained. Iran has sold oil on the black market since then-President Donald Trump imposed sanctions in 2018 and threatened to penalise countries that bought Iranian crude.

Indonesian authorities confirmed to the Chinese Embassy crew members are "in good condition," said foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian.

IRAN PREZ FLAYS PROSECUTION OF TELECOM MIN

Tehran, Jan. 27: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on Wednesday criticised Iran's hard-liner dominated judiciary over last week's prosecution of the country's telecommunications minister.

Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi was released on bail after he was summoned for prosecution. Judiciary officials cited his refusal to block Instagram and impose limitations on the bandwidth of other foreign social media and messaging systems.

Speaking in a Cabinet meeting Wednesday, Rouhani said improving the bandwidth of the Internet was done on his orders. "If you want to try someone, try me. It was my order," he said.

Under pressure from hard-liners, the Iranian government has long blocked access to many websites and social media platforms, from YouTube and Facebook to Twitter and Telegram. The relatively moderate Rouhani said increasing bandwidth would help improve business and an anti-corruption campaign.

U.S.: ERITREA SOLDIERS MUST LEAVE TIGRAY

Nairobi, Jan. 27: The United States said all soldiers from Eritrea should leave Ethiopia's embattled Tigray region "immediately." A State Department spokesperson cited "credible reports of looting, sexual violence, assaults in refugee camps and other human rights abuses." "There is also evidence of Eritrean soldiers forcibly returning Eritrean refugees from Tigray to Eritrea," the spokesperson said.

The statement reflects new pressure by the Biden administration on the government of Ethiopia, Africa's second most populous country and the anchor of the Horn of Africa, and other combatants as the deadly fighting in Tigray nears the three-month mark.

The AP this week cited witnesses who fled the Tigray region as saying Eritrean soldiers were looting, going house-to-house killing young men and even acting as local authorities. The Eritreans have been fighting on the side of Ethiopian forces as they pursue the fugitive leaders of the Tigray region, though Ethiopia's government has denied their presence.

Fog engulfs Eiffel Tower



A pedestrian crosses a bridge in front of the Eiffel tower in Paris on Wednesday. The top of Eiffel Tower is engulfed in fog.

— AFP

Impeachment trial: Don likely to be acquitted

Democrats fail to get enough support from Republicans

Washington, Jan. 27: Former US President Donald Trump is likely to be acquitted in his impeachment trial as the Democrats failed to garner enough support required from Republican Senators. The Democrats who have impeached Trump in the House charging him with "incitement of insurrection," needs two-thirds of the vote for the Senate impeachment.

Currently both the Democrats and the Republicans have 50 members each in the 100-seat Senate. The Democrats need the support of at least 17 Republican Senators to reach the two-thirds majority mark. Trump is the first US president who facing an impeachment trial after he left the presidency. This is for the second time in about a year that Trump is likely to be acquitted by the Senate. "I can't see how you get 17. I think that was a test vote," Republican Senator John Boozman said after 45 of the 50 Republican Senators voted for the motion that the impeachment trial of Trump after he left the presidency is unconstitutional.

The article of impeachment was delivered by the House to the Senate Monday night. "The next step, as you all have reported and people watching at home know, is for the Senate to proceed with their trial. He's going to allow them to move forward at the pace and manner that the leaders in the Senate determine. And I can promise you that we will leave the vote counting to leaders in the Senate from now on," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters at her daily news conference.

Biden inks orders for racial equity

Washington, Jan. 27: US President Joe Biden has signed a series of executive orders to ensure racial equity across the country, acting on one of his core campaign promises to dismantle "systemic racism" that has plagued America far too long.

While announcing the four presidential actions on Tuesday at the White House, a week after being sworn in as the 46th US President, Biden cited the killing of George Floyd, a PoC man, by a Minneapolis police officer last May,

which touched off demonstrations across the country. Biden called the killing "the knee on the neck of justice," and said that because of it, "the ground has shifted."

It changed minds and mindsets." "In my campaign for President, I made it very clear that the moment had arrived as a nation where we face deep racial inequities in America and systemic racism that has plagued our nation for far, far too long," Biden said.

— PTI

YouTube suspends Trump indefinitely

San Francisco, Jan. 27: YouTube has suspended Donald Trump indefinitely from the platform and said it will also prevent the former president's lawyer Rudy Giuliani from being able to monetize his clips, US media reported.

It comes a week after the social media giant confirmed it would extend a ban on Trump's channel -- which has just under

three million subscribers - joining other social media platforms in banning his accounts following the deadly January 6 Capitol riot.

The Google-owned firm has faced some criticism over its slow response following the violence in Washington, as well as the proliferation of conspiracy theories on the platform.

— AFP

Republican Senator Kevin Cramer said the Senate should not be wasting its time holding another impeachment trial. "We do not have solid constitutional standing to impeach a former president, and even if we did, this is not the time

to use it. As I have said repeatedly, President Trump's comments on January 6 were rash and ill-advised but I do not believe they meet the constitutional standard for impeachment," he said.

— PTI

Muslim attack plot: Two in trouble

Singapore/Berlin, Jan. 27: A Singaporean teenager planned to attack two mosques in the city-state on the anniversary of a massacre of Muslim worshippers in New Zealand, authorities said Wednesday. A German woman has been charged with preparing a far-right attack and other crimes on allega-

tions she was in the process of building a bomb to target Muslims and local politicians in Bavaria, Munich prosecutors said Wednesday.

The 16-year-old -- picked up in December -- made "detailed plans and preparations" to mount the attacks using a machete on March 15, two years after a

shooting rampage in Christchurch by Australian white supremacist Brenton Tarrant, security officials said. Tarrant was last year sentenced to life in prison without parole after killing 51 worshippers in the attacks on two mosques during Friday prayers. He also explored making a bomb and

planned to set fire to the mosques.

Susanne G., whose last name wasn't given in line with privacy laws, also faces charges of making threats and violations of weapons laws, among other things. She has been in custody since her arrest.

— PTI

EXTERMINATION | CAMP

Prez of Israel, Germany, Poland to deliver remarks on global Holocaust Remembrance Day

Auschwitz survivors mark anniversary online due to Covid

Warsaw, Jan. 27: Tova Friedman hid among corpses at Auschwitz amid the chaos of the extermination camp's final days. Just 6 years old at the time, the Poland-born Friedman was instructed by her mother to lie absolutely still in a bed at a camp hospital, next to the body of a young woman who had just died. As German forces preparing to flee the scene of their genocide went from bed to bed shooting anyone still alive, Friedman barely breathed under a blanket and went unnoti-

ced. Days later, on January 27, 1945, she was among the thousands of prisoners who survived to greet the Soviet troops who liberated the camp in Nazi-occupied Poland.

Now 82, Friedman had hoped to mark Wednesday's anniversary by taking her eight grandchildren to the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial site, which is under the custodianship of the Polish state. The Coronavirus pandemic prevented the trip. So instead, Friedman will be alone at home in Highland Park,

New Jersey, on International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Yet a message of warning from her about the rise of hatred will be part of a virtual observance organised by the World Jewish Congress.

Other institutions around the world, including the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial museum in Poland, Yad Vashem in Israel and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC also have online events planned. The presidents of Israel, Germany and Poland

will be among those delivering remarks of remembrance and warning.

The online nature of this year's commemorations is a sharp contrast to how Friedman spent the 75th anniversary of Auschwitz's liberation last year, when she gathered under a huge tent with other survivors and dozens of European leaders at the site of the former camp.

It was one of the last large international gatherings before the pandemic forced the cancellation of most large gatherings.

Maduro 'miracle' cure for Covid draws skeptics ire

Caracas, Jan. 27: Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro appears to be counting on yet another "miracle" to save his citizens from Covid-19, promoting a secretive solution with no published scientific evidence he claims will conquer the new Coronavirus.

"Ten drops under the tongue every four hours and the miracle is done," Maduro said in a televised appearance on Sunday. "It's a powerful antiviral, very powerful, that neutralises the Coronavirus." But his government has released no evidence. He even kept secret the name of the "brilliant Venezuelan mind" behind it, saying he needed to protect them. Scientists at home and abroad remained skeptical. The local National Academy of Medicine said it appeared be derived from the common herb thyme. It's not the first time the Venezuelan leader has promoted a cure.

In October, he notified the Pan American Health Organisation that Venezuelan scientists discovered a molecule that nullifies the replication capacity of the new Coronavirus. He hasn't spoken of that development since. He's also promoted a special herbal tea he claims can fend off the virus and other ailments.

Other leaders too have embraced solutions dismissed by scientific stud-

Supply chains vulnerable: UN

The Hague, Jan. 27: The head of the World Food Programme said Wednesday that the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the need to strengthen vulnerable supply chains to impoverished nations struggling to feed their populations.

David Beasley, executive director of the United Nations' Nobel Peace Prize-winning food programme, said that the pandemic put further stress on supply chains getting food to the hungry. "We've got to continue to work the system, we've got to make certain that we are ... less

vulnerable to Covid type impacts," Beasley told a World Economic Forum virtual panel.

"If you think you've had trouble getting toilet paper in New York, because of supply chain disruption, what do you think's happening in Chad and Niger and Mali and places like that?" Beasley stressed that the food supply system is "not broken" but that 10 per cent of the global population is in extreme poverty and need to be reached by suppliers and that the global pandemic exacerbated existing problems. — AP

JETS TO TAIWAN WARNING TO ALL POWERS: CHINA

Beijing, Jan. 27: The Chinese government said Wednesday that actions like its warplanes flying near Taiwan last weekend are a warning against both foreign interference in Taiwan and any independence moves by the island.

Asked about the flights, Zhu Fenglian, a spokesperson for China's Taiwan Affairs Office, said China's military drills are to show the nation's resolution to protect its national sovereignty and territorial integrity. "They are a stern warning against external interference and provocation from separatist forces advocating for Taiwan independence," she said at a regular briefing, giving the Chinese government's first official comment on the recent flights. China sent eight bombers and four fighter jets into Taiwan's air defence identification zone on Saturday, according to Taiwan's Defence Ministry.

— AP

N-treaty extension gets Russian nod

Moscow, Jan. 27: The lower house of Russian parliament on Wednesday approved the extension of the last remaining nuclear arms control pact days before it's due to expire.

The State Duma voted unanimously to extend the New START treaty for five years.

The vote came a day after a phone call between US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin, in which they voiced satisfaction with the exchange of diplomatic notes about extending the New START treaty.

They agreed to complete the necessary procedures in the next few days, according to the Kremlin. The pact's extension doesn't require congressional approval in the US, but Russian lawmakers must ratify the move.

Top members of the Kremlin-controlled parliament said they would fast-track the issue and complete the necessary steps to extend the treaty this week.

— AP

Raj Kapoor Pak home owner opposes sale at govt's rate

Peshawar, Jan. 27: The owner of Indian film legend Raj Kapoor's ancestral home in Peshawar has refused to sell the building at the rate fixed by the provincial Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, saying the prime-location property has been severely undervalued.

Earlier in the month, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government had approved the release of Rs 1.5 crore for Kapoor's ancestral home, with the aim to

turn it into a museum in honour of the movie star. Haji Ali Sabir, the present owner of the haveli, in a chat with a private news channel on Wednesday, flatly refused to sell the property at Rs 1.5 crore. "Even half a Marla land in the area is not available for Rs 1.5 crore. How can I sell the six-marla property for Rs 1.5 crore?" he said.

Marla, a traditional unit of area used in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, is considered as equal to

272.25 square feet or 25,292 square metres. Sabir said the right valuation of the property is Rs 200 crore. Raj Kapoor's ancestral home, known as Kapoor Haveli, is situated in the fabled Qissa Khwani Bazar.

It was built between 1918 and 1922 by the legendary actor's grandfather Dewan Basheswarnath Kapoor. Raj Kapoor and his uncle Trilok Kapoor were born here.

— PTI



File photo of the railway tracks where thousands of people arrived to be directed to the gas chambers inside the former Nazi death camp of Auschwitz Birkenau in Oswiecim, Poland.

— AP

DECCAN Chronicle

28 JANUARY 2021

China playing long game, be vigilant and prepared

The skirmish involving Indian soldiers on the Sikkim-China border last week is just another event in a decades-long chain featuring Chinese expansionism. It may seem incongruous that while Commander level talks have been going on that an incursion should take place. Place the event against a historical perspective and the reality hits home that more things change the more China remains the same. The skirmish may indeed be a minor face-off as the Indian Army described it but if it true that the casualties in terms of injuries was on a scale of five to one on the Chinese side, it might just have served the purpose in sending the message across to the territorially ambitious northern neighbour. India is prepared to hold its positions, at least wherever it is placed advantageously in terms of terrain and is capable of giving it back.

The gap between perceptions and reality is huge when it comes to India-China relations. While the political class might want 1.35 billion Indians to believe that not a square mile of territory has been surrendered to the Chinese since the 1962 war, the truth is huge swathes of disputed land, which in India's eyes is its, has been progressively taken over. It would not be far from the truth to suggest that the Chinese have come in as much as 25 to 30 km in places along the LAC and at least 5 to 8 km in the Finger area north of Pangong Lake in Ladakh. Historically speaking, this can be blamed on the unbridgeable gap in perceptions of LAC rather than weaknesses in the regimes in New Delhi, which, since the times of Vajpayee's prime ministership, have taken a harder stance on India-China border issues.

The reality of China's expansionism is being reflected too often for comfort in most recent times, whether in Doklam in 2017, Galwan Valley in 2020 or in Naku La in Sikkim a week ago. The complaints of our people in Arunachal Pradesh or Ladakh about Chinese soldiers and civilians using Indian roads to expand their presence across the LAC and taking over land they would normally use for grazing their yaks are real, so too whispers of villages coming up on what we perceive to be our side. There is no denying China's propensity to keep up the pressure on the 4,000 km border, ranging from Ladakh in the west to Arunachal Pradesh in the east and including on land bordering Bhutan and Sikkim.

Nothing could be more ideal than seeking peace through diplomacy and pursuing disengagement and de-escalation even if it means having to deal with a truculent neighbour whose deeds betray their words. Since recurring bouts of skirmishes cannot be ruled out, the way forward for India would be to keep continuously building and buttressing border infrastructure, particularly for the IAF whose capabilities are formidable, safeguarding areas around roads India has built and moving armour and men into strategic areas. All of this must serve eternal vigil about China while being prepared to shove if it comes to a push. Let us not for even a moment believe that China has changed.

There have been a lot of factors contributing to the steady spike in the number but experts are in unison pointing to the complacency people exhibit in following the Covid-appropriate protocol. It has been well-established that crowding, close contacts and closed spaces facilitate easy spread of the virus. With the restrictions on most events gone, the state has witnessed a spurt in events with people paying little or no attention to the rules of the "break-the-chain" campaign. Elections to the local bodies held in November and the festival season that followed did not help the situation either.

A key point is the low mortality rate that has taken the fear factor off the people's minds. The state has seen only 3,643 deaths due to Covid-19 as on January 26, thanks to the healthcare infrastructure it has created over the decades and the efficient mechanism it has put in place to treat the patients. The state has not yet reached a point where its facilities are overwhelmed though healthcare experts fear that outcome, should the trend continue unchecked.

The state government should act swiftly to contain the Covid spread, and even consider reintroducing some of the controls it has lifted. The state health minister is on record stating that the grassroots work undertaken by the local self governments helped contain the pandemic in the initial phases. The government should try and revive that spirit. With the elections to the state Assembly round the corner, it does not have much time to spare either.

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Subhani

As farmers lose ground, govt will take tough line



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

The Republic Day "tractor parade" mayhem at two points in Delhi on Tuesday is an episode in the two-month-long standoff between the Narendra Modi government and the Punjab farmers that is neither too big nor too serious. There are always moments in long-drawn agitations when unruly elements indulge in unseemly acts. An agitator placing some flags of a Sikh gurdwara and of the farmers' union was indulging in a mindless prank, or the man driving the tractor into a police cordon was a man who had no sense. But this foolish episode has been blown out proportion by young television news channel reporters and anchors. Their innocence and ignorance were both amusing and touching to watch.

The significance of the fracas on Tuesday has more to do with the position of the farmers, who could proudly claim till then that theirs was a peaceful protest and they could sit on a high moral perch. Their inflexible stance carried a quixotic nobility about it. All that vanished by the afternoon of Republic Day as some of the agitation's senior leaders even apologised as they blamed the people who had turned into hooligans and they tried to say that the troublemakers were not from their fold. Of course, that defence is weak and unconvincing. And it will be hard for them to live down the avoidable clash with the police. But the farmers and their leaders have lost strategic ground as well. They cannot any longer speak with the courage and confidence they had before Tuesday. They may not be to blame for the trouble and violence that erupted on the streets, but they cannot escape the moral responsibility.

The more curious part in this showdown is that of the Delhi police and that of the Union home ministry, with home minister Amit Shah at the helm. The unintended consequences of Tuesday's clash with the agitators allows the government to corner the farmers and their leaders, and it also gives them the room to prosecute the suspected "Maoists" and "Khalistanis" who ran amok on the streets. There is an uncanny resemblance to what the police did in February 2020 during the communal riots in northeast Delhi. The Delhi police literally adopted the guerrilla tactic of allowing the protesters to unleash violence, and they used the violence to turn the tables on the agitators. In last year's riots, the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act stir was used to shut down the months-long peaceful protest at Shaheen Bagh. It remains to be seen whether Mr Shah will try to use Tuesday's violence to push the farmers back now that they are on the backfoot. But that is unlikely to happen as the principal leaders of Punjab's farmers aren't going to allow themselves to be distracted by Tuesday's developments; their eyes are focused on the repeal of the farm laws. Mr Shah may not have an easy time though he has ordered the deployment of paramilitary forces in Delhi, Haryana and Punjab. It is, however, clear that Mr Shah will have more of a say in dealing with the agitation now.

Behind this political grandstanding by the government following

Tuesday's events, there is the troubling fact that the Delhi police has lost the ability to tackle agitations and protests. It has been argued by well-meaning neutral observers, including those who have a sneaking sympathy for the Narendra Modi government and a corresponding antipathy for Punjab's "pampered farmers", that the Delhi police could not have deployed sufficient forces at all points of the tractor parade's route due to the constraints of numbers. That the police officers could not but trust the farmer unions leaders, and the police was caught off-guard by the overwhelming numbers of angry protesters with their speeding tractors, swords, rods, etc. This lament of betrayal by police officials is as naïve as that of the farm leaders' blaming so-called saboteurs.

It is quite evident that the Delhi police has not been exposed to agitations like before, and that its personnel haven't been trained sufficiently to tackle such situations. The police officers as well as Union home ministry officials should have realised that there was a need for a larger force to monitor the movement of tractors and the protesting farmers. The decision to deploy paramilitary units on Tuesday should have been taken on Monday the moment it was decided to allow the tractor parade. These miscalculations are indeed part of the fallibility of those in command. It is however to be seen whether they will learn any lessons for the future.

The confrontation

The Delhi police is to be blamed for its inept handling and lack of preparedness. The farmers too have lost the moral high ground as rogue elements ran amok on the capital's streets.

between the agitating farmers and the government will turn more hostile than before, and this may not help to find a face-saving exit for either of the two sides. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has kept himself aloof from the issue apart from giving general, vague rhetorical responses. The people on the ground are agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar, railway and commerce minister Piyush Goyal and of course home minister Amit Shah. Mr Shah was earlier active in dealing with the agitation but then moved back and let Mr Tomar hold the fort. It was clear Mr Shah was not the man to take conciliatory positions of any kind, while Mr Tomar played the role of conciliator quite deftly.

After Tuesday's minor explosion, it is likely that Mr Shah will again be in the forefront and will show the mailed fist of the government. This may not help to end the agitation and the deadlock. The force deployment becomes inevitable all around. The government might relish the moment as it would create the momentary satisfaction that is in control of the situation. The Prime Minister, with his unsailable parliamentary majority in the last seven years, has not shown any signs of flexibility on any issue. The deployment of forces will maintain "law and order", but the decisions that gave rise to the agitation still need to be reviewed. Somewhere down the line, the Modi government is losing its political capital. But ruling parties, cocooned behind the turrets and moats of power, do not care much for the changes in the sentiments of the people. There is clear trouble ahead of the political kind, even as the Prime Minister and his colleagues exhibit self-righteousness.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

LETTERS

RED FORT BREACH

The unruly turn of events at Red Fort and hoisting of Sikh flag Nishan Sahib must be condemned. What needs to be

analysed is if the farmer unrest is natural due to the unlawful agricultural laws or a cold-blooded vandalism inspired by Trump's supporters' desperate attempt on Capitol Hill on January 6.

Engineer Hasanat Safa
Mahbubnagar

We are pained to see the mismanagement of the tractor rally by Delhi Police. An enquiry must find the guilty and punish those responsible for the loss of face globally. All parties must condemn violence by forgetting narrow politics. Time to awake is now.

Dr Jaspal Singh Bhatia
Hyderabad

The ugly scenes in Delhi have brought shame to the whole nation. It has exposed that if the Bills are passed a in hurry into laws without thorough discussions in Parliament, it can lead to confusion, frustration and conflicts.

T. Kaishal Ditya
Hyderabad

DRAINS AND FLOODS

Recently, the civil engineering department conducted a survey on the city floods for possible solutions to avoid disasters in future. The main reasons for inundation of houses were encroachments on the retaining walls of open drains, improper width and depth of drains and accumulation of huge silt, etc. Three months have passed since the floods and the concerned department is yet to commence the pilot project to modernise the city sewage system. It should be taken up immediately in colonies where houses drowned.

Surender Kumar Malla
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Four-party accord on 450 seats: Jana Sangh

NEW DELHI, JANUARY. 28 A.B. Vajpayee, president of the All-India Jana Sangh, announced today "complete accord" among the Four-Party Front with regard to 450 out of 518 Lok Sabha seats.

Vajpayee, who was addressing a meeting at the Press Club here, said the leaders tried their best to narrow the gap with regard to the seats over which there was differences. All the parties will be free to field their candidates, he said.

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Foreign assets on IRS radar as CBDT lobbies for more funds

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) is strengthening its drive against unaccounted foreign assets and benami properties with a slew of steps. It has launched a new online facility to encourage informants to tip off tax sleuths on black assets abroad. Further, it has started creating special Foreign Asset Investigation Units (FAIUs) in its 14 directorates across the country. Already, sources say, some 70 investigators have been transferred to these units to kickstart their operations. Sources say that CBDT has also put in a request for more Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officers. Since this requires additional resources, the CBDT has sought more allocation in the Union Budget to fund the drive.

The FAIUs will function under director-general ranked income tax officers, and depending on how these units are grouped, they will also have directors, additional directors and sufficient support

staff to perform their mandated job. All these units will be directly monitored by the CBDT, though it is unclear at this stage how this will be achieved.

Sources also reveal that the CBDT is not averse to hiring the services of experts like data analysts and chartered accountants from outside the government if required. The FAIUs will also probe cases of Indian entities named in global tax document leaks, such as the infamous Panama Papers. It does appear that the IRS cadre, often eclipsed by the other more high-profile civil services, may get their moment in the sun.

DON'T KEEP VIGILANCE CASES PENDING, SAYS CVC

In a significant move, the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) has urged cadre controlling authorities, including the Union home ministry and the department of personnel and training (DoPT), to facilitate and approve vigilance

Speculation is rife that Mr Arvind Sharma could be named the home minister or even deputy chief minister of UP. But many see a larger plan for Mr Sharma in UP politics.

clearance of IAS, IPS and IFS officers if the state government or relevant department fails to respond within three months on vigilance queries.

The communication from chief vigilance commissioner Sanjay Kothari also states that in all instances where the authorities fail to provide details of vigilance cases against babus within three months, the officers will be considered as clean and fit for promotion.

Sources say that this order is consequent to the commission discovering that often cadre-controlling authorities do not adhere to the

rule, leading to long-pending and unresolved complaints shown against the officers' names. Apparently, in some instances, even the concerned officers were unaware of a complaint pending against them!

If the CVC has its way, this could put an end to the many frivolous vigilance cases that are kept pending for months (and years in some cases) and give deserving officers their career dues.

SHARMA TO SPEARHEAD MODI'S UP PLAN

The advent of Arvind Sharma, a former Gujarat cadre IAS officer and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's trusted lieutenant, in the hurly-burly of Uttar Pradesh politics is being watched keenly. Mr Sharma recently joined the BJP after having retired as MSME (micro, small and medium enterprises) secretary at the Centre. He is to join the state legislative council.

Speculation is rife that Mr

Sharma could be named the home minister or even deputy chief minister of UP. But many see a larger plan for Mr Sharma in UP politics. They feel that Mr Modi wouldn't depute his trusted ex-babu to simply become an MLC or minister. It is believed that Mr Modi will start the party's campaign for the 2022 Assembly elections through Mr Sharma. So, it is quite likely that Mr Sharma's role will be to help chief minister Yogi Adityanath's government implement government schemes in the state before the polls.

The move also reiterates Mr Modi's oft-seen penchant for introducing his trusted bureaucrats in politics. Retired bureaucrats and technocrat professionals are his first choice—bringing R.K. Singh, Hardeep Puri and S.K. Jaishankar into politics is an example.

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipcherian@Twitter.com Let's multiply the effect.

quick BITES

INDICATORS %

Sensex	47,409.93	-1.94
Nifty 50	13,967.50	-1.91
S&P 500*	3,775.91	-1.91
Dollar (₹)	72.91	0.05
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.07	-0.43
Euro (₹)	88.60	0.02
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,421▼231	0.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	56.30	0.70
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.954	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.003	-0.037

* As of 8:30 PM IST

ByteDance cuts India workforce, unsure of future

China's ByteDance is cutting the size of its 2,000-plus India team and is unsure when it will make a comeback, the firm told employees in an internal memo, months after its popular TikTok video app was banned. The move came after India this month decided to retain its ban on TikTok and 58 other Chinese apps. "We initially hoped that this situation would be short-lived...we find that has not been the case," ByteDance said.

JLR appoints creative chief to board



Jaguar Land Rover appointed its chief creative officer Gerry McGovern to the board of management to help redefine the Jaguar brand as Britain's biggest carmaker reviews its strategy under new CEO Thierry Bolloré. McGovern would be "developing the character, distinction and personality of each" brand and the role includes leading the design function at the marques, the firm said.

Reliance, Israeli firm in deal to sell breath test kit

Reliance Group has signed a \$15 million deal with Israeli company Breath of Health (BOH) to distribute the latter's swift Covid-19 breath testing system throughout India, a media report in Jerusalem said. Reliance will purchase hundreds of systems from the Israeli company in a deal valued at \$15 million and will use them to conduct millions of tests a month at a cost of \$10 million per month.

Ethanol-blending target brought forward by 5 yrs

India has preponed the target of achieving 20 per cent ethanol-blending with petrol by five years to 2024-25 as it looks to cut dependence on costly oil imports, oil minister Dharmendra Pradhan said. "In 2014, less than 1 per cent ethanol was being blended with petrol against the target of 5 per cent. In the last sugar year, this ratio has reached 8.5 per cent and next year it is 10 per cent," he said at an event.



■ Double-digit growth in HUL rural sales FMCG firms sight consumption rise

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JAN. 27

Revival of consumer sentiments, combined with festive season consumption, helped FMCG companies post impressive growth in revenues, volumes as well as profits in the third quarter. Health and hygiene products, food and refreshments and rural consumption supported the performance of fast moving consumer goods firms.

Hindustan Unilever's total sales grew by 20 per cent in the December quarter, while its domestic consumer business grew by 7 per cent. Sales volumes, excluding acquisition of GSK, grew 4 per cent. Health, hygiene and nutrition, which form 80 per cent of HUL's portfolio, grew in double digits. Foods and refreshments were up by 19 per cent. Rural market, which grew in double digits, also supported sales.

HUL's profit after tax for the quarter went up 19 per cent to Rs 1,921 crore against Rs 1,616 crore in the year-ago quarter. As the commodity prices had gone up, HUL made double-digit price hike in tea and a 2.5 per cent increase in skin cleansing products during the quarter.

"With Covid cases coming down sharply and increasing mobility, economic activity in the country continues to improve. The rapid rollout of vaccines will give further impetus to economic growth," said Sanjiv Mehta, chairman and MD of HUL.



"Good recovery in lag-gard parts, 80 per cent of portfolio grew in double digits, Minimal margin compression, strong brand investments continue, which is the right strategy in our view," finds Edelweiss. Securities.

Emami reported 36.6 per cent jump in its standalone net profit at Rs 202.17 crore for the third quarter as revenue from operations surged by 13 per cent to Rs 845.37 crore. The company posted a strong growth of 16 per cent in its domestic business led by 13 per cent growth in volumes.

"We are witnessing a consistent and all-round growth coming from all channels over the last two quarters and expect to continue with this growth trajectory. Most of our brands, including power brands and digital-first brands in the healthcare segment are on their growth path," said Harsha V. Agarwal, director, Emami.

While rural markets continued to perform better, growth in urban markets also picked up. E-commerce grew by 3.5x and

modern trade registered growth of 51 per cent during the quarter for Emami. Marico reported a 13.04 per cent rise in consolidated net profit for the third quarter while revenue from operations went up by 16.33 per cent. Revenue from operations grew on the back of a strong domestic volume growth of 15 per cent. Marico saw robust demand for more than 95 per cent of its portfolio amidst steadily improving consumer confidence.

Jyothy Labs reported an 18.23 per cent rise in consolidated net profit. Revenue from operations of the company was up 13.26 per cent. According to Jyothy Labs, revival of the consumer sentiment reflected in the company's performance across its brand portfolio.

"The performance of FMCG companies have improved sequentially along with volume growth. Discretionary spends are also recovering. We should expect better performance in the coming quarters," said Kaustubh Pawaskar, AVP, fundamental research at Sharekhan.

Market gains of this month wiped out

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JAN 27

Profit taking ahead of the Union Budget, the outcome of US Fed meeting and monthly futures & options contracts expiry led to Nifty and Sensex falling for the fourth consecutive session and wiping out of all the gains made this month.

The Nifty-50 closed below the 14000 level at 13967.50, down by 271.40 points or 1.91 per cent while the Sensex closed at 47409.93, down by 937.66 points, or 1.94 per cent. The Sensex lost 2382.19 points, or 4.78 per cent, in the last four sessions.

The sharp fall led to a notional loss of Rs 2.62 lakh crore of investors wealth on Wednesday and over Rs 8.07 lakh crore in the last four days.

Investors are apprehensive of US Federal Reserve's next monetary policy move which will be known only on Thursday morning.

"Global cues were weak as investors got cautious about possible roadblocks to US stimulus plan and ahead of Fed policy announcement.

Absence of FII buying over last two days too added to the nervousness. The foreign portfolio investors were net sellers of equities worth Rs 1688.22 crore on Wednesday, much higher than the previous session.

This is the first instance of the benchmark indices falling for four days in a row since September 2020...markets have erased all gains for CY21 year to date and turned negative," said Siddhartha Khemka of Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

Govt plans ₹3 L cr spend to revive power utilities

SIDDHARTHA SINGH & DEBJIT CHAKRABORTY JAN. 27

The government plans to spend Rs 3 lakh crore (\$41 billion) on a new plan to revive regional electricity retailers, people with knowledge of the matter said, after a previous attempt failed to stem losses at the utilities.

The spending would be spread over a few years and is likely to be unveiled on February 1 as part of the government's budget for the year starting April 1, the people said, asking not to be identified as the proposal isn't public. The plan for carrying out reforms for reducing losses of state distribution utilities was sought by the power ministry and is under discussion.

The government is focusing on turning around electricity distributors to ensure reliable power supplies, improving the financial health of generators and making the sector more attractive to foreign investors. The combined loss at the power distribution companies, mostly controlled by state administrations, jumped 69 per cent to Rs 49,620 crore in the year ended March 2019, the latest available data.

The spending would focus on upgrading infrastructure and technology of the ailing utilities to make them more efficient and reduce financial losses, according to the people. Under the plan, the central government would provide annual grants to states that meet targets set by



BUDGET MAY ADDRESS INVERTED DUTY STRUCTURE FOR STEEL GOODS

New Delhi, Jan. 27: The government is likely to address the issue of inverted duty structure for certain steel products in the Budget to boost domestic manufacturing, sources said. Inverted duty structure refers to taxation of inputs at higher rates than finished products that results in build-up of credits and cascading costs. Sources said the

Centre may consider removing customs duties on raw materials used for manufacturing certain flat-rolled products of stainless steel.

The import duty on key inputs for stainless steel flat products—ferro nickel and SS scrap—is now higher than the import duty on final goods coming in from Free Trade Agreement partners. —PTI

the Centre.

The plan could include some specific measures such as separating power feeder grids for farmers and residential users, and installation of prepaid smart meters to stop pilferage and encourage timely payment, they said. It also plans to replace overhead cables with special insulated wires to prevent theft.

Electricity retailers are the weakest link in the country's power supply chain, losing on an average about a fifth of their

revenue because of technical and commercial reasons, including loss of power supplies through theft, poor transmission infrastructure and inefficient billing and collection.

The plan will be a modified version of an earlier programme unveiled in 2015 to revive power distributors through restructuring of their debt. That attempt remained unsuccessful in making retailers profitable by March 2019.

—Bloomberg

Economy to get shot in arm from budget: Poll

TUSHAR GOENKA & SHALOO SHRIVASTAVA BENGALURU, JAN. 27

India's path to economic recovery will be stronger than previously thought as fiscal expansion and vaccine hopes help the country heal from Covid-19, a Reuters poll of economists showed.

The vaccination drive and a steep fall in new coronavirus cases is supporting a recovery in the economy.

Alongside that, nearly 60 per cent of respondents, 18 of 31, who responded to an additional question in the January 13-25 poll said the Union budget would help a significant economic recovery in financial year 2021-22.

"We expect global economic activity to return to normality in fiscal Q2 and India to grow in fiscal 2021-22, with government stimulus packages expected to contribute," said Hugo Erken, head of international economics at Rabobank.

"There is a strong sentiment the budget will aim to continue expenditure as growth is the only way India can come out of recent setbacks."

The poll of over 50 econ-

omists showed the economy would grow 9.5 per cent next fiscal year—the highest since polling began for the year in March 2020—after contracting 8 per cent in the current fiscal year.

It was expected to grow 6 per cent in fiscal year 2022-23. The poll predicted the economy would grow 21.1, 9.1, 5.9 and 5.5 per cent in each quarter of the 2021-22 fiscal year, largely upgraded from a poll taken two months ago.

But when asked how long it would take for the economy to recover to its pre-Covid-19 level, 26 of 32 respondents said it would take up to two years, including six analysts said longer than that. Twelve analysts said within a year.

"There is a lack of fiscal space to boost growth sufficiently and India is unlikely to reach its pre-Covid-19 levels any time soon despite policy support," said Sher Mehta, director at Virtuoso Economics.

—Reuters

JEEP DRIVES IN COMPASS AT ₹17 L

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JAN. 27

Fiat Chrysler Automobiles, the Italian-American auto maker, on Wednesday launched the Jeep Compass facelift SUV with prices starting from Rs 16.99 lakh and going up till Rs 28.29 lakh.

The SUV gets tweaked styling, new interior, more features and can be had in four trim levels. For a limited time, an 80th anniversary edition will also be available for Rs 22.96 lakh.



Banks turn cautious on retail loans

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, JAN. 27

Banks are seeing new bad loan formation in consumer and MSME (micro small and medium enterprises) loans this quarter, something also warned by the apex bank last month in its Financial Stability Report.

On Wednesday, public sector lender Bank of Baroda that announced its third quarter results warned of rising stress in the coming months from retail and MSME loans resulting from the Covid stress.

Similarly, private lender Axis Bank said 83 per cent of its loan slippages during the quarter came from the retail segment, particularly from self employed

customers and mortgage customers.

"The kind of stress we are seeing now is something which is unprecedented and therefore it is likely that there may be some slippages in MSME and retail," said Sanjiv Chadha, MD & CEO of Bank of Baroda at the earnings call, adding, "I am holding out caution. But we are well-positioned, as we have tightened underwriting. Around one per cent of our loan book is unsecured and more than 70 per cent of the retail loan book comprises home loans."

BoB's credit cost, including the impact of provisioning on proforma non-performing assets, was at 2.10 per cent. The bank

restructured Rs 9,600 crore of loans in the December 2020 quarter, 80 per cent of which was corporate loans.

"We do recognise the fact that going ahead some stress will play out in the MSME and retail loan book," Chadha added.

The bank on Wednesday reported a standalone net profit of Rs 1,061 crore for the December quarter on the back of lower provisions. It had posted a loss of Rs 1,407 crore in the same period last year. It reported provisions of Rs 3,957 crore in Q3 of FY21, down 45 per cent year-on-year. With proforma slippages (adjusted for the Supreme Court's interim order), gross and net NPA ratios would have been

9.63 per cent and 3.36 per cent, respectively.

On the same lines, Axis Bank's rise in slippages from the retail portfolio led to tightening of credit norms by the bank for retail loans. "We have been adding rigour to our credit underwriting process. Our focus is to grow in the secured lending space in the retail portfolio," said Sumit Bali, president, retail lending and payments at Axis Bank.

About retail loans turning bad, Puneet Sharma, CFO said, "These are accounts which were under moratorium between March and August."

Axis Bank's net profit stood at Rs 1,116.6 crore compared with Rs 1,757 crore a year ago.

Bharat Biotech to manufacture GSK-PATH's malaria vaccine

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, JAN. 28

The city-based biotech major Bharat Biotech on Wednesday said that it had signed an agreement with global healthcare company GSK and global NGO PATH for manufacturing the malaria vaccine RTS,S/AS01E1. The firm will also get a

licence on all rights pertaining to the RTS,S/AS01 malaria vaccine.

GSK will retain the production of the adjuvant of the vaccine (AS01E) and will supply it to Bharat Biotech. The RTS,S/AS01E malaria vaccine, developed by GSK for more than 30 years, and in partnership with PATH since 2001, is being pilot-

ed in Ghana, Kenya, and Malawi under the Malaria Vaccine Implementation Programme. RTS,S/AS01E is the first, and to date, the only malaria vaccine to have received a positive review by regulatory authorities in Europe, Ghana, Kenya, and Malawi.

Commenting on the development, Bharat

Biotech chairman Krishna M. Ella said: "We salute the commitment by GSK, PATH, and partners, in developing a novel vaccine against malaria, a dreaded disease with more than 200 million cases worldwide. We are truly honoured to support this partnership and to provide global access to RTS,S/AS01E."

AT | SEA Hundreds of containers are being held up in Dalian for virus checks

Frozen fish pile-up in China threatens supply chains

ANN KOH JAN. 27

A huge pile up of fish cargoes at a Chinese port risks impacting shipments of frozen food across the country and beyond.

Hundreds of containers are being held up in Dalian, a major port for seafood imports, as local authorities test the fish for the coronavirus before allowing them to clear customs, according to several freight forwarders, consultants and shipping companies. That's leading to scant availability of electric outlets to keep refrigerated containers, known as reefers, cold.

The shortage of plug points and dwindling space at the port have prompted shipping liners to cancel new reefer bookings into Dalian, and the congestion is now spreading to other refrigerated items like fruit and dumplings. It also means frozen containers are being diverted to other ports in China, leading to bottlenecks in Shanghai and Qingdao too.

"Much of the recent concern for rollover cargo has focused on reefer containers," said Josh Brazil, chief operations officer of freight-data provider Ocean Insights. "If there are no power outlets at the port for reefers to be



plugged in, cargoes of perishable food could be damaged or entirely lost if they cannot be re-routed to another port."

The scenes playing out in Dalian echo the start of the disruptions the world saw when Covid-19 snared global trade flows early last year. Back then, lockdowns in countries including

China meant ports were closed and ships couldn't unload cargoes, causing a dearth of vessels across the world with the ripple effect lasting for months.

It also highlights the impact China's controversial testing of foreign food for the virus is having on supply chains. The country has been testing imported meat and seafood for traces of the virus on concern Covid-19 can spread to humans, despite the WHO saying there's no evidence of people catching the virus from food and food packaging.

"China is probably the only country in the world which claims that the coro-

navirus can be spread through frozen food," said Ralph Leszczynski, head of research at shipbroker Banchemo Costa & Co. "It might well impact container waiting times at ports."

At least four cold-storage vessels have been waiting near Dalian port for as long as two months, nine container ships are docked at the port, and at least six more are waiting in the Yellow Sea to unload, according to Bloomberg data. Reefer containers typically travel together with thousands of normal containers on ships, as long as they have a power source to keep the cargo cold.

—Bloomberg

Life insurers want GST cut to 12%

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, JAN. 27

Life insurance companies have called for a significant reduction in the goods and services tax (GST) to 12 per cent from the existing mark-up of 18 per cent. They argue that a financial product as critical as life insurance should have a low rate of GST to increase the penetration of life cover across the country.

"A financial product as critical as life insurance should have a reduced GST, and get exemption on stamp duty for mandated products, so that the costs are not increased for the end customer," said Tarun Chugh, MD & CEO, Bajaj Allianz Life.

"As per the GST norms, life insurance now falls under the slab of 18 per cent tax rate. Since insurance is an essential requirement of every individual for proper financial planning and protection, we believe that a reduction in GST to 12 per cent from 18 per cent or even lower is required," says Vignesh Shahane, MD & CEO, IDBI Federal Life.

Besides, life insurers also want receipt of life insurance premia via the NRE account as an export service for GST reduction purpose.

"The government can clarify that the receipt of life insurance premium through the NRE account of an NRI, in Indian rupees, is permitted and qualifies as export of services for GST purposes. This will help save costs for NRIs, and in turn, boost the life insurance business," Deloitte said.

The industry has also asked for greater tax exemption for premium payers. "It would be an ideal time for the government to consider increasing the tax exemption limit for life insurance," Chugh said.

SHORT TAKES

Paine remains Oz captain, Wade out

Sydney: Matthew Wade was axed Wednesday for Australia's Test series in South Africa after failing to fire against India, while under-pressure Tim Paine retained the captaincy. Wade played all four games in the tense 2-1 home summer series loss to India, including two as makeshift opener in place of the injured David Warner. But he managed just 173 from his eight innings, with some rash shots ultimately costing him his place in the side and seeing him replaced by Alex Carey as back-up wicket-keeper. Instead, Wade will join Australia's Twenty20 squad on their tour of New Zealand as vice-captain. Australia are due to play three Tests in South Africa. The tour was originally scheduled for February and March, but the dates have yet to be locked in due to concerns over Covid-19. — AFP

Stranded Bopanna waits for freedom

New Delhi: The hotel room wall is helping him get some practice and an online course keeping boredom at bay. Rohan Bopanna's build-up to the season-opening Australian Open has been far from ideal so far as he waits for his day of freedom — January 30. Bopanna was on one of the three flights out of a total of 17 Tennis Australia-arranged chartered planes, that landed in Melbourne with positive cases on board. "If you test positive, you would be in hard quarantine but what we did not know that if someone on your flight tests positive then everyone also had to be in hard quarantine. That's what happened," Bopanna said. — PTI

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English test on card

Root & Co. arrive in Chennai for series

Chennai, Jan. 27: Members of the England cricket team including captain Joe Root arrived in the city on Wednesday for the four-match series against India with the first two Tests to be played here.

Some of the Indian players and members of the support staff also landed in this southern city, airport sources said.

Root and Co flew in from Sri Lanka at around 10.30 am and headed to the hotel where members of the two teams will be put up as part of the bio-bubble, a Tamil Nadu Cricket Association official said.

The England team had on Monday completed a 2-0 series sweep of the Tests against Sri Lanka with Root slamming two big centuries.

Star all-rounder Ben Stokes and Jofra Archer had arrived in the city on Sunday and are in quarantine.

While a few Indian players including star batsman Rohit Sharma and Test vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane arrived on Tuesday night, some others like Cheteshwar Pujara, Jasprit Bumrah and Rishabh Pant, star of the series clinching victory in the Brisbane Test, reached on Wednesday morning.

Team coach Ravi Shastri flew in from Mumbai as did several other players from destinations across the country.

Indian Skipper Virat Kohli is scheduled to arrive later on Wednesday.

The players of the two teams will be staying at Hotel Leela Palace in a bio-bubble as part of quarantine protocols and will undergo testing for Covid-19, the TNCA official said.

— PTI



The England cricket team and staff leave Colombo airport in Sri Lanka for Chennai on Wednesday. — TWITTER

Virat, Rohit top ODI rank

Dubai, Jan. 27: India captain Virat Kohli and senior batsman Rohit Sharma retained their number one and two position respectively in the ICC rankings for ODI batsmen, while pacer Jasprit Bumrah remained at the second spot in the bowler's list.

Kohli, who had scored 89 and 63 against Australia in his last two

ODI appearance, has 870 points to his kitty.

Rohit, who missed the tour of Australia due to an injury and has not featured in any one-day game since the Covid-19 pandemic began, remained at the second spot, five points ahead of Pakistan skipper Babar Azam (837).

Ross Taylor (818) and Aaron Finch (791) round

up the top five in the batsmen's list.

Ireland's Paul Stirling gained eight slots to reach 20th place after scoring 285 runs against Afghanistan which included centuries in the second and third matches.

Afghanistan's Hashmatullah Shahidi improved (70th to 66th) and Rashid Khan (96th to 89th).

— PTI

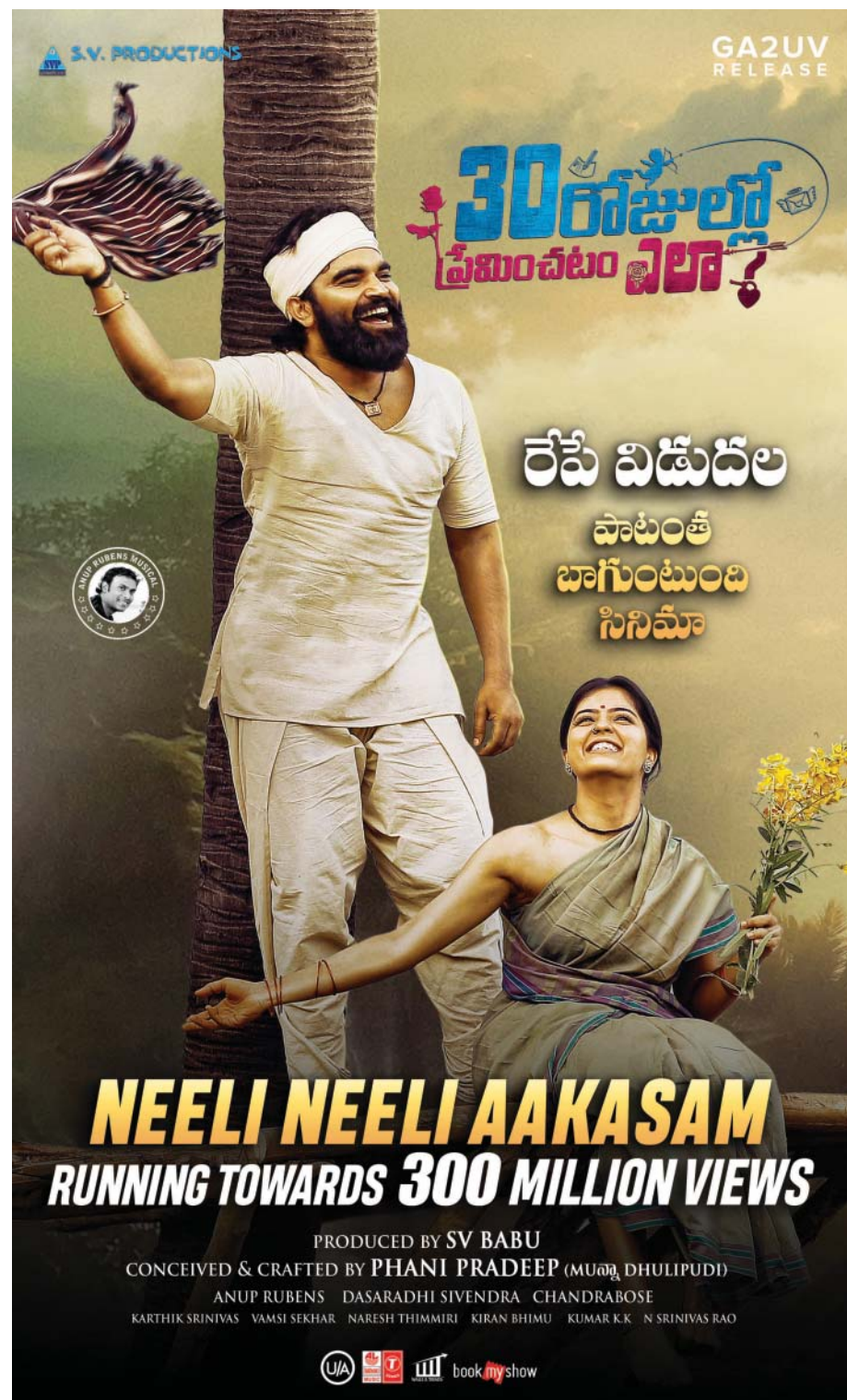
Shuttlers Sindhu, Srikanth lose in openers

Bangkok, Jan. 27: Star Indian shuttlers P. V. Sindhu and Kidambi Srikanth fought their hearts out before suffering close defeats in their respective group 'B' openers at the \$1.5 million HSBC BWF World Tour

Finals here on Wednesday.

Sindhu lost to world number one Tai Tzu Ying of Taiwan 21-19, 12-21, 17-21. Meanwhile, Srikanth went down to Anders Antonsen 21-15, 16-21, 18-21.

— PTI



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